**Title**: A Search For A Secret: A Novel. Vol. 2

**Author**: G. A. Henty

**Release Date**: February 13, 2011 [EBook #35265]

**Language**: English

**Credits**: Produced by David Edwards, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)



# A SEARCH FOR A SECRET.

**A Novel.**

## BY G. A. HENTY.

**IN THREE VOLUMES.**

**VOL. II.**

**LONDON:**
**TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.**
**1867.**

**LONDON:**
**WYMAN AND SONS, PRINTERS, GREAT QUEEN STREET,**
**LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS, W.C.**

---

## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



---

## CHAPTER I.

### A FAMILY CONCLAVE.

For some little time after Dr. Ashleigh's carriage drove off from Harmer Place, not a word was spoken. The scene through which its occupants had passed, had left a deep impression upon them—even upon Mr. Petersfield, who was by no means of a nature to be easily moved. Dr. Ashleigh felt greatly the words he had spoken, the wrong which had been committed, and the thought of his children's altered future. Harry felt more indignant than hurt; he was too astonished and angry to reflect yet how much it would affect himself. Perhaps if he had one wish more predominant than another, it was that the Misses Harmer were but men—men of about his own age, and that he could get them into some quiet spot—by Jove, would not he find out where the will was hidden!

But Robert Gregory felt the disappointment with all its force. To him the blow had been so overwhelming and crushing, that his fierce temper was beaten down and mastered by it; and he had borne it with a sense of dull despair, very unlike the passionate outburst of wrath which might have been expected from him. Only when Miss Harmer had turned upon him so fiercely, had the blood rushed to his cheek, and had not Dr. Ashleigh interposed, he would doubtless have given way to a burst of passion; but with a great effort he had checked himself; desperate as he was, he knew that Dr. Ashleigh stood in a far higher and better position in the case than he did himself; it was to his interest that the doctor should take the lead, for he felt that what hopes remained rested solely in him.

Dr. Ashleigh was certainly favourably impressed with his conduct throughout this trying interview; he knew that to this man the loss of the will was a terrible blow, the defeat of all his plots and schemes, and he was surprised and pleased that he had behaved with so much self-control, and had avoided creating a stormy and violent scene.

"Mr. Gregory," he said at last, breaking the silence for the first time as they were entering Canterbury, "I know that this is a grievous blow to you, as it is to us all. I think you had better follow out your original plan of returning this evening to your wife in London. You can safely leave the matter in my hands; I am, for the sake of my children, interested in this affair equally with yourself, and you may rely that I shall spare no pains to come to the bottom of it. What search and stir is made, will come with a far better grace from me than from yourself, and you may depend upon my letting you know, the instant the slightest clue is gained to the mystery."

Robert Gregory in a few words thanked the doctor, agreed that such a course was best, and that at any rate until Sophy was perfectly recovered, he would leave the affair in his hands.

Dr. Ashleigh then turned to Mr. Petersfield and asked him if he would come on to Ramsgate, and stay the night with him, to chat over the affair in quiet, and determine upon the best course to be pursued. Mr. Petersfield agreed to stop for the night, saying that he must return to town by the early train in the morning, but that if they would promise that he should do that, he would accompany them.

As this was arranged, they drove into the station, and here the party separated; Dr. Ashleigh, Harry, and Mr. Petersfield to go on to Ramsgate, Robert Gregory to return to London. The latter preserved his quiet demeanour until he was alone in a railway carriage, and then he gave full vent to his fury and disappointment. He raved aloud; he cursed himself, his fortune, and all connected with him; he poured imprecations of every kind and description upon the heads of the Misses Harmer; and his last exclamation as he flung himself down in a corner of the carriage, was, "Let them beware, for by——I will find it, if it is in existence, if it costs me my life!—or," he added, after a pause, "them theirs!"

I now resume my own narrative. How surprised I was that evening when they came in. Of course, just at first I was too much occupied in kissing Harry—whom I now saw for the first time, as he had only arrived from the North the evening before—to notice anything strange about their manner. Then papa introduced me to Mr. Petersfield; and after I had spoken a word or two to him, and had time to look at all their faces, I saw that there was a great gloom upon them, greater even than the occasion warranted; for I had been expecting some little joking remark from papa about my being a woman of property now, so that I was the more struck by the subdued expression of his face.

"Is anything the matter, papa?" I asked, quietly.

"Yes, my dear, a great deal is the matter, I am sorry to say. Mr. Harmer's will is missing."

"Missing, papa!" I exclaimed, almost incredulously.

"Yes, my love; you must not take it too much to heart; it may come to light yet, but at present it is missing."

I sat down with a faint feeling in my heart. It was not that I cared for the money for its own sake; but I thought of Lady Desborough, and I felt a rush of coming trouble sweep round me. However, after a moment, I drove back the feeling, and asked, in as cheerful a voice as I could,—

"But how is it missing, papa?"

"Ah, my dear, that is the rub. Mr. Harmer had it in the house, and now it is nowhere to be found. We all believe—indeed, there can be little doubt—that Miss Harmer has concealed it, or, at any rate, that she knows where it has been hidden away. I have noticed the last week a strange manner, a sort of secret understanding between the sisters, but thought little about it at the time. Now, however, I can understand it all by the light of the present state of affairs; and I remember

now, what I smiled at at the time as an impotent threat, that Miss Harmer said, in her passion, that while she lived, Sophy's husband should never enter the doors of Harmer Place."

"But, papa," I said, "she has a very good life-income; why should she do such a thing as this?"

"There are several reasons, my dear; but we will talk them over after tea. I am hungry and tired, and I am sure Mr. Petersfield and Harry are the same; so let us have tea at once; that will do us all good, and we shall be able to look at matters in a far more cheerful light afterwards. What are you going to give us, my dear?"

"Cold pie, papa, and some fresh-boiled mackerel, and a dish of prawns and some muffins."

"Capital! Now we will go and wash our hands, and make ourselves comfortable, and by that time you will be ready for us."

They were soon down again, and seated round the table, and papa began to question Harry about his work in the North; and Harry, who was never depressed above five minutes about anything, entered into a most amusing description of his life on the railway; and we were all laughing merrily, in spite of our troubles, before tea was over. I am sure no one who had looked in upon us would have guessed that we had that day as good as lost £50,000 between us. When we had done, papa said,—

"There, my dear, we are all a hundred per cent better. Now, as we have taken one great consoler —tea, let us take another—tobacco. I am sure Harry is dying for a pipe; and although I do not often smoke indoors, on this special occasion I will make an exception. What say you, Mr. Petersfield?"

"I am very fond of a good cigar," the lawyer said, producing a cigar-case; "but will not Miss Ashleigh object?"

"Not at all," I said. "Harry always smokes when he is at home, and I am quite accustomed to it. If I find it too much, I can easily open the window a little."

The tea-things were soon cleared away, and we took our seats round the fire. For although the weather was not actually cold, we usually had a fire in the evening, as, indeed, by the seaside one can do almost all the year round with comfort. Papa sat on one side, I on a stool by him, Harry next, and Mr. Petersfield on the other side. As soon as the cigars and pipe were fairly alight, the table cleared, and we alone, papa began,—

"Now, my dear, I will answer the question you asked me before tea; and I shall do so at length, as what I am saying to you may be some sort of guide and assistance to Mr. Petersfield, who—from his late partner, Mr. Ransome, having had the management of Mr. Harmer's affairs—does not know very much of the business."

Papa then explained the whole history of the Harmers nearly as I have told it, although of course in far fewer words. "Thus you see," he concluded, "there are several reasons which we may suppose, actuate the Miss Harmers. The first and principal, is the religious question. The Misses Harmer were, as I have said, educated in a convent; they were brought up to, and have ever since lived a life of ascetic severity. They have been taught to look upon the advancement of their Church as the thing to be striven for upon earth, the *summum bonum* to be aimed at. They were accustomed to consider the Harmer estate as destined to go to the furtherance of that object; and when Herbert Harmer by the accidental death of his two brothers, suddenly succeeded to it, they looked upon it as absolutely stolen from the Church, to which it was, by the elder brother's will, to have gone. They then left the house, went abroad, and did not return until the death of Gerald Harmer seemed again to open the way for them. They have since resided there off and on, in hopes probably that their brother might return to his old faith, might die without a will, or, in fact, that some unexpected contingency might happen. The last three or four years since Mr. Harmer's declared intentions relative to Sophy and yourselves, they have very much intermitted their visits, and only returned on the news of their brother's first paralytic seizure. Thus, you see, the last twenty years of their lives, may be said to have been given to the endeavour; and the temptation to them to suppress the will is of course enormous, in order that the property may come to them, and afterwards, as their eldest brother intended, to the Romish Church. They have, besides this, another motive now, and one which, no doubt, greatly soothes their consciences. They are mercilessly severe upon Sophy, they look upon her as their brother's murderess, and they therefore have the twofold satisfaction of punishing her—and so of avenging their brother's death—and of enriching their own Church."

"Strong inducements, my dear sir," Mr. Petersfield, who was a bachelor, said, "religion and malice, the two strongest motive powers in the female, especially the elderly female, mind."

"Mr. Petersfield," I said, "remember that I am here, and that you are talking treason."

"I apologize humbly, Miss Ashleigh," he said, smiling. "But really," he continued to papa, "what you say explains the whole matter, and gives it an even more awkward appearance, in my eyes, than it had before. The question is, what is to be done?"

"Ah! what is to be done?" papa repeated; "that is indeed a difficult question to decide upon. I believe the will to be in existence, and I do not think they will venture to destroy it; it is one thing to allow a will to lie hid in a secret drawer, another to take it out and deliberately burn it: one requires a very different degree of courage and hardihood to the other. No, I do not think they

will venture to destroy it."

"I do not think they will," Mr. Petersfield said; "they quailed so unmistakably under your denunciations. Do you know, doctor, I give you great credit for that, it was grand, sir!" and the lawyer rubbed his hands at the thought. "I give you my word, I never saw anything better done in the whole of my professional experience."

Harry laughed. "Yes, father, you actually alarmed me at the time; you were awfully impressive."

Papa could not help smiling a little. "Was I?" he said. "Well, I meant to be. I the women to be extremely superstitious; I have heard them confess to a belief in spirits and apparitions; and it flashed across me that the best thing I could do, to prevent them destroying the will, was to touch them on that score, and I do think it is safe for a time. One of the worst features to my mind is the appearance of that Father Eustace. Where does he come from? Who sent for him? They said he had come from abroad, and as he is an Italian, they must have telegraphed for him."

"I think I can find that out," Harry said. "Dick Thornton, who is one of the telegraph clerks, was at school with me, and I have no doubt I can get out of him who the message was sent to, and who sent it, even if I cannot get the words themselves."

"Do," Mr. Petersfield said; "that message might be of great value to us."

"By the way, Mr. Petersfield," papa said, "there is a point which has just occurred to me, which may serve to guide us materially in our search. Do you keep all Mr. Harmer's deeds and papers?"

"Not all; we keep the title-deeds of the property, and that sort of thing, but he himself keeps the copies of his tenants' leases, and papers of that kind, to which he may have occasion to refer in his dealings with them. But why do you ask the question?"

"It is a very important one, my dear sir, and I am pleased with your answer."

"How so?" the lawyer asked, rather puzzled.

"In this way: if the will had been the only important document at Harmer Place, it might have been kept in any of the drawers we searched to-day, and the Misses Harmer might have removed it last week, and either destroyed or concealed it in their rooms, or in any other place, where we could never find it. Now, we have every reason to believe it is not so, for in that case, they would have left the leases, and other documents, and we should have found them. It is quite clear to my mind, then, that Mr. Harmer had some secret place of concealment, to which he alluded when he told your clerk that all the burglars in the world could not find it; and in this place of concealment the whole of these papers, together with the will, are stowed away, and the Misses Harmer, who no doubt know of the existence of this place of concealment, will be perhaps content to let them remain there, and relying upon the secrecy of the hiding-place, will not be tempted to destroy the will."

"Capital, my dear sir," Mr. Petersfield exclaimed energetically, "you are quite right, and it is indeed, as you say, a great point gained. Before, we had a solitary document to look for, which might be contained and hid away in any small space, a drawer with a double bottom, a woman's desk, or sewed up in her stays—I beg your pardon, Miss Ashleigh—in fact, in any small out-of-the-way corner. Now we have some regular receptacle to look for, capable of holding bulky documents—at any rate, a good-sized box. This is indeed a great point gained. There the will is beyond doubt, for I think the Miss Harmers' faces were quite sufficient evidence that it is not destroyed; besides, we may reasonably suppose that the box is not concealed about the Misses Harmer's rooms, but is where it was originally placed by their brother; the question arises, 'Where the deuce is that?'"

"I can guess where it is," I said.

"Where?" the other three exclaimed, simultaneously.

"In the 'priest's chamber,' wherever that may be," I answered. "I remember well, that when I was once talking to Mr. Harmer about the old times, and old houses and their hiding-places, he said that Harmer Place was celebrated as having one of the snuggest hiding-places in the kingdom, and that many a priest had lain hidden there for months. I asked him if he knew where it was, and he told me that he did; for that when a boy he had gone into it on some occasion or other with his father, and that when he came back and took possession of the house, he had again examined it, and found it such a snug hiding-place, that he used it as a sort of strong room; he promised that some day or other he would show it to me, but I never thought to ask him, and, unfortunately, he never mentioned it again."

"By Jove," Harry exclaimed, "we shall find it yet!" while papa and Mr. Petersfield uttered exclamations of surprise and satisfaction.

"Sure enough, doctor, the will is in the 'priest's chamber.' The only question is, how are we to find it, and how are we to get into it when we do?"

"I should think there can be no difficulty about that," Harry said; "all we have to do is to go before a magistrate, and swear that the will is there, and get a search warrant to examine for it."

Mr. Petersfield smiled. "You would find a great difficulty in getting such a warrant."

"Why so?" Harry asked indignantly. "Do you mean to say that if we knew there was a will hidden

in a certain place, which will left us all the property, that we should have no right to go in and search for it?"

"It would be a very delicate matter indeed," Mr. Petersfield said, "very delicate; but still not impossible. By the 7 and 8 statute of the 14 of George, chapter 29, s. 22, it is enacted that if any person shall either during the lifetime or after the death of any person steal, or for any fraudulent purpose conceal any will, codicil, or other testamentary instrument, they shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof, be liable to various punishments. And by the same statute, chapter 29, s. 63, it says if any credible witness shall prove upon oath before a justice of the peace, a reasonable cause to suspect that any person has in his possession, or on his premises, any property whatsoever, or in respect to which any such offence (such as stealing a will, &c.,) shall have been committed, the justice may grant a warrant to search for such property, as in the case of stolen goods. Now by this Act it is clear that a warrant could be obtained upon an affidavit that you believed, as you do believe, that the will exists; but that would not allow you to pull the house to pieces, and it is quite certain that in no other way would you discover a chamber built for the purpose of concealment, and which you say baffled the priest-hunters of the old time—men who were pretty well accustomed to the finding of this sort of hiding-place, and who knew exactly where they were likely to be situated. You would never find it; and even while you were searching for it, Miss Harmer might enter by the secret door—wherever that may be—and abstract or destroy the will, without your being one bit the wiser; or, at any rate, she would be certain after you had given up the hopeless search and left, to destroy the will to prevent the possibility of your ever trying again with better fortune. No, your best course is to find out, first, where the chamber is; next, how to get into it; and when these two points are discovered, we can arrange about going in and taking possession of the will without asking any one's leave in the matter. That is, I believe, our only chance of recovering it—by strategy. Take one of the servants into your pay, and get her to search for the chamber. This I leave to you, as of course you are acquainted with some of the domestics. I do not know that I have anything more which I can suggest at present. Should anything strike me, I will write from town, and, as I go by the early train, I will now, with your permission, retire to bed. You will of course write to me immediately you find out anything which may seem to you to have the smallest bearing upon the affair. I should especially advise that you do not hint to any one your belief in the existence of the will, as it may get to Miss Harmer's ears; and although, if she believes that no search is being made for it, she may be content to let it remain for years concealed as at present, you may be assured that should she believe that you are working to find it, either she or the priest will destroy it at once." We all agreed in the propriety of following this advice, and then separated for the night.

The next morning I got up at six, to make breakfast for Mr. Petersfield before he started. He was pleased at my having done so. We had not much time for talk, but before he went, I said,—

"Honestly, Mr. Petersfield, do you think we shall ever find the will?"

"Honestly, my dear Miss Ashleigh, I am very much afraid you never will. It is a lamentable affair, and I am certain in my own mind that it is in existence, and that its place of concealment is known to the Misses Harmer; but under the circumstances of the case, I feel assured that, even on their death-beds, there is no chance of their ever revealing where it is. Your only chance, in my mind, is in finding the hiding-place; direct all your energies to this point; find that chamber, and you may be assured you will find the will."

When the others came down to breakfast at nine o'clock, I proposed that we should return at once to Canterbury; but papa said that this affair would cause so much talk and excitement in the place, that we should be quite overwhelmed with calls from every one, and have to repeat the whole story a dozen times a day, which would be a terrible infliction, and that as he and Harry would be mostly out, I should have to bear the whole brunt of the attack. So it was settled that we should stay there, at any rate a week or ten days longer, until the first stir and excitement were over. So papa and Harry went over every day to Canterbury, and I remained quietly down at Ramsgate. For some days they brought back no news of any importance, but one day towards the end of the week papa came back to dinner alone, and Harry did not arrive until nearly ten o'clock. As he came in he told us that he had had a long chat with his friend Thornton of the telegraph office.

"And what have you learnt, Harry?" I asked.

"I will tell you all about it, my dear, directly I have made myself comfortable;" and he proceeded with the most provoking coolness to take off his coat and gloves, and to arrange himself in a chair before the fire. "Now I will tell you. I went down to the station to-day, and there I saw Dick Thornton. He shook hands with me, and said—what every one says—'This is a bad job, Harry.' 'A devilish bad job' I answered."

"Never mind the expletives, Harry," I put in, "we can imagine them."

"Don't interrupt me, Agnes, or I won't tell you anything. 'I want to have a chat with you, Thornton,' I said. 'When can I see you?' 'I don't get away from here till six.' 'Well, suppose you come round to our place and have a chat with me when you get away.' 'Done,' he said. Accordingly I had a snug little dinner cooked, got a bottle of wine up from the cellar, and at about half-past six Dick came in. After we had dined, and had talked over the whole affair, I told him he could do me a great service by telling me whether the Misses Harmer had sent off a telegraphic message, and if so, where. 'It would lose me my place, if it were known I had told you, Harry,' he

said. 'I know it would,' I answered; 'but what you say will not go any further; indeed it is more as a matter of curiosity that we may find out where the priest came from, than from any action we can take from it.' 'Well, Harry,' he said, 'I will tell you all about it, and you can make what use you like of it; the place is not so first-rate that I should care very much if I did get the sack in consequence. One of the servants from Harmer Place—I should say Miss Harmer's own maid, for she was a stiff foreign-looking woman—came down upon that Friday afternoon, with a note and a message. I was alone at the time, for the other clerk happened to be away. The message was in Italian; it was that which made me notice it particularly, and when I got home I took the trouble to get a dictionary to see what it was about. I could not make much of it, and I forget the Italian words, but the English was—"To the Bishop of Ravenna, Italy. He is dead—much can be done, if lawful, for the mother—send advice and assistance." 'And did you get an answer,' I asked. 'Yes, the answer came on Sunday morning; I always attend there between half-past nine and half-past ten. It was also in Italian. "All is lawful for the mother—advice and aid have started."'"

"Father Eustace to wit," papa said.

"That is all," Harry concluded, "that Thornton told me. Of course I said I was very much obliged to him, and that I would take good care that it never was known from whom I got the information. And now, I suppose the mother they talk of means Mother Church, but who is the Bishop of Ravenna?"

"I remember," papa said thoughtfully, "that about three years ago Miss Harmer said she was delighted to hear that the confessor, or visitor, or whatever they call him, of the convent where they formerly lived so many years, and where they always stayed whenever they went upon the Continent, had just been made a bishop; and her only regret was that it was to some place in the north of Italy, whereas their convent was at Florence. I remember the fact specially, because, after the sisters had left the room, their poor brother said to me, 'Between you and I, doctor, I should have been much better pleased to have heard that the excellent priest had received his promotion to heaven. That man has had a complete ascendancy over my sisters for many years. He is, I believe, some four or five years younger than they are, but at any rate he has been the confessor or whatever it is of their convent, ever since they were there, twenty-four or five years ago. He is, I judge by what they say, a gloomy fanatical man, whose ambition is to do service to his Church, and, I suppose, rise in it—at any rate, he has a complete ascendancy over them, by his ascetic life and devotion to the Church. They correspond with him frequently, and I cannot help thinking that his advice and orders—given in his letters, and whenever they go over there, which they do constantly—have tended greatly to make them the gloomy unhappy women they are. They were, it is true, brought up with extreme strictness and austerity, but I cannot help thinking that much of that would have worn off, if it had not been for this man's influence.'

"No doubt," papa continued, "Mr. Harmer was right, and all their actions are dictated by this priest; it was he who ordered them to make friends with their brother, at Gerald Harmer's death, and to come over here and take up their abode,—I know they were at that convent when they heard the news, and that they had announced their intention of staying there permanently—and now he has sent over this Father Eustace. The man looks a religious enthusiast, and there is no doubt that he will never allow them to change their minds even were they disposed. Altogether, my children, it is evident the only remaining chance is to find out the secret chamber. If we can discover that, well and good; if not, it will be wiser for us, painful as the disappointment is, to give up all hope of finding the will, and to endeavour to go on as if it had never had an existence. It is a most unfortunate affair now, Sir John having died."

"It is, indeed," Harry answered, "Sir John would have pushed me on, and I should have had no difficulty, even without capital, in making my way."

Sir John, to whom papa alluded, I should say was the engineer to whom Harry had been articled. Harry's time had run out now three or four months, and he was only remaining in the North on a small salary, completing the piece of work on which he was engaged. His old master had died only a month before this time. When this piece of work was finished, Harry had intended buying a partnership in some good business, with the £10,000 Mr. Harmer had promised him for the purpose.

"Yes, it is very unfortunate his having died," Harry said; "unless one has a good patron of that sort to push one on, it makes up-hill work of it. Not that I care much; I can fight my way well enough;" and Harry stretched his great shoulders, and looked as confident and cheerful as if he had just gained a legacy, instead of losing one. "I shall go back in another two or three days to my work," he said; "it will not last much more than another month; and in the meantime I shall be on the look-out for something else."

---

# CHAPTER II.

## SWIFT RETRIBUTION.

Sophy Gregory might have excited pity even in the minds of her enemies could they have seen her as she lay, pale and sad, in her lonely room, during the long hours of the day upon which her husband had gone down to hear the reading of the will of Mr. Harmer. The week which had

passed since she left home had indeed been a terrible one. Her punishment had followed, bitter and heavy, ere the fault was scarce committed. Only one day of happiness and life, and then that crushing blow which met her the very day after her marriage, in the words of the telegraphic message, "Mr. Harmer is dead." It had reached them at York, where, after wandering through the old streets, they had come back to their hotel to lunch. It lay upon their table. Robert had opened it eagerly. Sophy needed not that he should tell her what were its contents. The sudden start, the deadly pallor, the look of horror that he could not control, told their tale too plainly. Her grandfather was dead; she had killed him.

She did not faint, she did not scream; one faint, low, wailing cry broke from her, and then she stood, rigid and immovable, her eyes open and staring, her lips parted, and every vestige of colour gone from her face. One hand clasped her throat; the other, clenched and rigid, rested on the table.

Robert Gregory forgot his own heavy interest in the news, forgot that a fortune might have been gained or lost by the few words of that telegram. Sophy's face frightened him as he had never been frightened before. He spoke to her, he called her every loving name; but it was of no avail. No movement of the rigid face, no change in the fixed eyes, showed that she had heard him. He dared not touch her; she might break into dreadful shrieks—her reason might be gone. What was he to do? He pealed at the bell, and then went to the door, and told the waiter who answered it to beg the landlady to come up instantly. In another minute the landlady arrived, all of a fluster—as she afterwards expressed it when describing the matter—at this sudden summons, and at the brief account the waiter had given her of the manner of Robert Gregory.

"My wife has had a terrible shock; she has just heard of the sudden death of her father, and I don't know what to do with her. She does not hear me; I am afraid she is going to be ill or something terrible. For God's sake speak to her, or do something or other." Such was the hurried greeting which met her at the door.

The landlady was somewhat accustomed to sudden emergencies, but she saw at a glance that this was beyond her, and she said to the waiter, who had followed her up, to hear, if possible, what was the matter,—

"James, the lady is ill. Send Hannah here with some cold water, and my scent bottle, and run across to Dr. Cope's opposite, and tell him to come over at once. If he is out, run for the nearest doctor."

Then, closing the door, she advanced towards Sophy.

"Don'tye, don'tye, take on so, dear!" she said, in a kind, motherly way, as if she was speaking to a little child; "don't, now, for your husband's sake; try and rouse yourself, dear." But it was no use. There was a slight, a very slight quiver of the eyelids, but no other sign of life or movement.

The landlady paused. She was almost as much frightened at Sophy's face as Robert Gregory had been, and she dared not touch the rigid hand. They stood, one on each side of her, watching her helplessly; with faces almost as much blanched by apprehension as was her own and listening breathlessly for the footstep of the doctor outside. It was not long in coming, although it seemed an age to them. He entered quietly: a tall, slight man, with silvered hair, and took the whole state of things in at a glance.

"A sudden shock?" he asked; and then gave orders to the servant to bring such things as were necessary. Then he spoke to Sophy, and put his finger upon the motionless wrist. "It is a serious case, sir," he said to Robert, "very serious; the shock to the brain has been very great. I must bleed her; it is the only thing to be done. Help me to place her upon the sofa."

Between them they gently lifted the rigid figure and placed her, half sitting, half lying, upon the sofa. There was no sign of consciousness. In another minute the doctor had opened a vein in her arm. At first no blood came, then a few dark drops, and then gradually a steady stream.

The doctor gave a sigh of relief. Still the blood flowed, on and on, till Robert Gregory was frightened at the quantity, and looked anxiously at the doctor, who, with his fingers on her pulse, was watching Sophy's face. Presently a change came over the stony expression, the eyes lost their fixed look, the eyelids began to droop down, and the whole figure to yield; then, as she fell back on the sofa, he prepared to stop the bleeding.

It had had its effect; Sophy had fainted. The first crisis was over, but not as yet was the danger past. Very anxiously they watched her waking, and intense was the relief when they found that she was conscious of what had happened; but there were still grave apprehensions for the future. Weak as she was, she was in a state of almost delirious grief and excitement; indeed, at times her mind wandered.

No reproaches which the Misses Harmer had lavished upon her were one-tenth as severe as those she bestowed upon herself. Over and over again she called herself her grandfather's murderess. Constantly she pictured up harrowing scenes of his death, and how he had died, invoking the curse of heaven upon her and hers with his latest breath. Above all, she insisted on returning at any rate to London, that Robert might go down to Canterbury to hear the particulars.

The doctor had a long talk next day with Robert, who explained, to some extent, the facts of the case.

"I hardly know what to do, Mr. Gregory. Your wife is in a most critical state. She has set her mind upon going to London, and ill as she is, I almost question whether there would not be less danger in her doing so than remaining here in her present state of nervous anxiety. It is most essential that, if possible, her mind should be relieved of the present strain, and that she should obtain some intelligence as to the last moments of her adopted father. You tell me that he had a seizure before; it is likely, therefore, that the present attack was very sudden, and in that case he may not—probably would not—have said anything against her. This alone would be a relief to her; and, at any rate, she would be pacified by knowing that she was doing all she could to learn the truth. I fear that brain fever will be the termination of her attack, but its character may be modified if her present anxiety is to some extent allayed. By applying to-day at the railway office, you can have a carriage with a sleeping couch ready by to-morrow, and I should advise your taking her up without delay. Of course, upon your arrival there, you will at once call in medical assistance."

And so it was carried out. Sophy bore the journey better than could have been anticipated; indeed, the very fact that she was getting nearer to Canterbury soothed and satisfied her. But she was still in an almost delirious state of remorse and grief. The doctor who was called in to her had shaken his head in talking over her case with her husband, and had told him that unless her mind could be relieved from the terrible weight upon it, he would not answer for her reason.

And so, leaving a nurse to take care of Sophy, Robert Gregory went down to Canterbury and saw Dr. Ashleigh. The news which he brought back of Mr. Harmer's forgiveness before his death, saved her from an attack of brain fever, if not from entire loss of reason. And yet, although it allayed her fears, and relieved her mind of the harrowing pictures of her grandfather's death which she had before conjured up so constantly, it scarcely lessened her sorrow and remorse; indeed, the knowledge that his forgiveness had been so instant, and his last thoughts those of kindness to her, caused her to reproach herself more than ever; but her grief was now quieter, and the doctor believed that she would escape the fever he had feared for her. She could now shed tears, and in long and bitter fits of crying found exhaustion and relief. In another two or three days she was calmer and better.

Robert had been everything which was kind and consoling to her, and very gentle and thoughtful in his talk and manners. In her wildest outbursts of grief she had never blamed him for his share in her fault, and would not listen to the reproaches which, in the hope of relieving her conscience somewhat, he would have gladly bestowed upon himself. But this Sophy would not allow. He had not deceived a benefactor; he had been actuated only by his love for her, and his entreaties for her to elope with him had been but natural; it was she only who had been wrong and wicked in neglecting her plain duty, and in deceiving her more than father; and upon her, and her only, must the blame and grief fall.

She was very quiet and pale, as she lay that day that he had gone down to the funeral, and she waited and thought all those long hours that he was abroad. She thought a good deal of the future, and planned that they should go upon the Continent first for a while, and upon their return spend the great proportion of their income in doing good, living quietly themselves upon very little; she thought that in any other way she should feel as if this fortune were a curse to her, for it had never even occurred to her that Mr. Harmer might have altered his will.

It was late in the evening before Robert returned; he came in quiet and grave, but with no sign of passion or disappointment upon his face as he kissed her, and asked her how she had been all the long day. Robert Gregory was not a good man. In many respects he was bad and vicious; but, as in most men, there was some good in him, and what there was came out at its brightest in his relations with Sophy.

Deep as had been his disappointment, bitter and fierce the invectives and curses which, during his journey, he had showered upon the Misses Harmer, his own unfortunate luck, and upon the world in general, yet, as he approached the hotel, he curbed himself in, and became calm and quiet. As he thought of her love and suffering, of the sacrifices her attachment for him would entail upon her, and upon her trust in himself, he determined that, come what might, she should not see his disappointment, and that in addition to her other troubles, she should never come to know that he had married her for her money; and as he came into the room where she was lying, pale and weak, upon the sofa, his brow cleared, his voice softened, and he tried, and tried hard, that she should see no sign in his face of that bitter sense of disappointment he was feeling in his breast.

Sophy answered his inquiries as to her health, and then, as he sat down on a chair close to the sofa, so that she could lean her head upon his arm, and look up into his face, she said,—

"I am afraid that this has been a very painful day for you, Robert?"

"Not very pleasant, love," he said, almost cheerfully; "but, of course, I had made up my mind for that."

"Did you see the Misses Harmer, Robert, and did they say anything about me?"

"I saw them, Sophy, but we did not exchange many words."

"And Dr. Ashleigh, did he speak as kindly as before?"

"More so, Sophy; he could not have been more kind; he took me back in his carriage to the

station."

Sophy looked pleased. There was a little silence. Robert did not know how to announce his intelligence, and his wife considered all that part of the affair as so much a matter of course that she did not even think it necessary to ask any question about it. In a short time Sophy went on,—

"Do you know, Robert, I have been thinking so much about the future, and I think that when we come back from our travels we ought to put aside almost all our money to do good with."

"My dear," Robert said, gently, "I hardly think we need enter into that now, for an event has occurred which will alter all our plans. The fact is, darling, the will is missing."

"The will missing, Robert!" Sophy repeated, opening her eyes in astonishment—"how can it be missing?"

"It is a curious business, darling, and looks very bad. Mr. Harmer, it seems, had it down some little time since to make some slight alteration. We know that he did not destroy it upon that morning, but it is not to be found, and there is strong reason for supposing that the Misses Harmer have concealed it. In that case, although it may yet turn up, still we must look the worst in the face, and consider that it is very probable that it may never be heard of again."

"And in that case should I get nothing?" Sophy asked, eagerly.

"Not one penny, Sophy; it will all go to the Misses Harmer."

Sophy closed her eyes, and leaned back, with a faint "Thank God!" She looked upon it as a punishment—as a sort of atonement for her fault. Then in an instant a fresh thought struck her. How would Robert bear it? Would he love her any the less, now she was penniless, instead of being a great heiress? And she looked up again with a frightened, inquiring glance into his eyes. He bore it well, and said, gently,—

"We must bear it bravely, Sophy. It is, of course, a heavy blow. I have never disguised from you how I am situated. Still, darling, we must do our best, and I have no doubt we shall pull through somehow. I am very sorry for your sake, dear, and I bitterly accuse myself for tempting you. It will be a different life from what you expected, but I will try hard to make it easy for you."

He spoke tenderly and earnestly, for he, at the time, almost felt what he said. Sophy had raised herself, and, as he finished, was crying softly, with her head upon his shoulder, but her tears were quite different to those which she had shed during the last week.

"I am not crying, Robert, because I have lost the fortune—I am crying because I am so happy. I know now that you love me quite for my own sake, and not for my money."

"You did not doubt it, did you, Sophy?" her husband asked, rather reproachfully, although he felt that he was but a hypocrite while he said so.

"I never really doubted you, Robert—no, no—I would not have married you if I had. At times, when I felt low, I could not help wondering how much my money had to do with it, but I always drove away the thought, dearest, as an injustice to you; and now I shall never think so again. Do you know, Robert, this news has been quite a relief to me? I should always have felt that the wealth was a burden; and now that I am punished for my fault, I shall not reproach myself quite so much with it. But I am sorry for your sake, dear. It must be a great blow for you, and I feel how kind it is of you to hide your disappointment for my sake. I will try very hard, Robert, to make it up to you by loving you more and more; and you shall see what a useful little wife I will make you as soon as I get strong again, which I mean to do very fast now."

---

# CHAPTER III.

## THE SEARCH COMMENCED.

Papa wrote several times in the fortnight following the funeral of Mr. Harmer to Robert Gregory, in answer to his letters inquiring what progress he was making towards the discovery of the will. At the end of that time I received a letter from Sophy, and from the handwriting I could see how ill and shaken she must be. Her letter was very, very pitiful; she was still evidently suffering the greatest remorse and sorrow for the death of Mr. Harmer, and she said "she was sure she should never have recovered at all had she not received the news of the forgiveness he had written to her before he died." It had been a dreadful shock to her; but she accepted the loss of her fortune as a deserved punishment for her wicked conduct. "My husband," she said, "is very kind indeed to me; and it is on my account entirely that he regrets the loss of the fortune, as he says that my listening to him has been my ruin." If the will was not found shortly, he intended to get something to do, and she meant to try to get some pupils for music. She begged me to write to her, for that I was the only person she could hope to be a friend to her now.

Of course I answered her letter, and from that time we kept up an occasional correspondence.

Papa told me that in his early letters to him, Robert Gregory had expressed his determination to discover the will at all hazards, but that he had now, to a certain extent, acquiesced in papa's

view, that an unsuccessful attempt would be certain to prove the signal for the instant destruction of the will, and that therefore nothing should be attempted unless success was pretty certain. Robert Gregory was the more obliged to acquiesce in this decision, as far as he was personally concerned, for he was unable to appear in Canterbury, as he would have been arrested if he had done so.

We returned from Ramsgate, as we had agreed upon, about a fortnight after the funeral. Harry having already left for the North, papa would still further have postponed our return; but I said it would be very unpleasant whenever we returned, and we might as well go through it sooner as later.

Indeed, I got through the next fortnight better than I had expected. Every one, of course, came to call; but by that time people had heard pretty well all there was to tell,—namely, that the will was missing,—so that all I had to do was to receive their condolences. Almost all were, I believe, sincerely sorry for us, and every one remarked what an extraordinary business it was; indeed, popular opinion was strongly against the Misses Harmer, whom every one accused of having hidden the will. However, papa and I were careful never by any remarks of ours to appear to confirm these suspicions, as it was evidently our best policy to keep quiet, and let the matter seem to drop.

In the meanwhile I had commenced taking steps towards what was now our only hope, the discovery of the "priest's chamber."

The day after I returned from Ramsgate, I went round the garden to see how things were looking after my long absence, and I found our servant Andrew—who acted in the general capacity of coachman, groom, and gardener, having a boy under him to assist in all these labours—busy banking up some long rows of celery, an article on which he particularly prided himself. Andrew had been in papa's service a great many years, and papa would not have parted with him on any account. He was a very faithful, attached old man. When I say old man, I believe he was not more than seven or eight and forty; but he looked much older: his face was pinched and weatherbeaten, he stooped very much, walked with a short, quick, shuffling step, and looked as if he were momentarily on the point of falling. This was not to be wondered at, for he had never, as long as I can remember, had any legs to speak of; and now there did not seem to be the least flesh upon them. They looked, as Harry once said, exactly like a pair of very crooked mop-sticks; and as he always dressed in drab breeches and gaiters to match, it showed the extraordinary thinness of his legs to the greatest advantage. Andrew, however, had not the least idea but that he was an active, able man; and, indeed, would sometimes in confidence lament to me,—

"Master going out in wet, cold nights to visit patients."

"But it is much worse for you than for him, Andrew," I would urge; "you are outside all in the wet, while he is inside in shelter."

"Lor', Miss Agnes, it is no account along of me. I am a young man by the side of master. He must be nigh fifteen years older than I am."

And so he was; but papa was a hale, active man, whereas poor Andrew looked as if a strong wind would blow him off his seat on the box. Even when he was at his best, and came to papa when we first went to Canterbury, and he was only thirty, I have heard papa say that he never had been at all strong; and yet he was so willing, and careful, and indefatigable, that papa put a great value on him.

Andrew ceased from working among the celery when I came up, and, touching his hat to me, inquired how I had been all this longtime.

"Bad doings at Harmer Place, Miss," he said, after a few remarks about the weather, the garden, and the horses.

"Are there, Andrew?" I asked; "anything new?"

"Very bad, Miss; half the servants have had notice to leave. There's my Mary, who has been there three years last Michaelmas, and who your papa was kind enough to recommend there as housemaid—she's got warning, and she came to me last night as savage as ever was; not because she was going to leave, miss—don't go to think such a thing; but she wanted to have given warning at once, when we found that Miss Harmer had hid away the will, and cheated you all out of your money. But I said to her, 'Don't you go to do nothing in a hurry, Mary; the will is hid away, and you may be useful somehow in watching what they two old cats—saving your presence, Miss Agnes—is up to. At any rate, you wait.' And now she's got warning to go, and she's as savage as may be that she did not have the first word. Didn't she let on to me last night though, till her mother up and told her to sit down and hold her tongue; but it were enough to aggravate the girl, surely."

"I am sorry to hear that she will have to leave, Andrew, both for her own sake and because she might, as you say, have been useful to us in making a few inquiries."

"That's just what I said to my son Thomas last night when Mary came in with the news; but he said that it did not matter so much on that account, because his Sarah's not got warning to leave, and she will find out everything that is wanted."

"And who is your son Thomas's Sarah?" I asked, smiling.

"She is the under-housemaid, Miss; and she used to go out walks with Mary on her Sunday evenings out. Thomas, he used to go out to meet his sister, and so met Sarah too; at last he goes to meet her more than Mary, and, I suppose, one of these days they will get married. She is one of the few that are to stay, Miss, for most of the old ones are going because they don't mean to keep so many servants, and they have got some new ones coming. All those who are going were recommended to Mr. Harmer by Master; and they seem to have picked them out a-purpose. Now Sarah was not; she came from the other end of the county, and was recommended to Mr. Harmer by some lady last year, at the time of all those grand doings over there; and as they don't know that her young man Thomas is my son, seeing he is in service in another place, they have not given her warning to go."

"And do you think, Andrew, that Sarah would be willing to do anything to help us?"

"Lor' bless you, Miss, she would do anything for you; she said the other day she would, and that she did not care whether she lost her place or not; she did not want to stop with thieves. Oh, you may depend on her, Miss."

"Well, Andrew, do you think I could get her to come here and have a talk with me quietly?"

"Sure enough, Miss Agnes. To-day is Friday. On Sunday evening she goes out, and will walk into town with Mary—and for the matter of that, with Tom too—and she can very well come here; no one will know her in the dark, and so she will be quite safe."

Accordingly, on Sunday evening our maid came in to say that Andrew's daughter, Mary, and another young woman, were in the hall, and would be glad to see me. And so Mary and Thomas's Sarah were shown in. Mary I knew well; indeed she had learnt her work with us as under-housemaid before she went to Mr. Harmer's. She was a stout, well-made, active girl, with a good-natured honest face, but I should have had some hesitation in entrusting any delicate and difficult task to her. Thomas's Sarah, I felt at once, had tact and intelligence sufficient for my purpose, and I was sure that I could trust her, and that she would do exactly for what I required.

Thomas had certainly shown good taste in his selection, for his Sarah was a very pretty little girl,—a slight active figure, a bright clear complexion, brown hair waving back off her forehead, a cheerful smile, large speaking eyes with a little touch of sauciness in them—which I fancied would sometimes vex and puzzle Thomas, who was a steady matter-of-fact young groom, not a little—and a very prettily cut nose and mouth. I was altogether very much taken with her appearance.

I asked them to take seats, and Sarah at once began:—

"Miss Ashleigh, I am told by"—and here she paused a little, coloured, and ended by telling a story and saying—"Mary, that I could be of service to you. I can only say that I shall be glad to do so by any means in my power; we are all at Harmer Place very sorry at your losing your rights, and should rejoice to see you restored to them."

Sarah expressed herself so well that I was really quite surprised. I thanked her for her offer, and said, "You can, indeed, do us a service which may turn out of great importance. Now I do not disguise from you, it will cost you your place if you are discovered; but I need not say that we will take care that you shall be no loser by that. Now I will at once tell you how we stand at present, and what we want to find out. We know, or at least are nearly sure, that the will exists, and that it is with some other papers large enough to fill a good-sized box. Now we strongly believe that this box is hidden away in a secret room we know to exist in the house; and what we want to find out is, where is that secret room? It must be a pretty good size—I mean much larger than a mere closet—because we know people used to lay hid there in old times." Sarah nodded, as much as to say that she had heard legends of the "priest's chamber." "Now, Sarah, the first thing we want to discover is the whereabouts of this room—and this can only be done in one way. I want the exact dimensions—that is to say, the measure, the height, length, and breadth, of every room, passage, closet, and staircase in the old part of the house; because as this room existed in the old time, it is only in the central part of the house, which was the original building, that the secret chamber need be looked for. When I have got all these measurements, and put them all down upon paper, I shall see where there is a space to fill up. Do you understand?"

Sarah did not quite understand; so I got a sheet of paper, drew a rough plan of a house, and explained the matter more fully.

Sarah understood now, and at once entered into it with all her heart.

"You see," I said, "we want the exact position of the doors, windows, and chimneys. Here is a small pocket-book and pencil: take one page for each room; mark down first in this way, the extreme length and breadth, then the positions of the doors and windows thus, and put 'in small figures' their distances from each other."

I then showed her a small plan of Harmer Place, which I had drawn from my recollection of it, and Sarah understood perfectly what she had to do.

"Make a notch the length of a yard on the handle of your broom," I said, "and measure the exact length of the bottom of your apron. With your broom you can get the height of the room, and with your apron the other measurements, so that you will be able to get all the sizes; and even if you are disturbed, no one would have the slightest idea of what you are doing."

I then asked her to measure the room we were in, and to make a little sort of plan of it, and I found her so quick and intelligent, that I felt certain she would execute her task with sufficient accuracy to enable us to find out where the secret room was situated.

The two girls then took their leave, and I really felt strong hope in the success of my plan—not indeed that it was mine, for it was Harry's idea entirely, and I only gave her the instructions he had previously given me.

After this, a small packet arrived every week, sent by Sarah, through Thomas, to his father, containing seven or eight leaves of the pocket-book.

In little more than a month we had all the measurements, and were enabled to make out the entire plan, in doing which, of course our previous knowledge of the house assisted us greatly. Papa assisted me in this. I had not, at first, told him anything of what I was doing, as I wished that, in case by any chance my scheme was detected, he should be able to say that he knew nothing about it. At last, however, I was obliged to let him into the secret, and when I told him, he was very much interested and pleased; and I do not think that I should ever have succeeded in putting the parts together, and certainly have never arrived at any accurate conclusion, without his assistance.

When it was done, we found the blank space precisely where we had anticipated that we should do. It is difficult to explain the exact position, but I will endeavour to do so.

On entering the house, from the front, one found oneself in a large square hall, from one side of which the library opened, and from the other the dining-room. Opposite to the front door was an immense fireplace, in which still stood two large iron dogs, and in which in winter a great wood fire always blazed; on one side of this fireplace, the grand staircase went up, and on the other a passage led down to a room which had originally been a drawing-room, but which, from its windows being at the back of the house, had been long since turned into a kitchen; the fireplace of this room stood back to back to the one in the hall. It was in the block contained in the square formed by the backs of the kitchen and hall, the staircase and the passage, that we came to the conclusion that the secret room must be, for, even allowing for immense thickness of masonry, there was yet a large space unaccounted for. On the floor above there was also a space, directly over this, considerably larger than would have been required for the chimneys of the hall and kitchen fire, even had there been two of them—which there were not, for Sarah found that the chimney of the hall made almost a right angle, and ran into the kitchen chimney.

Papa, after going very carefully into the measurements, came to the conclusion that the room itself was situated nearly over the hall fireplace; that it might be some seven or eight feet long, by five or six wide, and that it could be little over six feet high. He thought it was approached by some short staircase opening into the hall fireplace, or into one of the bedrooms above, which abutted on the vacant space on that floor. One of these rooms had been occupied by Herbert Harmer, and the other had been, and was still, Miss Harmer's room.

Indeed papa suspected both entrances to exist, as by them, in case of necessity, provisions could be so much more readily and secretly supplied, and escape made in some disguise from the one exit, should an entrance be forcibly made at the other.

"All this is mere guesswork, my dear; but when there is so much ground to go upon as we have got, one can guess very closely indeed to the truth."

"And where should you think, papa, that the entrance is most likely to be discovered?"

"Most likely in the hall fireplace. The back and sides, if I remember right, are formed of iron, with rude ornaments upon it. The mantelpiece, too, is of old oak, and is covered with carving; undoubtedly in some of all this the secret spring is concealed. The hall is the best place to try for another reason; early in the morning, and at various times indeed, Sarah might search among all these ornaments and knobs for the spring, and if any one came suddenly into the hall, her presence there would appear only natural; whereas in either of the bedrooms, and especially that of Mr. Harmer, which is not now in use, she could hardly be often without exciting suspicion."

Sarah came on the following Saturday evening, and I showed her the plan we had made, and explained to her where we thought the entrance was, and how she was most likely to find the secret spring.

Sarah was much pleased with the success which had so far attended her efforts, and promised to find the spring if it existed. She said she would get up half an hour before the other servants, and try every knob and roughness on or near the grate.

However, week after week rolled on, and every Saturday came a message, "No result;" and the week before Christmas she sent to say she had tried every possible place, but could not find any signs of it. I sent back in answer to ask her to try all the stones and bricks as far up the chimney as she could reach.

With Christmas, Polly came home from school, and this time to stop for good, for papa could not very well afford to keep her at so expensive a school as Grendon House; and indeed we wanted her bright face and happy laugh back again among us. Papa's practice was not very lucrative; it was a large, but not a good-paying one. A great proportion of it lay among the lower classes; in any serious cases among them he was always ready to give his time and skill. Indeed for the last three years, since there was an apparent certainty that we should be all so handsomely provided

for, papa had purposely given up much of his paying practice. Many among the upper classes have the habit of calling in a medical man on the slightest pretext, and like him, indeed, to call regularly, and have an hour's chat on all sorts of subjects; this time papa could not spare, and indeed I know that he said to two or three of his very best patients,—

"You have nothing serious the matter with you. All you want is a little occasional medicine, and a good chat of a day to do you good and cheer you up; this I have no time to give you, when I have half a dozen dying people waiting anxiously for me. Send to Harper; he is a clever fellow; knows all about everything; will amuse you more than I do. He has a large family, and your money will be of use to him. If you get seriously ill, and want me, I will of course come to you."

So papa had gradually withdrawn himself from much of his paying practice; he had still an income sufficient to keep us comfortably, but it was not nearly what it had been four or five years before. However, he was quite content to work as he did, giving his skill and time to those who most required but were least able to pay for them.

Harry came home, too, a little before Christmas. He had finished his last piece of work, and had now obtained an appointment of £150 a year to superintend a railway in the course of construction in the north of Ireland.

The evening after Christmas Day I received a note from Sarah, saying, that that morning, she had, in feeling up the chimney, found a projecting knob immediately behind the mantelpiece; that on pressing this it went into the wall, and that every time it did so, she could hear a click, but that she could not find that anything else moved.

"Hurrah, Sarah!" Harry shouted when I read the note aloud; "we are on the right track. 'The king shall enjoy his own again!'" he sang in his stentorian way.

"I really do begin to think we are on the track," papa said. "You must tell Sarah that no doubt there is some other spring which must be pressed either together or before or after this; for generally there were two springs to these old hiding-places, in case one should be touched accidentally."

This I told Sarah, who came on the next Sunday evening to see me. She had rather began to despair before; but now that she had found something tangible she became quite enthusiastic, and said that she was determined to find the other spring if she were years engaged in the search. She was now certain that we were right, that the secret chamber existed, and that the entrance was there, of neither of which facts had she been quite sure in her own mind before.

---

# CHAPTER IV.

## EVIL DAYS.

With the cheering thought that she was punished, and that perhaps her fault was thus in some little way atoned for, and with the happy conviction that her husband loved her for her own sake, and not for that of her money, Sophy Gregory recovered from the weight of her sorrow and remorse more quickly than could have been expected; and by the end of another ten days she was able to leave her room, and go for a little walk leaning upon Robert's arm. That evening they were sitting before the fire; Robert looking moodily into it, but sometimes rousing himself and trying to talk pleasantly to Sophy, who was watching him a little anxiously, when she said, after one of these pauses,—

"I think, Robert, now that I am getting strong again, we ought to talk about the future. I am sure that by the time we have paid all we owe here, we shall not have much left out of our hundred pounds."

Sophy might have said, "my hundred pounds;" for it was she who had furnished the funds for their elopement. Mr. Harmer had been in the habit of giving her money from time to time, for which she had little use; and this had, at the time she left home with Robert Gregory, accumulated to rather more than a hundred pounds.

"The first thing to be done, Robert, is to find some very cheap lodgings. How cheap could you get two little rooms?"

Robert roused himself; he was pleased at Sophy's broaching the subject; for he had been all day wondering what they were to do, as of course it was out of the question that they could remain where they were. It was a small private hotel where Robert had gone the night of their return from Scotland, thinking that their stay there would not have exceeded three or four days at most, whereas now it had run on to more than a fortnight.

"You are quite right, Sophy, although I did not like to begin the conversation. It seems so hard for you, accustomed as you have been to luxury, to go into all the discomfort of small lodgings."

"My dear Robert," Sophy said, "please don't talk in that way. I am your wife, and shall be very happy anywhere with you; besides I have not been always accustomed to luxury. I was born and lived until I was twelve or thirteen in a cottage as a poor village girl. And please do not remind

me of scenes where I had no right, and where I never deserved to have been. Do not let us think of the past at all, Robert; it is perhaps not very pleasant for either of us. Let us think of the future—it is all before us, and we are not worse off than thousands of others; but you did not answer my question, how cheap could we get a little parlour and bedroom?"

"We could get them, Sophy, in some out-of-the-way place, such as Islington, or Camberwell, or Chelsea, at about twelve shillings a week; but remember, they would be very small."

"That is of no consequence at all," Sophy said, cheerfully. "Now I will tell you what I have been thinking of. I have been thinking that when we have gone into some little lodgings, and people come to know us, the tradesmen round will let me put some cards into the windows, saying that a lady wishes to give some lessons in music, French, and German. If I charge very little, say one shilling an hour, I should think I might get five or six daily pupils, which would bring us in some thirty or thirty-six shillings a week, and we might manage on that, Robert, for a time; after paying our bill here, there will be enough to keep us for some time till I can get some pupils."

"Sophy," Robert said, in a deep, husky voice, "God forgive me, I have been a great scoundrel. I have ruined you. I have dragged you down to this; and here are you now, hardly able to walk, offering to support us both. Oh, Sophy, I wish to heaven I had never known you." And the strong, bad man put his face between his hands and fairly cried.

"But I do not wish so, Robert," Sophy said, getting up from her seat, taking his hands from his face, kissing him fondly, and then seating herself on his knees, and nestling up to him as a child might have done; "I do not, and therefore why should you? Would it not be a pleasure to you to work for both of us, if you had any way to do so? but as of course you cannot, why should I not have the pleasure? It need not in any case be for long, dear. Agnes Ashleigh in her letter this morning says that she does not give up hope, and that she has already got a servant at Harmer Place to look for the secret chamber; let us wait for the issue of the search, and let me do as I propose for that time. If after a time the will cannot be found, will it not be better for us to go either to Australia or America? I hear any one can get work there, and we will both work and get quite rich, and that will be much more enjoyable than owing it to another. I am sure Dr. Ashleigh will lend us enough money to take us out there. What do you think, Robert?"

"Yes, darling, it will be far best. I shall never do any good here: out there I may. But I shall not give up the will for a long time yet; but once assured, quite assured, that it is not in existence, I shall be ready to start with you at once."

And then they talked over a new life in a new land, as thousands and thousands have done since then; and the future looked bright and happy out there. Australia is indeed a land of promise, a bright star in the horizon, to countless numbers whose fate it never is to reach it; but who have yet—when almost hopeless of keeping themselves afloat in the fierce struggle for existence in this crowded land—looked longingly over across the wide ocean, and said, "At the worst, we can go there, where every strong arm and willing heart is welcome. If we cannot get on here, we will go." Perhaps they never do go, but still it has served its purpose; it has given them hope when hope was most needed, and when without it they might have yielded in despair to the reverses of fortune.

The next morning Robert Gregory started in search of lodgings, and returned in the afternoon, saying that he had found some across in Lambeth, which were very small, but were clean and respectable, and which were to be had for the twelve shillings a week. Into this they moved next day, and they found on paying their hotel bill, that they had twenty pounds left out of Sophy's hundred, and this they calculated would, with care, last for three months. The lodgings, which were situated in King Edward Street, Westminster Bridge Road, consisted of a parlour, and bedroom behind it. The parlour was very small, but clean, and Sophy felt quite happy as mistress of her little domain, which under her care soon assumed a homelike appearance.

The first step was to clear away those innumerable extraordinary knicknacks with which small lodging-house keepers delight to cumber their rooms. The inevitable shepherdesses and imitation Bohemian glass vases on the mantelpiece, the equally inevitable shells on coloured worsted mats, and the basket of wax fruit under a glass shade, standing on the little round table in the middle of the window.

These alterations the landlady complied with without hesitation, rather pleased indeed that these valuables should be placed beyond risk of breakage; but the next change proposed was evidently very wounding to her feelings, and was not complied with until it was made the sole condition on which her lodgers would take the rooms beyond the first week for which they had engaged them.

Over the chimneypiece was a glass, about three feet by two; it could not fairly be termed a looking-glass, for its ripply surface seemed agitated as by a gale, and no reflexion which it gave back in the slightest degree resembled the original. Still it was to a certain extent ornamental; for it was enclosed in a wide, dark wood frame, with a gilt ornament at each corner, which in summer Mrs. Billow protected by elaborate fly-papers of red, blue, and yellow. As this glass, although not useful, was so ornamental, no objection was raised to it. On the walls round the room were suspended a great variety of pictures, mostly landscapes, in the pure tea-tray style. These as a general thing, although by no means ornamental in themselves, yet served to enliven the very dingy paper, and to them too, as a whole, no objection was taken; but on the side opposite to the fireplace hung two half-length portraits, which at once inevitably and unpleasantly attracted the attention of any one entering the room—almost, indeed, to the

exclusion of everything else. These were the portraits of Mr. Billow, the landlord, and his wife, taken when they were much younger, probably at the time of their nuptials. These paintings were in the early Pre-Raphaelite style. Their dresses were of an elaborate description; the lady in green silk, with a gold brooch of immense size and massive pattern; the gentleman in blue coat, black satin waistcoat, showing an immense extent of white shirt, and a resplendent watch chain. Their faces were charmingly pink and white, perfectly flat, and with an entire absence of shade. They were alike characterized by a ghastly smile impressed upon them, and a staring fixed look in the eyes very painful to behold. This stare of their eyes looked into every corner of the room, and could in no way be avoided. Robert declared that it was as bad as a nightmare; and even Sophy, disposed as she was to be pleased, and to like everything, confessed that she really should feel uncomfortable with those staring eyes constantly watching her. Mrs. Billow urged that they were considered remarkable pieces of art, and had been very much admired; indeed that when they were first painted the artist had frequently asked permission to bring strangers in to see them, as they were quite an advertisement for him.

Sophy seeing that Robert was about to express an opinion respecting the portraits which would irreparably injure the feelings of their landlady, hastily said, "That, beyond question, they were remarkable paintings; but that she had been ill, and that the eyes had such a very lifelike expression, that she should never feel quiet and alone with them looking at her."

Mrs. Billow thereupon acceded, and the cherished portraits were removed upstairs to her own bedroom, leaving two large light patches upon the dingy paper. They were, however, partially covered by two framed prints, which were displaced upstairs to make room for the portraits.

After a few days, when they were settled, and found that they should be comfortable, Robert wrote to Miss Harmer, requesting that Sophy's things might be forwarded to her there.

In a few days a railway van arrived with quite a number of packages. All Sophy's wearing apparel, her work-table, her desk and music-stand; all the paintings she had executed under a master at school, and which had been framed and hung in the drawing-room at Harmer Place; her books; her grand piano, given to her by Mr. Harmer when she left school, and which was much too large to go into their little room, and was therefore sent to a warehouse for the present, to be reclaimed or sold, according as their circumstances might demand; and lastly, a pony-carriage, with two beautiful ponies, which Mr. Harmer had presented to her a few months before his death.

This was at once sent to be sold, and the money it fetched was a welcome addition to their little store, which the amount to be paid for the conveyance of all these things had nearly exhausted.

The ponies and carriage fetched seventy guineas, and Robert was at once anxious to move into larger lodgings; but Sophy persuaded him to wait as they were for the present, at any rate, until they saw what success attended her project for teaching. The only thing to which she would agree was that a few shillings should be laid out in repapering their sitting-room; and when this was done with a light, pretty paper, all the tea-tray landscapes removed, and her own paintings hung up in their place, the room looked so different that Sophy was quite delighted with it, and even Robert allowed that, although very small, it was really a pretty, snug little room.

In a short time, Sophy went round to the various tradesmen in the neighbourhood with whom they dealt, and asked them to allow her modest little cards to appear in their windows; and in a month she had obtained two pupils, three times a week, for an hour in French or German, and three every day for an hour in music—in all twenty-four shillings a week.

It was tedious work, no doubt; but Sophy felt so much pleasure in bringing home her earnings at the end of the week, that, as she said, she really liked it. Besides this, it was a break to the monotony of her life; for, after a while, Robert took to going out after breakfast and not returning until five o'clock to dinner, being engaged, as he said, in looking for something to do; and, indeed, he did believe that he was trying very hard to get employment, although he had not the least idea what kind of work he needed. He sauntered across the bridge, went into a public-house to read the paper, and look through all the advertisements in the vague hope of seeing something to suit him. Three or four advertisements, indeed, he answered; but received no reply. Still he comforted himself with the assurance that it did not matter for that—the will was sure to be found; and that it was therefore really as well that he should not undertake a situation which he should, when he became a rich man, be sorry that he had filled. For the same reason he tried hard to persuade Sophy not to enter into the teaching business, as it would be humiliating to look back upon afterwards; but Sophy replied that she could see nothing to be ashamed of in the remembrance that she had tried her best to get her living, at a time when she had thought it necessary that she should do so. And in this particular she insisted on having her own way.

After another month Sophy got four more pupils, but two of them were in the evening, and this brought with it a more than countervailing drawback; for Robert was now left at home by himself on the evenings when she gave her lessons. Finding his own society dull, he would saunter out to seek other companionship, and on one or two of these occasions he came back with his face flushed, his tread unsteady, and his voice thick and uncertain; and Sophy felt with a terrible fear that his old habits were coming back upon him, and that, even for her sake, he could not keep from drink. On the morning after the first time that this happened, he was very penitent, called himself hard names, and promised that it should not happen again; but after a time he ceased to make excuses for himself, but was only sulky and sullen of a morning as if he resented the reproaches which Sophy never made. Sophy's evil time was coming, and she felt it; the bright

smile with which she had lit up their little home, came only with an effort now; the roses which had began to bloom in her pale cheeks, faded out again, but she bore it unflinchingly. Sophy was a quiet, undemonstrative girl, but she had a brave heart; she felt that she deserved any punishment she might receive, and she tried hard to bear it uncomplainingly. When Robert found this, and that no cold looks or reproaches greeted him, he did try hard to please the patient loving woman who had suffered so much for his sake, and withdrew himself, for awhile, from the new friends he was making. Sophy on her part gave up her evening pupils, and stopped at home with him; and so for a time things went on smoothly again.

Sophy had now become accustomed to the place, and had learned from Mrs. Billow—who was a good-hearted, talkative old woman, in a very large cap, and who waited upon them herself—all about their various neighbours. King Edward Street was a quiet, semi-respectable little street, and although it was a thoroughfare leading into the Westminster Bridge Road, very few people except its own inhabitants ever passed through it. It was, it seemed, quite a little professional colony. Next door, in the parlours, played first violin at a theatre on that side of the water, and the one beyond that was second cornet at the Adelphi. The two sisters in the house opposite danced in the ballet at the opera, and worked as milliners in their spare time; next door was a comic singer at Cremorne; and beyond him again lived a leading star and his wife—who was a singing chambermaid, both at the Victoria. They were a kindly, cheerful lot, sociable among themselves, and ready to do any kindness or service to each other. There were a few black sheep among them, but the very blackest of all, Robert and Sophy now suspected Mr. Billow himself, to be.

Mr. Billow was a bad-tempered, cross-grained old man, dirty, and almost always unshaven, very unlike the pink and white gentleman which his portrait represented him to have been; indeed it is almost certain that his habits must have changed greatly for the worse since that was taken; for it was otherwise inconceivable how he could ever have got himself up in that dazzling degree of cleanliness, both of face and shirt front. Mr. Billow's ordinary custom was to get drunk three or four times a day, and then to doze by the fireside into a state of comparative sobriety. All this was bad, but it was not the worst.

Mr. Billow was supposed to be a retired watchmaker, living upon his savings, but he was in reality engaged in a far more profitable trade than that had ever been. At various times of the day ill-looking fellows would lounge in at the little front gate, and instead of going up the stairs to the front door, would knock at the window, and be admitted by a little door under the steps into the kitchen. Mr. Billow would then postpone his sleep for a few minutes, tell Mrs. Billow to "hook it;" and when alone, would enter into a low but animated conversation with his visitors, who had generally small parcels of goods to display to him; the ownership of these, after much altercation, generally changed hands—that is to say the nominal ownership, the real owner being some third person, whose rights and interests were entirely unrepresented and overlooked. Sometimes men would come in the same way late of an evening, with a bundle too large to be carried openly through the streets in the broad daylight; and on all these occasions Mrs. Billow was dismissed while the conversation was going on. Once, too, at three or four in the morning, Robert Gregory hearing a noise below, went down, stairs and found Mr. Billow engaged over a fire in the kitchen, apparently cooking. Finding that all was safe, Robert had gone up to bed again, and in the morning, Mrs. Billow mentioned casually that Mr. Billow had started very early, and that Robert had found him cooking his breakfast. But Robert knew that if Mr. Billow had required breakfast at any hour, his wife would have had to get up to prepare it; he had moreover detected that the smell of the ingredients in the pot on the fire, much more resembled the fumes of melting metal, than the savory steam of Mr. Billow's breakfast. He was therefore confirmed in what he had previously strongly suspected, namely, that his landlord was neither more nor less than a receiver of stolen goods. Sophy objected to this, "Why then should he let lodgings?" But Robert told her, with a laugh, that this was merely a blind to deceive the police as to the character of the house. Sophy when she made this discovery, wished at once to leave their lodgings, but Robert said that it could make no difference to them what the old rogue was; that the lodgings were clean and comfortable, and that it would be a pity to change without some better reason. And so, this time against Sophy's judgment, they determined to stay for the present as they were.

---

# CHAPTER V.

## OVERTURES FROM THE ENEMY.

I have as yet said nothing about my own feelings during these three months, nor told how I bore the loss. At first I felt it very, very much. I made sure the will was gone for ever; and although I had concerted with Harry our plan to find the secret chamber, and pretended to believe in it, I did so with the same feeling with which, as a child, one pretends a chair is a ship, and makes voyages upon it; shouting as lustily as if on board a real vessel, apparently quite as anxious if an imaginary wind arises and threatens to wreck our bark, and making our escape on to the sofa, which represents a desert island, with as much joy as if our rescue had been all real.

We elders smile at these pretences, and wonder at the lively interest, the loud joy, and the terrible panics with which children enter into these imaginary games of theirs; but I am sure we often play at ships too. We make believe that our barks are going safe to port, and sing pœans of

joy, while in our heart of hearts we know it is quite otherwise, and that a disastrous shipwreck is inevitable; we ignore the threatening black cloud on the horizon, and congratulate ourselves that the sun is shining so brightly. Some of us, indeed, do this through long, long years—play it till the curtain falls, and all play is over.

I do not think that men thus wilfully shut their eyes as we women do: they have not the same happy faculty for self-deceit. But do we not all know many women who are for ever playing this game of ships? Do they not cling confidently all their lives to the idea that the bark to which they have entrusted themselves and their fortunes is indeed a gallant vessel, built of true heart of oak, marked A 1, fit to contend against any tempest and storm whatever, and certain to make a delightful and prosperous voyage to the end—cling to it even when the rotten timbers show through as soon as the fresh paint wears off, even when the water pours in through the leaky sides, and she tosses about without helm or rudder, a mere sport to every breeze? Happy are the women who are adepts at playing at this game—happy those who can go through life persisting in it; driving back with angry self-reproach any thought which may intrude itself that their dolls are not princesses—that the idol which they worship is not a god after all, but a mere image, made of very common clay indeed.

So I played at ships with myself, and made believe that we were certain to find the secret chamber. After a time, indeed, I did come to believe in it—that is, after we had put the plan together, and found out whereabouts it lay,—but even then an incredulous doubt would occasionally occur, which, however, I never allowed to stop there long. All this wore me very much—this constant anxiety, this endeavour to be cheerful, this trying to believe that all would be right yet.

When the news of Mr. Harmer's death came to us at Ramsgate, I had written to Lady Desborough, and had received in reply from her a letter of condolence, which indeed, from the tone it was written in, resembled rather one of congratulation. It was evident that Lady Desborough considered that £25,000 at once was a very much more comfortable thing than £10,000 on my marriage, and the remaining £15,000 at some uncertain, and perhaps distant, period. Ada and Percy both wrote, really sympathizing with me in the loss of so very dear and kind a friend.

When, however, I had to write, ten days after, and say that the will was missing, I confess that I did so almost with the feelings of a man signing his own death-warrant. I wrote to Ada this time, and related the whole history to her. I told her—what I tried to believe myself—that we might find it yet; indeed, that we did not by any means give up all hope. I said that we felt quite sure that it was concealed in a secret chamber, and that until we found that chamber we should never give up the search. In truth, I was a coward—I dreaded what might happen if I said that all hope was gone, and that I had no idea of ever finding it; for that I knew would bring on a crisis from which, although I felt sure it must some day come, I shrank with a terrible fear. I believe now that if I had allowed to myself that it was hopeless, I should, whatever came of it, have written and said so; but I was playing at ships, and I really persuaded myself that I believed as I wrote.

Ada's answer came in a day or two; it was, as I knew it would be, everything which was kind and affectionate. She "was sorry, so, so sorry for us all," and she was indignant and furious against "those dreadful old hags," as she irreverently termed the Misses Harmer, "and she should only like—" and Ada's wishes and intentions towards them were terrible. Nothing indeed could be kinder or more satisfactory than the first part of Ada's letter; but when she came to write about her mamma, her pen evidently went slower, and her words were cautiously chosen. Mamma, she said, was very sorry indeed to hear of the will being missing, and indeed was made quite ill by the news. She begged her to say how much she condoled with me upon it, and what a dreadful affair it was. "In short," Ada finally scribbled, evidently puzzled how to put it—"in short, you know exactly what mamma would say under the circumstances."

Ada and I continued to correspond regularly, and I kept her posted up in the proceedings of our plot to discover the chamber. In answer to the joyous letter I wrote to Ada after Christmas—saying that we had discovered one of the secret openings which opened the door, and had now every hope of finding the other—Lady Desborough herself wrote, for the first time since the will had been lost. She said how glad she was that, after all, it seemed by what Ada said, we were likely to find the missing will, and regain our fortunes. She stated that she had always expressed herself as certain that the infamous conspiracy against us would be defeated, and she wound up by saying that she sincerely trusted that the document would be discovered before long, both for my sake and Percy's, who, she believed, would sail for India in the following autumn.

As I read this letter, it appeared to me that the pith of the whole contents was contained in that last line. To me it said as plainly as if she had so written it—"He goes to India in the autumn, but, of course, unless you find the will before that, he will have to go without you." I was neither hurt nor surprised at this. I knew Lady Desborough well enough to be perfectly assured that with her consent I should never marry Percy unless I regained the lost fortune.

Percy's letters to me were always alike; he told me that he did not care whether I had the fortune or not. That for my own sake he should of course have preferred that I should have had money, in order that in our Indian home we might be surrounded by more comforts and luxuries, but that for no other reason did he in the least care. That, of course, his pay as a cornet was next to nothing, but he expected that before many months he should get a step. He calculated that his lieutenant's pay in India, with the staff appointment—which he made sure, from his proficiency in the native languages, he should speedily obtain—together with the £300 a year his mother

allowed him, would enable us to live in tolerable comfort.

He spoke always of the £300 a year as if it were a certainty, but I was sure that in case of his marrying me his mother would at once stop it.

Lady Desborough, although she lived in so fashionable a style, was by no means a very rich woman. Her income, with the trifling exception of her pension as a General's widow, was derived entirely from property she possessed previous to her marriage, and which had been settled upon her at that time. Of this she had the entire income during her lifetime, and could leave it as she chose between her children.

Percy's letters to me were very loving and tender, and he was never tired of drawing happy pictures of our future. My answers to him, since the loss of the will, were not less loving, perhaps, than before; but they were far less confident and hopeful, and I could not trust myself to speak much of a future which I so feared in my heart could never come for me.

Altogether, I was very nervous and anxious all this time, and I looked forward to Sarah's communications with feverish eagerness. I felt that to me far more depended on the discovery of this will than the mere matter of money. It was not the question of wealth or the reverse, it was—a life of happiness with Percy, or one of solitary unhappiness. Had it not been for the search Sarah was making, which kept hope alive, I should have felt it even more than I did. But when the secret spring was found, I did begin to think that all would come right again.

On New Year's Day we had a great surprise—a letter came to papa from Miss Harmer; a messenger brought it, and it was sent in just as we had finished dinner. Papa opened it, glanced it through, and gave a long whistle of astonishment. "The man who brought this is not waiting, I suppose?" he asked the servant.

"No, sir, he said that he was told there was no answer."

"You can clear away the dinner things at once, and put the dessert on."

We were all quiet while this was being done, wondering what it could be about—and papa was evidently waiting only till the servant left the room to read the letter to us. When she had finished, and had gone out, without any preface he opened the letter and read it aloud:—

> "Dear Dr. Ashleigh,
>
> "The will of our late brother Herbert not having been found, and it therefore being now extremely improbable that it ever will be so, my sister and myself have naturally, as his only relatives, come into possession of his property. At our death that property will go, as originally intended by our elder brothers, to the destination from which it was only diverted by one of those extraordinary combinations of events by which Providence sometimes upsets our best-laid plans. My brother Herbert had, however, some property of his own, which he acquired in India, in addition to that which he inherited from his brothers. The amount of this property was, our man of business informs us, about £30,000. This sum we propose to devote to carrying out a portion of his expressed wishes. We are willing therefore to pay over at once the sum of £10,000 to each of your children—on the one condition that not one single penny shall they ever directly or indirectly bestow to or for the benefit of the person formerly known as Sophy Needham, and now as Sophy Gregory, she having by her conduct caused our brother's death. And that they all bind themselves to this condition under an oath solemnly taken on the Bible, and under penalty of forfeiture of the amount should this condition not be strictly observed.
>
> "Awaiting your reply,
> "&c., &c.,
> "Cecilia and Angela Harmer."

What an astonishment that was to us, and in what silent amazement we looked at each other when papa had finished reading the letter.

No one spoke for some time.

At last papa said, "This is a very serious question, my dears; and the offer ought to be thoroughly discussed before being either accepted or refused. £10,000 each is a handsome provision for you. It will start Harry in a good business, and it will enable you girls to marry well and yet to feel that you bring your share to the expenses of the household." And here papa glanced at me, and I saw at once that although he had never spoken to me on the subject, he had yet thought a good deal about my engagement with Percy. He then went on: "All this is the bright side of the picture—now for the reverse;—you are unquestionably entitled to a much larger amount, and those who make this offer are the very people who are keeping you out of it. Then, too, the condition about Sophy is most repugnant; as you would naturally have wished in the event of your accepting this sum, to make her at any rate an equal participator in it with each of yourselves. The matter is one which must be thought over very seriously, and no conclusion should be hastily arrived at. Talk it over quietly together: it is a question on which I would rather give no opinion whatever, but leave you to decide it entirely by yourselves."

"There is one thing, papa, you have not mentioned," Polly said, "and that is, that if we take this

money we must give up all search for the will; we cannot accept the Misses Harmer's money, and then get their servants to work against them."

"Certainly, my dear; that must of course be quite understood. If you accept this money, you must give up all further search for the will, and dismiss all idea of ever hearing of it again. There, don't say any more about it now. Let us have a glass of wine and some nuts, and after that I shall go into my study, and you can talk it over among yourselves."

When papa left us, we drew round the fire, and Harry said the first thing to be done was to smoke the calumet of council; accordingly in a minute or two he was puffing clouds of smoke from an immense meerschaum, of which he was very proud.

"Now," he said, "the council is begun; let my sisters speak."

Neither of us took advantage of the invitation, but sat looking steadily into the fire.

Polly—who was now sixteen, and who had grown up a very dear, loveable girl—was seated between us, in a high-backed, old-fashioned chair, with her feet on a low stool. I have not hitherto described her, and I could not choose a moment to do so in which she would look prettier than she did as she sat there; with the light on the table behind her shining on the gold of her hair, and her face lit only by the dancing light of the fire. She was a blonde, her hair looked almost brown in shadow; but when the light fell on it, it had still the bright golden tinge that every one had admired when she was a child. Her eyes were a pure blue, her complexion was bright and clear, she had a particularly lithe lissom figure, and her small head was very gracefully set on her neck and shoulders. She was very lively and full of fun; indeed I sometimes had to call her to order. She was a little positive and wilful sometimes, but she was a very loving and loveable girl. She was at present hardly as tall as I was, but as she had another year to grow, it was very probable she would be the taller in time. She had very long eyelashes, nearly the longest I ever saw, and these added greatly to the effect of her great blue eyes. The mouth and nose might both have been better, but for all that she had grown into a very pretty girl.

"Well, girls, what do you think about this offer of ours?" Harry repeated, finding that neither of us answered him.

My own mind was pretty well made up on the subject, but I wished to hear what the others thought, so I said, "What do you think yourself about it, Harry?"

Harry did not seem more inclined to give an opinion than we had been, for he sat and puffed out such huge volumes of smoke, that Polly threatened to take his pipe away if he did not smoke more quietly. At last he took it from between his lips, and began: "The fact is, girls, I am loath to give my opinion, not because I have not one, but because I do not wish to influence you. Your cases are so very different from mine, that there is no comparison at all between us. I am now just twenty-one; I am in a position to keep myself, and consequently the advantage this sum of money would be to me, is not sufficient to counterbalance the repugnance I feel—as far as I am concerned—to taking the money from these women who have robbed us. Still understand, I am not so much against it as to decide to refuse it, should you both agree to accept it. This is rather a suggestion of mine, as it were, than a positive and final opinion. I mean to say that for my own sake I certainly would not accept of the offer, but you are so differently placed that if you give your vote for accepting it, I shall be quite ready to agree with you."

Harry made this unusually long speech, for him, with some difficulty. I could see that personally he was very strongly opposed to taking any favour from the Misses Harmer, after the way in which they had treated us. Being quite of the same opinion myself, I thought the matter was settled, as I made sure Polly would refuse. When Harry had done, he took another puff or two at his pipe, and then turning to Polly, who was next to him, said,—

"Now, Polly, you have heard what I have to say, let us have your opinion."

For some time sister Polly did not answer, but sat gazing into the fire, with the long lashes nearly shading her eyes, and looking more womanly and thoughtful than I had ever seen her before. At last, without moving, or lifting her eyes, she said,—

"I think we had better accept."

Harry, evidently surprised, gave one or two short puffs at his pipe. I was myself astonished. I had made sure that Polly would of all the three be the most indignant and determined to reject the offer; for she had been most bitter in her invectives at the Misses Harmer, and money had at present no particular value in her eyes. However, I made no remark expressive of my surprise, but only said,—

"Let us have your reasons, Polly."

"Yes," Harry repeated, "let us have your reasons."

Polly was again silent a little, and sat thoughtfully twining her long taper fingers one over the other; then without looking up she asked,—

"Is it understood and agreed between us that two votes carry the day?"

"Certainly," I said, knowing that my vote would be on Harry's side.

"Quite so," Harry agreed, "if you two girls make up your minds that it is best to accept this offer,

I, as I said before, shall offer no objection."

"Well then, Harry, I say—accept, and I will tell you why;" and now, although Polly had not changed her attitude, she spoke clearly and firmly, and her eyes were fixed on the fire with a steady resolute look. "But you must both agree not to interrupt me till I have done."

"I promise," Harry said, looking rather puzzled at Polly's very unusual demeanour.

"I promise," I repeated, amused and rather surprised, too.

"Very well," Polly said, "please remember that. Now, Harry, you are a great big strong fellow, but you know you are hardly fit to entrust any delicate business to, and that in any affair of that sort you would know no more than a child."

"Well, Miss Polly," Harry said in astonishment, taking his pipe out of his mouth, "you are a pretty cool hand to talk to your elders; what next, I wonder!"

"You promised not to interrupt, Harry. As I said, you are very good and kind, and all that, but you know you are not—not so to say sharp."

I could hardly help laughing, Harry's eyes opened so very wide in amazement at the girl's remarks, and Polly herself was looking so very serious and earnest.

"Now we women——"

"We women, indeed!" Harry repeated.

"Yes, we women," Polly continued unmoved,—"I have left school now, and I am more of a woman as far as these things go than you are of a man—we women look very deeply into these matters. Now there is only one of us three, who, as we stand at present, will be greatly affected by this gift. I do not say that £10,000 is not a nice sum to have, or that it might not some day assist me to get a husband, but at present I can manage very well without one——"

"I should think so," put in Harry.

"And you can get on without it, and keep yourself comfortably. Therefore to us the money has no peculiar charms at present, and we might both be rather disposed to refuse it, than to accept it as a gift from people who have robbed us of a large sum. There is a good deal in that, Harry, is there not?"

Harry nodded; he had not yet sufficiently recovered from the astonishment into which the position of superiority taken up by Polly had thrown him, while I on my part could not fancy what was coming next.

"Well you see, Harry, we have agreed that we neither of us are in a position rightly to estimate the value of this £10,000 at present. Now Agnes, on the contrary, is in a position to appreciate it keenly."

Here Harry again opened his eyes, and looked at me with such astonishment, that I really thought he must fancy that I wanted the money to pay off a gambling debt or something of that sort.

"Agnes appreciate it!" he exclaimed.

"Of course," Polly said; "and please do not interrupt me so, Harry. Now this £10,000 will, in all probability, be the turning-point in Agnes's life, and her future happiness or unhappiness may depend upon it. Let us see how she is situated. She is engaged to Percy Desborough——"

"Thank goodness," Harry muttered to himself, "she has said something I can understand at last."

"She is engaged to him, and he is a capital fellow; but for all that unless we find the will, or she has this £10,000, she knows, and I know it by her face, that it may be years before she marries Percy Desborough, if she ever does so."

"By George," Harry exclaimed, taking his pipe suddenly from his mouth, and jumping up from his chair,—"By George, if I thought for a moment that Percy Desborough——"

"There, you will interrupt me, Harry," Polly said, looking for the first time up from the fire with a little glance of amusement into his angry face. "Do sit down and hear me out, and you will see that there is no vengeance to be taken upon any one."

Harry looked more than half inclined to be very angry; however he resumed his seat, and took short sulky puffs at his pipe.

"The fact is, Harry, you have heard of Lady Desborough, and from what you have heard you must know——"

"My dear Polly," I interrupted in my turn, assured at last that she had intuitively arrived at a correct conclusion about the state of my engagement with Percy,—"My dear Polly——"

"My dear Agnes," she said, "you promised to hear me out. But, my darling,"—and she spoke in a very soft tender voice, turning round to me, and laying her hand on mine,—"you know what I am going to say to Harry; if it is painful, will you go away till I have done? Harry must hear it before he can come to any correct conclusion about this money."

I shook my head silently, but pressed her hand, which, while she went on, still remained resting in mine.

"Lady Desborough," and now she was looking steadily into the fire again, as if she read there all she was saying, "is a proud woman of the world, very ambitious, and very self-willed. Had Percy followed her wishes, and remained in the Guards, she would have expected him to have made a first-rate match; as it is, she could not hope that any earl's daughter would unite her fortunes to those of a cornet in a cavalry regiment, and troop with him out to India. When Percy therefore succeeded in persuading our Agnes here, that it was the best thing she could do, Lady Desborough was delighted at the match, which, with Agnes's £25,000, was vastly better than she could have expected. But when Mr. Harmer dies, what happens? Agnes has no fortune. All this time that I have been at school since Mr. Harmer died, and the will was missing, I have wondered and thought over what Lady Desborough would do. I came to the conclusion that she would wait for a bit, and would take no decided steps until it was clear that the will would never be found, but that unquestionably when it was proved to be gone she would interfere to break off the engagement between Percy and Agnes. I come back here, and what do I find? I find very little said about the engagement, and Agnes looking pale and depressed. Percy's letters come regularly; Agnes takes them up into her room, and comes down again after a very long time, with flushed cheeks, and a soft look, and yet not perfectly happy—that is not brightly happy. What does this mean? Just what I had anticipated. Percy is unchanged; the money, in his eyes, makes no difference whatever, but there is an obstacle somewhere; that obstacle being of course Lady Desborough. Probably by the continuance of the correspondence, she has not yet given up hopes of the will being found, and has not therefore taken any decided step, but has, I should imagine, plainly shown what her intentions will be if the fortune is not recovered. In support of this view, I see Agnes absorbed in the result of this search for the secret room; I saw her delight when one of the hidden springs was found—and this not because Agnes loves money, but because she loves Percy Desborough, and knows that without the fortune she cannot be married to him."

"Why cannot Percy marry her in spite of his mother?" Harry growled in an unconvinced way. "He is not a boy; why can he not do as he likes?"

"Because his present income and his future fortune depend upon her. I heard Agnes say so the last time I was at home. She could refuse to allow him one penny, and leave every farthing she possesses to Ada. You don't suppose that a subaltern in a cavalry regiment can keep a wife on his pay, even if Agnes would marry him under the circumstances, which she would not. Is all this true, Agnes darling?" she said, turning again to me, and this time I saw the tears were brimming up in her great blue eyes.

"You are certainly a witch, Polly," I answered, trying to smile, but the tears were stealing down my cheeks too, as I got up and kissed her flushed face very tenderly and affectionately. To me all this was a perfect revelation. Here was my little sister Polly, whom I had always looked upon as a mere child, thinking and talking like a woman, and a very sensible, loving woman, too. I felt that in that half hour's conversation my child-sister was gone for ever, and that I had gained in her place a dear friend in whom I could trust and confide every secret of my heart. As for Harry, he was completely silenced.

"Well, oh most sapient brother," Polly asked, turning to him in her old laughing way, "do you confess that all this never entered into your mind; indeed, that you knew no more about it than the man in the moon?"

"By Jove!" Harry said with a great effort, "I confess you have fairly astonished me, as much by yourself as by your story. I think that you are right, and that in these matters you are more of a woman than I am of a man. How you found this all out I cannot conceive; it certainly never entered into my head. I thought of the effect which the money would have upon myself, and upon you, but Agnes I hardly took into consideration. I thought of her marriage with Percy as a sort of settled thing, and knowing him to have a handsome allowance, I never gave her case a second thought. But I see you are quite right, and that we must, of course, accept this money."

"Indeed, we will not," I said; "with my consent, this money shall never be accepted."

"That is not fair, Agnes," Polly said. "You know we agreed that two votes should carry the day."

"I did, Polly; but I have a right to say what I think about it before it is put to the vote. I acknowledge all that Polly has said about my affairs to be true. I allow that I do believe that my marriage with Percy depends upon this will being found. But for all that, I say we cannot take this money. These women have robbed us of £25,000 each; they have robbed Sophy of £75,000; robbed us as actually as if they had stolen it from our possession—and now they offer, as a gift, £10,000 each to us. If we take it, it is on an understanding that we renounce all further claim, that we receive it as a free gift from these enemies of ours; and by this act not only should we, as it were, pledge ourselves to make no further efforts to find the will, we should not only sell our birthright to our enemies, but we should be bound to desert Sophy, and so leave her in hopeless poverty, for without our assistance she has not the slightest chance of ever finding the will. All this would be a miserable degradation—a degradation so deep that nothing could satisfy our own consciences to it; even my marriage to Percy could not reconcile it to myself, and he himself would blame me for it. No, no, dears, this would be a shameful action. Let us refuse it at once. You, I know, would do it for my sake; but I would not do it for myself, much less allow you to do so. We have really, at present, strong hopes of finding the will; let us trust to that; let us believe that in the end we shall be righted. If not, God's will be done. The evil may seem to prosper at

present, but at any rate let us make no terms with it."

Polly and Harry were both silent. Polly was crying fast now—crying, that her little scheme for my happiness had failed; but yet they both felt as I did, and she could urge nothing further.

"There, dears, I know you both agree with me in your hearts, so let us say no more about it."

And so it was settled; and when papa came in soon after, I told him that we were unanimously of opinion that the money could not be accepted. Papa then said, that although he had not wished to bias us in our decision, yet that he quite agreed with us, and was very glad we had so decided. So the next day he wrote to Miss Harmer, acknowledging the receipt of her letter, and stating that, for various reasons into which it was not necessary to enter, we felt ourselves obliged to decline the offer. This affair had one consequence among us, and that was, that Polly henceforth occupied a very different position amongst us from what she had heretofore done. Harry looked up to her as a prodigy of intellect and acuteness; and I myself felt deeply not only her intelligence, but the thoughtful, loving kindness she had evinced towards me. From that time Polly became quite one of ourselves; and, indeed, I think that insensibly she fell into her natural position as the clever one of the family.

---

# CHAPTER VI.

## THE PRIEST'S CHAMBER.

I was very glad that Polly had left school and come home for good. It was far more cheerful and pleasant than it had been at all since I left school. Polly made the place so cheerful with her bright happy smile, and was so full of life and fun, that I never found time to sit and muse, and wonder and fret over the future, as I had done before she came home. She never left me long alone for any time, but every day would make me go out for long walks with her, and indeed devoted herself entirely to cheering and amusing me. Papa too very much recovered his spirits under her genial influence; and altogether she made our home much brighter and more cheerful than before.

So our life went on for nearly three months, and then one Friday evening I was told that Sarah was below waiting to speak to me. I was rather surprised, for she had been to the house very seldom before, and then always on Sunday evenings.

However, the moment she came in, I saw that she had something very important to tell. Her bright face was quite pale with excitement, and her whole figure was in a nervous tremble.

"Oh, miss," she burst out directly the door was closed behind her, "Oh, miss, I have found the secret door!"

Although I had tried all along to hope that she would some day do so, that hope had been so long deferred that it had almost died away; and now at the sudden news, I felt all the blood rush to my heart, the room swam round with me, and I sat on a chair quite overwhelmed by the sudden shock.

"Shall I get you some water, miss?"

"No, no, Sarah, I shall be myself in a minute or two."

I had to sit quiet a little time, before I could steady myself sufficiently to listen to the account of the wonderful discovery, which was to lead to fortune and happiness. Then I said,—

"I am not very strong, Sarah, and the surprise has been almost too much for me, for I own I hardly expected that you ever would find it. Now tell me all about it, or stay, let me ask papa and my sister to come in to share in this wonderful news of yours." So saying, I ran down to the study where papa was busy writing.

"Papa," I said, "I want you to come up stairs directly."

"What for my dear? I am really very busy at present."

"Never mind, papa; but put by your writing at once and come up. Sarah is here, and oh, papa, she has found the secret door."

"That is news, indeed!" papa said, pushing back his chair at once; "I am sure I never expected it."

So saying, he followed me upstairs. I called Polly as we went up, and she came running up after us, and as she went into the drawing-room with me, I whispered to her that the secret door was found. She gave me a little squeeze of congratulation, and I saw that even in that first flush of pleasure at the news, it was only the consequences to me that she thought of, and that her own personal interest in the matter never entered into her mind.

"Well, Sarah," papa began, "so I hear you have discovered the secret entrance at last."

"Yes sir, I have. From the time I found the first spring at Christmas, I have never ceased looking for another one. I had felt every knob on the fireplace and chimneypiece, and every stone up the

chimney as far as I could reach. You know, sir, it is only in the half hour I get of a morning by being up before the other servants that I can try; indeed I only have half that time, for I must get some of the shutters open and appear to have began to do something to account for my time. Well, sir, at last I really seemed to have tried everywhere, and I almost gave up all hope of finding it, although I had quite made up my mind to go on searching as long as I stayed there, even if it was for ten years. Well, sir, yesterday morning I quite got out of temper with the thing, and I sat down on the ground in the great fireplace quite out of heart; my face was quite close to the great iron dogs, so I said, "Drat you, you look for all the world as if you were putting out your long tongues at me;" and I took hold of the tongue nearest to me, and gave it a twist, and do you know, sir, it quite gave me a turn to find that the tongue twisted round in my hand. I twisted and twisted till the tongue came out in my hand, then I touched the spring behind the mantel, but nothing moved; then I tried the tongue of the other dog, and that came out too; but still nothing moved. Just then I heard the cook moving in the kitchen, so I had to put the tongues back again and go to my work; but all day I hardly knew whether I stood on my head or my heels, I wanted so much to see whether anything would come of it. Well, miss, this morning I got up quite early, and unscrewed the dogs' tongues, and looked in the places they had come out of, but could not see anything. Then I pushed the sharp end of the tongue into the hole, and twisted and poked about, but I could not find anything moved; then I put that tongue in again, and tried the other, and directly I pushed the sharp end in, I felt something give way, and then I heard a click. I jumped up and pushed the knob in the chimney, and directly something creaked, and the whole of the left hand side of the fireplace swung open like a low door, about four feet high, and beyond it was a little flight of stone stairs. I was so excited, sir, when I saw the door and the steps, and knew I had found the place I had been looking for so long, that I had to lean against the wall to support myself. After a little while I pushed the door back again, and heard it close with a click. Then I screwed the tongue into the mouth again, and went about my work, but all day I have hardly known whether I stood upon my head or my heels."

We were all silent when Sarah finished. So far, then, we had succeeded in our search. What was to be done next? We turned to papa.

"You have indeed done well, Sarah, and have laid us under a deep obligation to you for the perseverance you have shown, and the clearness with which you have carried out my daughter's plans. But this we will talk about hereafter. The thing to be done now is to follow up your discovery. The most important point is to find out the size of the box or safe in which the will is kept in this secret room. If it is small enough to be carried away easily, our course will be very simple. If, on the other hand, the chest or safe should be too heavy to be moved, I shall first take a lawyer's opinion on the subject, and either get a search warrant, or else go quietly into the chamber with a locksmith, force the lock, and take out the will, which, when found, will be ample justification for our forcible entrance. The first thing to be done is for Sarah to examine the room, and to bring us word how large the box is."

"Do you mean, sir," Sarah asked, in a terrified tone, "for me to go up that staircase by myself? I could not do such a thing for the world. I could not, indeed, sir."

"We will reward you handsomely, Sarah," papa began.

"Don't ask me, Dr. Ashleigh. I could not do it if it were to make me a rich woman all my life. Please, sir, don't ask me."

The girl was so evidently terrified at the idea of going up the secret staircase, and she had already done so much for us, that we felt it would not be right to urge her further, and we looked at each other for a moment or two in silence. Then Polly said,—

"The proper persons to go are certainly Agnes and I. It is our property for which the search is made, and it is our place to make it. I think that the best plan will be for Sarah to get up some morning an hour earlier than usual. We will be waiting outside for her to open the doors; papa will be with us, and will stay there while we go inside, examine the room, and bring out the box in which the will is kept, if it is not too heavy for us to carry. What do you say, Agnes?"

I confess I was frightened at the idea, not of going up into the priest's chamber, but of entering the house in that sort of secret midnight way, and at the thought of the scene which would ensue if we were detected. However, Polly seemed so brave and confident about it, that I was ashamed to offer any opposition, and so said that I thought it would be a very good plan.

"I think so, too," papa said. "It certainly seems a strange expedition for us to make at five o'clock on a March morning; still, with such a fortune depending upon it, one does not mind doing strange things to obtain it. But before we do it, write to Sophy; tell her what has happened, and what you intend doing, and ask her to send you by return of post an authority from her to search in her name as well as your own for the will. It would be as well, in case of any misadventure, that we should be able to prove that we are acting in the joint interest of the heirs. Let me see; to-day is Friday. She cannot get the letter now till Monday, and you will have her answer on Tuesday. So let us say Wednesday, Sarah. What time is the house stirring?"

"At seven, sir, the servants get up."

"Very well; will you be at the front door as the clock strikes six? We shall be there. If not, some change will have taken place in our plans. And now, Sarah, whether we succeed in our aim or not, we are equally indebted to you. Here are twenty pounds for you, for what you have done for us; and if we get the will, you may rely upon it that you shall have a present which will make you

comfortable for life."

Sarah retired delighted with her present, and promising to be ready on Wednesday. We then had a long chat over our plans. Papa, who had, I think, a strange tinge of romance in his disposition, quite looked forward to the adventure, and he and Polly talked it over with great glee. Papa said that he should write to Mr. Petersfield, tell him that we had found the chamber, and ask him to come down and be present at the finding of the will, so that he could—should the box be too large for us to carry—give us his advice as to the best course for us to pursue.

On Tuesday morning we received the answers to the two letters;—that from Sophy written in high spirits at our discovery, and authorizing us to act in her name; that from Mr. Petersfield, also written in terms of warm congratulation, and saying that, although the legality of our course was at least doubtful, he had felt so warm an interest in our search, that he would come down to be present at the *dénouement*, and he felt quite sure that the will, when found, would amply justify our proceedings. He said that he should leave town by the afternoon train. And so nothing whatever seemed likely to occur to postpone our expedition, as I could not help hoping in my heart that something would do.

Mr. Petersfield came down in the evening, and was full of spirits at the prospect of recovering the will, and made several jokes about female burglars, which amused Polly very much, but made me feel shivery and uncomfortable.

At night, after we had gone up to bed, Polly came into my room, and said,—

"Agnes, darling, I can see you are nervous and frightened about this expedition of ours. You are not strong, you know, and I think that really you had better stay at home. I can just as well go by myself; it is only to see if it is there, and when I find it, if the box should be too heavy for me to carry, Sarah will not mind going up with me the second time to help me to bring it down."

"No, no, Polly," I answered; "I know I am a coward, but I am not so bad as that. I will most certainly go with you; nothing would induce me to stay at home and let you go alone. Still, I cannot look at it in the same amusing way that you do. It is to me a very awful business; but you will see that when it comes to the point I shall be able to go through it all calmly. And now, good-night, dear. I will call you at half-past five."

That night I did not close my eyes. I thought over every possible accident by which we might be detected, and at last made myself so nervous that I could remain in bed no longer; so I got up, lighted a candle, dressed, and then wrapped myself in a warm shawl, and read till it was time to call the others. Then I went and woke Polly, who was sleeping as quietly and peacefully as if she were a girl again at Grendon House, with nothing on her mind but the extreme difficulty of her German lesson. She woke up with a cheerful laugh as she remembered what was to be done. I afterwards knocked at papa's and Mr. Petersfield's doors, and then lighted a large spirit-lamp under a kettle, which papa had to make coffee when he went out or returned from any night visit.

At five o'clock we all met in the dining-room—looking, as papa said, like a lot of conspirators; and I quite agreed with him. However, by the time we had taken a cup of coffee and some bread and butter and a slice of cold ham, our spirits quite rose again, and we all responded gaily to Polly's funny remarks; even I felt more confident and less nervous than I had done since the expedition had been proposed.

It was just a quarter past five when we started, and still quite dark. The stars were shining brightly, and the keen March wind made us shiver and draw our wraps more closely round us as we went out into it. The carriage was waiting at the door for us, and old Andrew, to whom we had confided somewhat of our intended attempt, was stamping up and down, and swinging his arms in the attempt to warm himself. Papa had at first intended to walk, but he afterwards came to the conclusion that the carriage passing through the streets at that hour would excite no attention at all, whereas if we were seen walking it would be sure to give rise to all sorts of surmises and conjectures. We pulled down the blinds, and drove out through the town. When we were fairly past the barracks, we again pulled them up and looked out. There was a faint light growing up in the east, but the country round was as dark as ever. We met or passed two or three solitary individuals going towards or from the town to their work.

We were a silent party. Papa and Mr. Petersfield made an occasional remark, and Polly tried once or twice to enliven us, but it would not do. We all felt that we were engaged upon a serious business, and that the future of our lives depended upon its result.

As we passed through Sturry, we again pulled down the blinds, for the villagers were astir there. The light smoke was curling up from the chimneys, the flickering fire-light could be seen through the latticed windows, and many of the men were starting to their work. We drove up the hill behind the village, and then the carriage turned up a narrow lane, where it would be concealed from the sight of any one going along the highroad. Here we got out, entered Mr. Harmer's grounds by a small gate, and followed a footpath across the park up to the house, and then went round to the front door. Now I was once there, I felt no longer frightened, and the excitement of the adventure set my blood in a glow.

"What time is it?" I asked papa.

"Ten minutes to six," he said, "but I dare say Sarah is waiting for us."

She was, for the moment that we reached the door she opened it, and stepped out to meet us.

"It is all ready, sir," she said to papa. "I oiled the lock and bolts yesterday, and I had everything undone ready, so as to open the door when I heard your footsteps on the gravel. I am not afraid now, sir, and will go up with the young ladies if they like."

"No, Sarah—you had better wait in the hall, to let them know if you hear any one stirring in the house. We shall remain out here. Now, girls, courage and victory!"

"Now for it!" Polly said, and we went into the hall together.

There were three candlesticks with lighted candles on the table. We each took one of them, and with light steps crossed the hall to the chimney-place. Sarah at once knelt down, and unscrewed the dog's tongue, touched the spring, then the one in the chimney, and the door swung round with a slight creak, startling us, although we expected it.

While she was doing this, I looked round the hall, and I do not think that the least trace of my past fear remained. I was thinking of the last time I had been in that hall, some little time before my dear mother's death. How different was my position then, and what changes had these sad nine months brought about! I thought, too, for a moment of how it might be the next time I entered it, with Sophy as undisputed mistress; and, quickly as all these thoughts had flitted across my mind, I had only got thus far when the creak of the opening door made me turn sharply round, and prepare for the business on hand.

"Shall I go first, Agnes?" Polly asked, offering to pass me.

"No, no," I answered; "I am not in the least afraid now."

Nor was I. My pulse beat quick, but it was purely from excitement, and I do not think at that moment, had the Misses Harmer suddenly stepped down the staircase, before me, I should have been afraid of them. Holding my candle well in front of me, I stooped under the low doorway, and began to ascend the narrow stone stairs, Polly following closely behind. The stairs, as papa had calculated, were only five or six in number, and we then stood at once in the chamber into which for so many months we had been so longing to penetrate. Now for the will!

After the first breathless look round, a low exclamation of disappointment broke from each of us. There was no box or chest of any kind to be seen. The room was a mere cell, a little more than six feet high, eight feet long, and six wide. The walls were of rough stone, which had been whitewashed at no very distant time. The only furniture in it was a small table and an easy chair, both quite modern; indeed, the chair was the fellow to one I remembered in Mr. Harmer's library. On the table stood an inkstand, some pens and paper, and there were some torn scraps of paper on the floor; on picking up one of which I perceived words in Mr. Harmer's well-known handwriting. On the table, too, were placed two or three of his scientific books, and a half-consumed cigar lay beside them.

It was evident, from all this, that Mr. Harmer had been in the habit of using this room for a study, and the warmth which we felt the moment that we came into it, from its being against the kitchen chimney, suggested his reasons for so using it. It was apparent that the room had not been disturbed since he left it after reading there—on, perhaps, the very night before his death.

There was no other furniture, and no place whatever where the will could be concealed. We examined the walls closely, but without any result, the only opening being a small hole near the roof, about four inches square, and evidently leading into the kitchen chimney for the purpose of ventilation. Hiding-place, as far as we could see, there was none.

The stairs did not stop on reaching the room, but wound upwards. I ascended them very cautiously, and found that they went up about ten steps, and then ended at a small door, on which were two bolts with which any one inside could fasten it, and so prevent its opening, even if the secret springs outside were discovered and touched. This door, I had no doubt, formed the entrance into Mr. Harmer's room, and opened by some spring which I could not perceive; nor indeed did I look for it, but returned with a heavy heart to Polly, who had remained in the chamber, and who was in vain examining the walls for any sign of a hidden closet. We looked ruefully in each others faces.

"It is no use, Polly," I said, as cheerfully as I could. "We shall not find the will here."

"I am afraid not," she said, and gave me a silent kiss, expressing her sorrow for my sake; and then taking our candles, we went down the stairs into the hall again.

Sarah was standing listening with hushed breath.

"Have you found it, miss?"

"No, Sarah—the place is quite empty."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" Sarah exclaimed, almost crying with vexation. "I am so sorry."

We put our candles down on the hall table, and went out into the open air. We shook our heads in answer to the looks of papa and Mr. Petersfield. They asked no questions, for they saw at once by our looks that we had found no signs of the will, and the present was no time or place for explanation. So we turned off from the house, and walked fast across the grounds, and out to where the carriage was standing, for the morning was fairly broken now, and our figures could have been seen for a considerable distance.

Once in the carriage, we related all that we had seen, and that there was no sign of the will to be found. Mr. Petersfield and papa were both very much disappointed. Mr. Petersfield remarked that most likely we had been within arm's reach of the will, for it was certain now that Mr. Harmer did use that room for a study, and that no doubt there was some secret hiding-place there, made originally for the concealment of important papers in case the entrance to the secret chamber should be discovered. It was a singular fancy of Mr. Harmer's to use that little place for writing in.

"I can quite understand that," papa said. "Mr. Harmer lived a long time in India, where the night and early morning are the pleasantest part of the twenty-four hours, and I have heard him say that he often rose at four o'clock, and got through five hours' writing before breakfast; and I can remember now that I once said to him that he must find it very cold in winter, and he said, 'Oh, I have a very snug little place for it.' I did not ask him where it was, although I dare say had I done so he would have told me. But it is evident now that it was in this chamber, which from its warmth, and from it so immediately adjoining his room, would be very convenient for him, as he would not be under any fear of disturbing the house by his movements. I have no doubt you are correct in your conjecture, and that there is some secret receptacle there for papers, which could never be discovered without the secret being communicated."

"At any rate we must give it up now," I said, "and I have not the least idea that we shall ever hear any more of it."

The others were silent, for they, too, felt that it was in vain now to cherish any further hopes of its discovery.

---

# CHAPTER VII.

## THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

We reached home after the expedition a little before seven o'clock, and then sat down to a regular breakfast, under the influence of which our spirits rose somewhat, and we recovered a little from our disappointment. Polly and I agreed that it was settled that we were not to be heiresses, and that it was no use our repining. We talked a good deal of Sophy, and we agreed that the loss was a matter of far more serious importance to her than it was to us. We feared she had a terrible life before her, and we wondered what she and her husband would do.

For some time while we were talking, Mr. Petersfield ate his breakfast in silence, and was evidently not attending to what we were saying, but was lost in his own contemplations.

"What are you thinking of?" papa asked him, at last.

"I am thinking, doctor—that is, I am wondering how Herbert Harmer came to know of that secret hiding-place. Of course his sisters may have told him of it, but I should doubt if they did. I am wondering if he found it described in any old family documents, and if so, where they are now. There are no longer any papers in my possession, as at Miss Harmer's request I gave them all up a week after the funeral to their new solicitor."

"I should think," I said, "that Mr. Harmer was shown this secret hiding-place at the time when he first knew of the chamber itself; that is, when he went into it as a boy with his father."

"No doubt," papa said,—"no doubt he was. Don't say any more about it, Petersfield; let us make up our minds to the inevitable. We have done our best, and now let us give it up. There is not, I believe, the slightest chance in the world of our ever hearing any more about it, and it is far better to give it up, than to go on hoping against hope, and keeping ourselves in a fever about what will never take place. Let us give the matter up altogether, and turn over a fresh page of our lives. We are no worse off than other people. Let us look forward as if it had never been, and give up the past altogether."

And so it was settled, and the will henceforth ceased to be a subject of conversation among us.

After breakfast, Mr. Petersfield took his leave and returned to London; and when papa had gone out on his round of visits, and sister Polly had sat down for her usual hour's practice on the piano, I went up into my own room, shut and locked the door, and prepared for the task I had before me. For it was clear to me that I must now face my position. I could no longer play at ships with myself. I knew that my last hope had fled. The last anchor, to which I had so fondly trusted, was gone now, and my bark of happiness was destined to certain and irretrievable wreck. I knew that my engagement with Percy must come to an end, and that this letter which I must write would be the means of making it do so.

How long I sat there on that dreary March morning I do not know, with the paper lying open and untouched before me, its black edge a fitting symbol of the dead hopes, whose tale I had to write upon it. Not that I think I looked at that; my eyes were fixed blankly on the wall before me; but not one word did I write, although all the time my hand held the pen ready to set down what my heart and brain should dictate. But nothing came; my heart seemed cold and dead, as if it could feel no motion, while my brain was in a strange whirl of thought, and yet no thought framed itself

into any tangible shape. I hardly know what current they took, the past or the future; I cannot recall one single thought; indeed, I question if one stood out prominently enough among the others to have been seized, even at the time.

How long I sat there I do not know. But at last I was recalled to myself by a loud, continued knocking at my door. I think I heard it some time before I answered; it did not seem to me to be connected at all with me, but to be some noise a long way off. Even when I was sure that it was at my door, and that it was a loud, urgent knocking it was some little time before I could rouse myself sufficiently to answer. At last I said, "What is it?" But the knocking was so loud that my voice was not heard, and I now distinguished Polly's voice calling to me. I tried to rise, but I found that my limbs were stiff and numbed. However, with a great effort, for I was really frightened at the noise, I got up, and with great difficulty moved to the door and opened it. I was about to repeat my question, "What is it?" when Polly burst in, pale and terror-stricken, the tears rolling fast down her cheeks. She fell upon my neck, and sobbed out, "Oh, Agnes, Agnes, how you have frightened me!"

"Frightened you!" I said. "How? What is the matter?"

"What have you been doing? and why did you not answer my knocking?"

"I answered directly I heard it."

"Then what have you been doing, Agnes? I have been knocking for ten minutes. How pale you are, and your hands are as cold as ice, and so is your face; you are nearly frozen. There don't say anything now, but come down to the dining-room."

I had some difficulty in getting downstairs; I had sat so long motionless in the cold, that I was, as Polly said, nearly frozen, and it required all the assistance she could give me, before I was able to get down at all. Once in the dining-room, Polly wheeled the sofa up in front of the fire, and then ran off and got some boiling water from the kitchen, and made me a glass of hot port wine and water, which she insisted on my drinking scalding hot,—all the time scolding and petting me; then when I began to get warm again, she told me that when she had done practising, not finding me anywhere, she asked the housemaid if she had seen me, and the girl told her that I had gone into my room more than an hour before, and that she had not seen me since. Polly went back to the dining-room, but finding that time went on, and I did not come down, she came up to my room to scold me for staying up in the cold so long, and to suggest that if I had not finished writing, I should go into papa's consulting-room, where I should be quite secure from interruption. She had knocked, but receiving no answer, had at first gone away again, thinking that perhaps I had lain down, and gone to sleep, having had such a short night; but after she had gone down stairs again, she came to the conclusion that I should not have done that without telling her of my intention; so she had come up to my door again, and finding that her first gentle knocking had produced no effect, she had continued, getting louder and louder, and becoming more and more terrified, until at last, just as I had opened the door, she had worked herself into such an agony of terror, that she was on the point of running down into the kitchen to send out for some one to come in to force the door.

I told Polly that I was very sorry that I had frightened her so much, but that I really did not know what had come over me; that I had sat there thinking, and that I supposed I had got regularly numbed, and had not noticed her knocking until I got up and opened the door. When I was thoroughly warmed again, I proposed going into the library to write my letters, but Polly would not let me, as she said that I had had more than enough excitement for one day. So I yielded to her entreaties, not sorry indeed to put off the painful task, if only for one day.

On the following morning, however, I went into papa's study to write my letters, and got through them more easily than I had expected. Polly came in from time to time to see that I was not agitating myself too much, only staying just for a minute or two to kiss me, and say some little word of consolation and love. My first letter was to Percy. I told him what had happened, and that all hope which I might previously have entertained of finding the will, was now entirely extinguished. I told him that I knew he loved me for my own sake; and no unworthy doubt that this would make any difference in him had ever entered my mind; but I frankly said that I feared Lady Desborough would no longer give her approval and consent, and that I foresaw painful times in store for us, for it was of course out of the question that we could marry in the face of her determined opposition. Putting aside pecuniary considerations, which even lovers could not entirely ignore, I could not consent to marry into a family where my presence would be the cause of dissension and division between mother and son. I said this was my fixed determination, and begged him to acquiesce in it, and not pain me by solicitations—to which I could not yield—to do otherwise than what I felt to be right, in the event of his mother's insisting on his breaking off his engagement with me.

My letter to Percy finished, I had the other and more difficult one before me, and I was some considerable time before I could make up my mind respecting it. In the first place, should it be to Lady Desborough or Ada? and then, how should I put it? Of course I must say that all hope of finding the will was gone; but should I add that in consequence I considered my engagement with Percy to be at an end, or should I leave her to do so? At one time I resolved upon the former, and wrote the beginnings of two or three letters to that effect. But then I said to myself, why should I do this? Why should I assume that she would stop the allowance of 300l. a year, which Percy has, when he thinks that with that and the staff pay he expects to get in India, there is no reason why we could not manage very well? I accordingly came to the conclusion to write to Ada. I told her

all that we had done, and that the will was now unquestionably lost for ever; I said that this was of course a grievous disappointment to me, and then after a little chit-chat upon ordinary matters, I wound up by asking her to show to Lady Desborough the part relating to the loss of the will.

Although I wrote these letters at the same time, I did not send off the one to Ada until the following day. I delayed it in this way in order that Lady Desborough might get a letter from Percy within a few hours of receiving mine; so that she might not answer me until she had heard Percy's arguments and entreaties that she would not withdraw her approval of the engagement.

The second letter sent off, I had nothing to do but to wait patiently, but oh, how anxiously, for the result.

Percy's letter came by return of post; it was just what I knew it would be, a repetition of the one he had written when the will was first found missing,—full of passionate protestations of love, and assurances that my fortune had only value in his eyes on my account, and that therefore to him its loss could make no difference. He said that it was quite impossible that his mother could withdraw her consent, previously so warmly given, merely from a matter of money; and he affirmed that indeed, at the age he was, he did not consider that under any circumstances she had any right to dictate his choice to him. He told me that he was that day writing to her, to inform her that of course what had happened had not made the slightest change in his intentions, and that he felt assured she would be entirely of his opinion. The next day passed without any letter from Lady Desborough; the next and the next—a week passed. How my heart ached. I knew what the delay meant, and could guess at the angry correspondence which must be passing between mother and son. I knew what the result must be, and yet I hoped against hope until the eighth day, when the long-expected letter arrived; it was as follows:—

> "My dear Miss Ashleigh,
>
> "You may imagine how extremely sorry we all were to hear that the will under which you ought to come into possession of the fortune to which I always understood that you were entitled, is missing, and I fear from what you say in your letter to Ada irretrievably lost. This is a terrible event for you, and the more so, since it of course alters your position with respect to my son Percy. You will I am sure be sorry to hear that it has caused a very serious misunderstanding between him and me. I gather from what he has let drop, that you yourself quite see that it is out of the question that your engagement with him can continue, and I know that you will regret with me that he should not like ourselves submit to what is inevitable. Knowing your good sense, I felt sure that you would, as a matter of course, view the matter in the same light that I do, and it gives me pleasure to know that I had so correctly judged your character. I am sure, my dear Miss Ashleigh, that you would be grieved that any serious estrangement should take place between Percy and myself; but I am sorry to say his obstinate and violent conduct at present renders this not only probable, but imminent. I rely upon your aid to assist me in bringing him to the same way of thinking as ourselves. Percy will, I am sure, listen to your arguments with more politeness and deference than he pays to mine. His allowance, as you are aware, depends entirely upon me, and it is quite impossible, as he surely must see, that he can support a wife, even in India, on a bare lieutenant's pay. I rely upon your good sense to convince him of this, and you will be doing a great service to us all by your assistance in this matter. I need not say, in conclusion, how much all this sad affair, and my son's headstrong folly, have shaken and disturbed me, and how much I regret that circumstances should have occurred to prevent an alliance on which I had set my heart. And now, with my sincere condolence,
>
> "Believe me, my dear Miss Ashleigh,
>
> "Yours very faithfully,
>
> "Eveline Desborough."

I really could hardly help smiling, pained and heartsick as I felt, at the quiet way in which Lady Desborough arranged the affair, and claimed me as an ally against Percy. When I had finished the letter, I gave it to Polly—who was watching my face most anxiously—to read, and I do think that if Lady Desborough had been there my sister Polly would have been very near committing a breach of the peace. She did not say much—only the one word "infamous," as she threw the letter on to the table, and then sat down by the fire, biting her lips with anger, with her large eyes ablaze, and her fingers and feet twitching and quivering with suppressed rage.

A letter arrived by the same post from Ada, which I will also copy from the original, which has been so long laying in my desk:—

> "My darling Agnes,
>
> "This is a terrible affair, and I am quite ill with it all. My eyes are red and swollen, and, altogether, I was never so wretched in my life. I should have written to you at once to tell you how sorry I was about it, and that I love you more dearly than ever, but mamma positively ordered me not to do so at first, so that I was obliged to wait; but as I know that she has written to you to-day, I must do the same. We have had such dreadful scenes here, Agnes, you can hardly imagine. On the same morning your letter arrived,

one came from Percy. It did not come till the eleven o'clock post, and I had sent your letter up to mamma in her room before that. Mamma wrote to Percy the same day; what she said I do not know; but two days afterwards Percy himself arrived, and for the last three days there have been the most dreadful scenes here. That is, the scenes have been all on Percy's side. He is half out of his mind, while mamma is very cold, and——Well, you can guess what she could be if she pleased. To-day she has not been out of her room, and has sent word to Percy that as long as he remains in the house she shall not leave it. So things are at a dead-lock. What is to be done I have no idea. Of course I agree with Percy, and think mamma very wrong. But what can I do? My head is aching so, I can hardly write; and indeed, Agnes, I think I am as wretched as you can be. I do not see what is to come of it. Mamma and Percy are equally obstinate, and which will give way I know not. Mamma holds the purse-strings, and therefore she has a great advantage over him. I am afraid it will be a permanent quarrel, which will be dreadful. My darling Agnes, what can I say or do? I believe Percy will go down to see you, although I have begged him not to do so for your sake; but he only asked me if I was going to turn against him, too; so, of course, I could do nothing but cry. How will it end? Oh, Agnes, who would have thought it would ever come to this? I will write again in a day or two. Goodbye, my own Agnes.

"Your most affectionate

"ADA."

At twelve o'clock that day there was a knock at the door, and Percy Desborough was ushered in. I was prepared for his coming, and therefore received him with tolerable composure; and although I dreaded the painful scene I knew I should have to go through, I was yet glad that he had come, for I felt that it was better that all this should come to an end. Percy was looking very pale and worn, and as he came up to me, much as I had schooled myself, I could hardly keep my tears down. He came up, took me in his arms, and kissed me. I suffered him to do so. I knew that it was nearly the last kiss that I should ever have from him. Polly, after the first salutation, would have left the room, but I said,—

"Stop here, please, Polly. She knows all about it, Percy; and it is better for us both that she should be here. I have heard this morning from Lady Desborough, and also from Ada, so I know what you have come down for."

"I have come down, Agnes," Percy said, solemnly, "to renew and confirm my engagement to you. I have come down, that you may hear me swear before God that I will never marry any other woman but you."

"And I, Percy, will marry no other man; but you, even you, I will never marry without your mother's consent. I will never divide mother and son. Besides which, without her consent, it would be impossible."

"Impossible just at present, Agnes, I admit. My mother has refused to allow me one farthing if I marry you, and I know I cannot ask you to go out to India as a lieutenant's wife, on a lieutenant's pay; but in a short time I am sure to get a staff appointment; and although it will not be such a home as I had hoped to offer you, it will be at least a home in which we could have every necessary comfort; and I know you too well, not to feel sure that you would be content with it."

"Percy," I said, "why do you tempt me? You know well how gladly I would go with you anywhere, that comfort or discomfort would make little difference to me if they were shared by you. But you know Lady Desborough, and you know well that she will not only refuse to assist you now, but that she will utterly disown and cast you off if you act in defiance of her will. You are choosing between wife and mother; if you take the one, you lose the other. Has she not told you, Percy, that if you marry me, you are no longer son of hers?"

Percy hesitated. "She has," he said, "she has; but, Agnes, although in any just exercise of her authority, I, as a son, would yield to her; yet at my age, I have a perfect right, in a matter of this sort, to choose for myself; besides, she has already given her entire approval, and it is not because circumstances have changed that she has any right to withdraw that consent. It was you she approved of, and you are unaltered."

"She is acting, as she believes, for your good, Percy. You think her mistaken and cruel, but she will never change, and I will never marry you without her consent. See, Percy, I have no false pride. I would have come to you, had there been nothing to prevent it, as a penniless wife, although I had hoped it would have been otherwise; but no true woman will drag her husband down; no true woman will marry a man when, instead of bringing him a fortune, she brings him ruin. You are now comparatively well off; some day you will be much better; and I will not be the means of your losing this—losing not only this, but your mother."

"But my happiness, Agnes!—what is money to happiness?" Percy exclaimed, impetuously.

"Nothing, Percy,—I know and feel that; but I also feel that my decision is right, and not wrong. I know that I could not decide otherwise, and that whatever unhappiness it may cause us both, yet that, without your mother's consent, I can never be yours."

"You will make me wish my mother dead, Agnes," Percy said, passionately.

"No, no, Percy, do not say that; I know I am doing right. Do not make it harder for me than I can

bear."

Percy strode up and down the room. Once or twice he stopped before me, as if he would speak, but he did not. I was crying freely now, and I could not look up at him.

"Can you not say something for me?" he said to Polly, at last.

Polly got up when he spoke to her—before that she had been sitting on the sofa by me, holding one of my hands in hers—now she went up to him. She put one of her hands on his shoulder, took one of his hands in her other, and looked up into his face.

"Percy, she is right—you know in your own heart she is so. Have pity upon her; she will not do it—she cannot. I love her better than myself, but I could not advise her to do, even for her happiness, what she believes is not right;—she cannot come between you and your mother. Wait, Percy, and be patient—time works wonders. You may be sure she will be yours in heart to the end of her life. Have pity on her, Percy, and go."

"Oh, Polly, have pity on me, too," Percy said, and his lips quivered now; and although he kept the features of his face still rigid and under control, the tears were starting from his eyes. "What shall I do!"

"Go, Percy," I said, getting up. "Go. Let us help each other;" and I took his hands now, and looked up into his face. "Go. I do not say, forget me; I do not say, goodbye for ever; I only say, go, now. I cannot do what you ask me; let us wait—let us wait and hope."

"Agnes," Percy said, solemnly, "I go now; I leave you for a time, but our engagement is not over, and again hear me swear never to marry any woman but you."

"And I no other man, Percy; and now kiss me and go."

For a little while Percy held me strained to his heart, his tears rained down upon my face, his lips pressed mine again and again, then one long, long kiss—I felt it was the last; then he gave me to Polly, who was standing near. I heard the door close behind him, and for a long time I heard no other sound. I had fainted.

---

# CHAPTER VIII.

## STRUGGLES FOR A LIVING.

When at Christmas time Robert Gregory heard that one of the springs which were supposed to open the secret door was found, he gave up for a time even the pretence of looking for anything to do; but not very long afterwards he met an old friend, and most unexpectedly went into a business with him, and that perhaps the only one which could have been named for which he was really fitted.

He had one day, as was his usual custom, entered a public-house where he was well known, and had gone into the bar parlour, where he was sitting reading the paper, smoking his pipe, and drinking a glass of spirits and water, when another man entered the room, looked carelessly at Gregory, then more attentively, and finally burst out,—

"Hallo, Robert? is that you? How fares the world with you all this time?"

"By Jove, Fielding! is that you? How are you, my boy?"

They greeted each other warmly, for they had been a great deal together in the time when Gregory was in London, and their satisfaction at meeting was mutual. After a while, they sat down before the fire, ordered fresh glasses of spirits and water, and prepared for a long talk over all that had happened since they had parted some four years ago—Robert to return to his father at Canterbury, Fielding to continue for a short time longer the reckless life they were living about town.

"Now, Gregory," Fielding said, "let me hear what you have been doing first."

Robert, in reply, related pretty accurately the whole of his life since he had left London.

"Well, that is a rum start," his companion said when he had finished his story. "And you really think that you will some day come in for all this money?"

"I do," Robert answered. "As I have told you they are trying down there now, and have a good chance; but if that fails, I mean to try for it myself. And now what have you been doing?"

"The easiest way to answer would be to tell you what I have not been doing. You left us in the winter, and I held on, as I had been doing before, till the next Derby Day; but I dropped so much upon that, that I had to make myself scarce for a bit. Then I came back again, and set to work to earn my living, and very hard work I found it."

"I should think so," Robert Gregory put in. "I have been trying to get something to do for the last three months, and I am no nearer, as far as I can see, than when I began. How did you set about

it?"

"To tell you the truth, Robert, I found it rather up-hill work at first. I worked for the papers for a bit,—went to all the fires, and the inquests, and the hospitals, and sent accounts to all the dailies. Of course at first they did not often put them in, still they did sometimes, and after a month or two they came to take them pretty regularly. At last I did what I really very seldom did do; but I was very hard-up, and I sent an account of a fire which only existed in my imagination. Well, it turned out that there was a row about it, and of course that put an end to that line. It was winter then, and I was very hard-up, and was glad to earn a few shillings a week as super at one of the pantomimes. Then I happened to meet with a man with a few pounds, and together we set up a very profitable business—advertising to find situations for clerks and servants. They paid us five shillings to enter their names in our books; then we answered every advertisement that appeared in any of the papers for that sort of thing, and sent them to look after the situations. If they got them, they paid us thirty per cent, on the first year's earnings, down on the nail. There were three or four of us in that game. I kept the head office, and they took places in other parts, and each of them wanted clerks at £150 a year. It was a capital dodge, and we made a lot of money; but at last it got blown upon, and we had to give it up.

"Then I did the ladies employment business. Lessons given for a guinea, and constant employment guaranteed when the art was learnt. We used to send them a book on illuminating, which by the gross cost us twopence each. None of the ladies, as it turned out, ever became perfect enough for us to give them employment; but that was their fault you know, not ours. Well, that paid uncommonly well for a bit. After that, I tried no end of moves, and did sometimes well, sometimes badly; still I was not often without a sovereign in my pocket. At last I took up my present line; I have been at it now a year and a half, and I mean to stick to it."

"What is it?" Robert Gregory asked rather curiously, for his companion had the look of a well-to-do man, although perhaps rather of a sporting cut. He wore a good substantial great-coat with a velvet collar, a very good hat, put rather on one side of his head, and a quiet scarf, with a gold pin representing a jockey's cap and whip.

"I am a betting man," Fielding said. "I make a book on all the races. I have certain places—public-houses, quiet streets, and so on—where I am always to be found at regular hours of the day, and I do a very fair business."

"And do you always win, Fielding?"

"Not always; occasionally one gets hit hard, but nineteen times out of twenty, if one is careful, one wins. The great thing is always to have enough in hand to pay your losses the day after the race; and as one receives all the money when the bets are made, two or three months before a race, it is hard if one cannot do that. In this way I have got a good name, am looked upon as a safe man, and so am getting a good business together.

"What do you make on an average a week?"

"Well, on an average, five or six pounds—more than that a good deal in the season, but very little just at this time of year; in a month or so I shall be beginning again."

"I should like to join you, Fielding," Robert said, eagerly.

"Aye, but what capital could you put in? I acknowledge I could do very well with a partner who would take one end of the town while I took the other. I could easily double the business. But I should want a good sum of money with one. I have been, as I told you, a year and a half at it, and have got a good connection together."

"How much do you call a good sum?"

"That would depend upon the man," Fielding answered. "I have known you well, and I am sure we should pull well together. I would take a hundred pounds with you; not for my own use, mind, but to lay in a bank in our joint names. You see it makes the beginning of an account, and we could pay in there all we took, and settle our losses by cheques, which looks much better, and would give us a much better name altogether."

"I should have difficulty in getting a hundred pounds," Robert said; and indeed the sixty pounds the pony carriage had fetched had melted away very fast; for Robert had spent a large amount in this daily search for employment, and Sophy often wondered to herself, with a little sigh, how Robert could possibly spend as much money as he did. "No, Fielding, I am sure I could not manage a hundred, but I think I could go as far as sixty."

"Suppose you think it over, Gregory, and see what you can do. Let us meet here again to-morrow at the same time, and then we will enter into it again; and I will bring you some of my old books to show you that what I say is correct."

"Very well," Robert said, and they parted to meet again next day.

That evening Robert told Sophy what had occurred, and said that it seemed to him an opportunity for getting on which might not occur to him again, but that he would be guided entirely by her.

Sophy was a little alarmed at the thought of their whole available capital being embarked; but she assented cheerfully to the proposal, as she was delighted at anything which seemed likely to

occupy Robert's time and thoughts, and prevent him being driven, from sheer want of something to do, to spend his time in drinking. So the next day the grand pianoforte was sent to an auction-room to be sold; it fetched fifty-five pounds, and with this and twenty-five of their former stock Robert joined Fielding as a partner, leaving a solitary ten pounds only in Sophy's charge. But as she was now regularly giving lessons six hours a day, she had very little occasion to break in upon this, as the thirty-six shillings she earned quite covered her household expenses; and she was now able to go to her work with a light heart, knowing that her absence from home no longer drove her husband to spend his time in public-houses.

The firm of Gregory and Fielding flourished; in a short time they had plenty to do; and as the spring came on and the racing season began, they had their hands quite full. At first they went about together; and then, when Robert became known to Fielding's connection, the one took the east end of the town, the other the west, meeting twice a day at some middle point to compare their books and see how they stood. They now, too, started as racing prophets and commission agents, and advertised in the sporting papers, and by the end of April they were making a large income. How large a portion of the money they received would be clear profit, they could not tell until the races were over, so they agreed to draw five pounds a week each, and to pay the rest into the bank to draw from as required. Sophy knew Robert was doing well; for he again begged her to give up teaching, and generally gave her four pounds out of the five he drew every week for the expenses. This was, as she told him double what they spent; but he said that he was making that, and therefore gave it to her; that he did not want to know how it went, but any she could save she might put by with her own earnings, in case of a rainy day.

For the first two months after Robert Gregory had commenced his work, his wife did not see much of him, for his business now often kept him out the whole evening; and when he came back late he was seldom quite sober, and he was frequently not up when she started to her work at nine o'clock. This went on until, in the middle of March, the news came that the secret of the door was found, and Robert was in such a state of excitement at what he considered the certainty of the missing will being found, that he was quite unable to attend to his business, so Fielding agreed to give him a holiday at any rate until he heard of the result. These three days Robert spent in going about from public-house to public-house treating every one he knew; telling them all it was probable that this was the last time he should see them, as he was about to come into an immense fortune. Proportionate therefore to his exultation, was the disappointment when the news came that the secret chamber had been entered, and that the will was not there. Sophy had never seen him in a rage before, indeed she had never seen any one really in a passion, and she was thoroughly frightened and horror-struck by it. She listened in silence to the terrible imprecations and oaths which he poured out, and which shocked and terrified her indeed, but of the meaning of which she had, of course, not the slightest idea.

At last he calmed down, but from that time he was a changed man. Among his associates he had no longer a loud laugh and ready joke; he was become a moody, surly man, doing all that he had to do in a dogged, resolute way, as if it was only by sheer force of will that he could keep his attention to the work upon which he was engaged. He came to be known among them as a dangerous customer; for one or two of them who had ventured to joke him about the fortune he had told them of, had been warned fiercely and savagely to leave that subject alone; while one who, more adventurous than the others, had disregarded the warning and continued his jokes, had been attacked with such fury, that had not Robert been pulled off him by the bystanders, the consequences would have been most serious. So it came to be understood amongst them that he was a man who was safer to be left alone.

Still the business did not suffer by the change, but, as I have said, throve and increased wonderfully through the months of April and May. People seemed to fancy that their money was safer with "Surly Bob," as he generally came to be known among them, than with some of the other offhand, careless, joking speculators. At any rate, the firm throve. They were lucky on the "Two Thousand," and won heavily upon the "Derby;" so the money in the bank accumulated, and Fielding and Gregory came to be looked well upon among their associates.

Robert now arranged for his partner to take as much as possible of the evening work off his hands. He gave up all his former companions, and returned back to Sophy at half-past six, after which, except on the week preceding very important races, when he was obliged to be at work, he did not go out again.

But he did not give up drinking. He told Sophy that he would stop at home of an evening if she would not interfere with him, but that he could not give up drink till the will was found or they started for Australia: in either of which cases, he swore a great oath that he would never touch spirits again.

Sophy tried in vain to point out to him that the will now seemed altogether lost, and that it would be better to start for abroad at once. But Robert said that he did not give it up yet, and that, as he was doing very well, he was in no hurry to start; but that if by the end of the next racing season—that was to say, in about eighteen months—it was not found, he would give up his present work and go abroad, for by that time he should have made enough money to take them out comfortably, and to start them fairly in the new country.

Indeed, in his heart Robert Gregory would rather have gone on as he was, for he knew that he should find no work out in the colony so easy and suitable for him as his present; but yet he was determined that he would go, for Sophy's sake. He thought that there, with hard work as a settler, he could keep from drink, and he was sincere in his determination never again to touch it.

There he might be a respectable man yet, and, cost him what it would, he was resolved to try.

Sophy was satisfied with the new arrangement. She was glad to know that, at any rate, he was now safe at home of an evening. It relieved her from the anxiety with which she had sat, sometimes for hours, listening for his heavy, and usually unsteady, footfall. So after that Robert, whenever he could, stayed at home, drank large quantities of spirits, and smoked moodily; arousing himself sometimes to talk with Sophy, who would sit by working, and always ready to answer with a cheerful smile. Occasionally he brought home some book or paper about Australia, and Sophy looked through it and read out to him such parts as she thought would interest him; and then he would leave his spirits untasted for a while, and listen to the accounts of the struggles of the back-wood settler, of the clearings in the dark forests, and of the abundant return nature gave for the labour; and his eye would brighten, and his finger tighten as if on the handle of an axe, and he longed for the time to come when he too would be there, away from all debasing associations, and out of reach of the spirit-bottle. And sometimes he told Sophy that perhaps, after all, he should not wait as long as he had said, but might start in the early spring. The spirits he drank of an evening had little effect upon his hardened frame, and he generally went to bed, if not quite sober, at any rate not very drunk.

He now succeeded in persuading Sophy to give up teaching; telling her that she might be of the greatest use answering the correspondence of the firm, for that this was now growing too large for them to manage. He urged that they would otherwise have to pay some one else to do it, and that it would be a great annoyance to have to let a stranger into all their secrets. He added that of course they should be glad to pay her for her work instead of a clerk, and that they would give her thirty-five shillings per week, which she should have for her own private use.

Sophy, seeing that she really could be of service, at once agreed; and telling her pupils that for a time she must give up teaching, she settled to her new employment. Accordingly, the first thing after breakfast of a morning, she now sat down to her writing-desk, with the list, on one side of her, of the horses selected by the firm as the probable winners of the various races; on the other, of the entries for the different races, and the current odds against each horse. She then opened the letters received that morning, and made a list of the various commissions sent to back different horses, to be given to Robert when he came in for them at one o'clock; then she answered those which required reply, and sent out circulars and lists to their numerous town and country subscribers. Generally she had done her work about twelve o'clock, but on the few days preceding great races she was frequently engaged until quite late in the evening.

However, she liked it much better than the teaching, for there was a certain excitement in seeing whether the prophecies of the firm were correct; and as she now knew pretty nearly what horses they stood to win or lose upon in each race, she quite shared in their interest in the result of the different events. Every Saturday she received her pay, which she put by as regularly. She had now two funds. The one she considered the common fund; this consisted of the ten pounds which remained in hand after paying the partnership money to Fielding, and which had been increasing at the rate of nearly two pounds a week—her savings out of the housekeeping money—ever since that time; the other was her private fund, her own earnings since Robert had been able to pay their expenses. Of the existence of either of these hoards Robert was quite ignorant. He was himself so careless in money matters, and had always parted with his money so freely, that he never thought what Sophy was saving. He knew that she always had everything very comfortable for him, and he asked nothing more. If he had been asked, he would have said, perhaps, that Sophy might have laid by a few pounds; but if he had been told what the total amount came to at the end of the six months, he would have been perfectly astounded. But Sophy said nothing about it. She was laying it by till the time should come for starting abroad.

She was more comfortable now than she had been at all. Her husband, although he was gloomy, and talked little, still was not unkind, and very, very seldom spoke harshly to her.

Mrs. Billow had turned out a really kind-hearted, motherly old woman, and had conceived quite an affection for her quiet, pale young lodger.

Mr. Billow she saw very little of. He was generally quite drunk or asleep, and she never heard him except as he tumbled upstairs to bed. At first, indeed, he had been inclined to be disagreeable, and had taken upon himself to tell Robert Gregory that he would not have his lodgers coming in drunk at all times of the night. But Robert turned upon him fiercely, loaded him with abuse, told him that he was a drunken old vagabond, and a receiver of stolen goods; and that if he ever ventured to say a word to him again, he would go the next morning to Scotland Yard, and mention what he knew of his goings on.

Mr. Billow cowered under this fierce and unexpected attack, and was from that time in deadly fear of his lodger, and kept scrupulously out of his sight.

Sophy, too, had by this time got to know many of her neighbours,—most of them professional people, simple, kind-hearted women with families, struggling hard for existence. Some of these would frequently bring their work over of an afternoon, and sit awhile with her. They would on these occasions talk unrestrainedly of their lives and struggles; and Sophy came to take quite an interest in their histories, and occasional little triumphs, and in talk with them forgot her own trials and troubles. They would have been much more sociable had Sophy chosen, and several times asked her and her husband over to take tea with them, on evenings when they were not professionally engaged. But Sophy declined these invitations, saying that her husband had a dislike to society, and would not go out anywhere. Their only visitor of an evening was Fielding,

who occasionally came over for a quiet talk with his partner, to compare their books, and discuss at leisure the chances of the various horses, and which to lay against. He took a strong liking to Robert's quiet lady-wife, reminding him as she did of the women he used to meet when he was young, before he left his father, a quiet country clergyman, and came up to London.

Sophy's great treat was upon occasions when the firm had done particularly well, and when Robert had come home in an unusually good temper. Then Sophy would petition him to take her to the theatre; and as it was so very seldom that Sophy did ask for anything, Robert, on these occasions, would give up his pipe and his spirit-bottle, and go with her to the pit of one of the theatres. These were the great treats of Sophy's life, and she enjoyed them immensely. She had never been to a theatre before the first of these expeditions, and she entered into it with all her heart. Even Robert was pleased at seeing her gratified, and promised himself that he would come oftener with her, as when so little made her happy he would be a brute not to let her have that little. It was too much self-denial, however, for him voluntarily to suggest giving up his spirits and his pipe, but he never refused on the rare occasions when she proposed it; and when he did go, he went willingly, and with an air of pleasure which doubled Sophy's enjoyment. After their return from the theatre, Sophy always had a nice little supper ready—some oysters, or a lobster; and they would chat over their evening's entertainment, while Robert drank a glass of spirits-and-water, before going to bed; and Sophy, for the time, would really feel as happy as she had long ago dreamt she should be when Robert Gregory was her husband.

---

# CHAPTER IX.

## POLLY TO THE RESCUE.

In three or four days after that terrible interview with Percy, in which we agreed—well, I don't know that we actually did agree to anything,—but in which it was at any rate understood that my resolution was immovable, and that I would not marry and accompany him to India without Lady Desborough's consent to our union—I received a letter from him. It was written from Newry, where his regiment was stationed, and was as follows:—

"My darling Agnes,

"I do not write this letter to you to ask you to reconsider your determination. Deeply as I feel the disappointment of my dearest hopes, I yet bow to your decision. Indeed, although it is against me, I feel, now that I can consider it calmly, that it is the only one which you, with your feelings of delicacy, could have arrived at. Forgive me, Agnes, for the cruel way in which I tried and agitated you the other day; but my mother's hardness and obduracy had driven me nearly out of my mind. I went away, Agnes, with your words ringing in my ears, 'Wait and hope!' and I am ready to do so. But how long, Agnes? My regiment may not improbably remain in India fifteen years; but at the end of eight years out there, I can return home for, at any rate, a year's leave; so that I may expect to be in England again in nine years from the present time. I shall by that time have got my troop; and my pay as a captain in India, together with the extra pay I may get from any staff appointment, would enable us to live in tolerable comfort. Should my regiment be returning before the time I name, I can exchange into another; so as to remain in India, at any rate, for another six or seven years.

"Will you, Agnes, when I return in nine years from this time, be my wife?—I mean, whether my mother still oppose or not? I cannot think she will; but let us suppose the worst. Will you then be my wife? Will you continue your engagement to me, and correspond with me for that time? Will you give me that fixed period to look forward to, instead of a restless waiting for my mother's death? If you do this, I shall be comparatively happy; for I should then have something certain to look forward to. If you answer 'yes,' I shall write to my mother, whom I have neither seen nor heard from, and say that I am willing—at your request—so far to give in to her that I will agree not to marry you before proceeding to India, and that we will wait, at any rate, until my return. But that I shall, of course, expect on her part that my allowance will be continued as before. The three hundred a-year which I receive from her I shall scrupulously lay by, as I can manage very well in India upon my lieutenant's pay; and as this, without counting what I may make by my staff appointment, will amount to nearly three thousand pounds in the nine years, I shall—even in the event of my mother refusing to assist me farther after my marriage with you—have accumulated enough to purchase my majority when the time comes. This is my future, if you agree to my proposal, dearest. If you tell me that you will not promise, if you write and repeat that you will not ruin me by marrying without my mother's consent, my mind is made up. I shall at once send in my papers to the Horse Guards, sell my commission, and embark for Australia, where, I am told, with a thousand pounds capital to start with, I may in a few years be a rich man. I shall then return and claim you, and no one will have a right to discuss my choice. Upon your decision, dearest Agnes, rests my future. What is it to be?

"Your own,

"PERCY."

After I had read this letter through many times, I resolved to lay it before Polly, in whose judgment I felt the most perfect confidence. My sister did not hesitate a moment.

"What Percy asks is only fair, Agnes. He must not, as he says, be made to look forward to his mother's death as the only hope of his marriage with you. If you and he make this great sacrifice to her wishes, and at the end of nine years are of the same mind, I think that he at thirty-two and you at twenty-seven, have a perfect right to marry even without her consent; and by that time, as he says, his position will be so secured that he can afford to make the money sacrifice. Write and agree to his proposal, dear, by all means."

My own opinion tallied with Polly's, and I wrote to Percy to tell him that I agreed to remain engaged to him, and that, at the end of the nine years, if he claimed me, I would be his. That I would not cease all correspondence with him, although I felt that I had better do so, but that I would agree to exchange letters once every three months.

Percy wrote at once, thanking me very much for my decision, but begging that I would not insist on such long intervals between the letters. I would not, however, relax that condition. I knew how few long engagements ever came to anything, and how hard it is for a man to wait through the best part of his life. I determined, therefore, not to keep up a too frequent exchange of letters, which would, I felt, however much he might wish it at present, prove terribly tiresome to him long before the expiration of the period of trial; and yet he would not like to fall off in his correspondence, for he would know that I should feel it a great trial when he began to write less frequently. So I maintained my resolution, but told him that, in the event of illness, or of any particular news, the rule might, of course, be broken.

In another day or two I heard again from him, saying that his mother—while on her part reiterating her assertion that she should never alter her determination, or consent to his marriage with any woman without either money or rank to assist him—had yet agreed willingly to his proposal, namely, that things should go on as before, and that the breach between them should be healed if he would go to India by himself.

And so it was settled; and when my letter to Percy in answer to his was written, the three months' rule began. And now that I could have no letter for that time, I settled down into a dreamy, despondent state, from which, although I tried to rouse myself, I could not succeed in doing so. Nine years! It was such a long, long time to look forward to; and so few long engagements ever came to anything, even when there were no difficulties in the way. How could I hope that my case would form an exception to the rule?

Under all this, my health, which had never since my mother's death been strong, failed rapidly, in spite of papa's tonics, and sister Polly's kindness and tender care. Papa I could see was growing very anxious about me, and I myself thought that I was going into a decline. I was thin and pale; I had no longer strength to go for long walks with Polly, but seldom went out beyond the garden. I felt the heat, too, dreadfully. I do not know that it was a particularly hot summer, but I was weak, and the heat tired me sadly. Polly was unceasing in her kindness and attention; she read to me, chatted to me, talked cheerfully about the future, pictured Percy's return to claim me, painted our life in India, and laughingly said that if she could not get a husband here, that she would come out to us on spec. Indeed she did everything in her power to cheer and amuse me. I tried hard to respond to all this kindness, but with little result; I was ashamed of myself for giving way, and yet I gave way, and daily became weaker and weaker. I am sure that Polly thought I was going to die, and she came to a resolution of the result of which I was not told till long afterwards.

She ascertained that the elder Miss Harmer was in the habit of coming in on Sunday mornings, to the little Catholic chapel in the town, and that she was very seldom accompanied by her sister. Accordingly, one morning when I was unusually poorly, and was unable to go to church, she started early, and walked through the town, and out upon the road to Sturry; presently she saw the well-known Harmer carriage approaching, and she pulled down her veil as it approached her, to prevent any possibility of her being recognized.

She pursued her way until she reached the lodge gate of Harmer Place, turned in, went up the drive, and rang at the hall door. Sarah opened it, and looked not a little surprised at seeing Polly.

"Is Miss Angela Harmer in, Sarah?"

"Yes, Miss, she has just come down into the drawing-room."

"Do not ask her if she will see me, Sarah, as I have no doubt she would refuse, and it is absolutely necessary that I should have a talk with her."

"Very well, Miss," Sarah said; "I gave notice better than three weeks ago, and my month is up on Thursday, so I do not care in the least what they say to me." Accordingly Sarah led the way to the drawing-room, opened the door, and announced "Miss Mary Ashleigh." Polly went in, the door closed behind her, and she was alone with Angela Harmer.

The old lady had changed much since Polly had seen her a year before; she had aged wonderfully, and was evidently breaking fast; her cheeks had fallen in, her face was wrinkled, and her whole figure was thinner and feebler than before; her hands, too, which had before been plump and well shaped—and upon which, if Angela Harmer had a single thought of personal

vanity, she rather prided herself—were thin and bony, unmistakably the hands of an old woman.

As Polly Ashleigh was announced and entered, Angela Harmer half rose, with an exclamation almost of terror, and looked round with a wild, frightened look, as if seeking some outlet of escape; but there was none, and even had there been she could not have availed herself of it, for her knees gave way under her, and she sank down with a scared, helpless look, into the chair from which she had half risen.

Polly raised her veil, and looked down with a rather heightened colour, but with a steady look, at the cowering old woman before her, and then said, "You are surprised to see me here, Miss Harmer; and you well may be; for myself—had it been to make me the richest woman in the world—would not have set foot as a petitioner within the walls; but on behalf of my sister, I would do this and much more."

"What do you want, Miss Ashleigh?" Angela Harmer said, in hurried, anxious tones. "You must not talk to me; you must see my sister; she is more able to talk upon business than I am."

"I do not go to your sister, Miss Harmer, because I know my errand would then be a fruitless one. I come to you in her absence, because from what I know and have heard of you, I believe that your heart is accessible to impulses of kindness and pity; I come to you because I believe you to have been a mere passive participator in the wrong which others have committed."

"What do you want?" again Miss Harmer asked, in the same frightened, helpless way.

"I ask at your hands my sister's life—Miss Harmer, she is dying; do you know why? She was happy, she was loved; and was engaged to a man worthy of her, and they would before this have been married. But this man is dependent upon another, and that other's consent was only given for him to wed an heiress; my sister is an heiress no longer. This man would gladly take her penniless as she is, take her to the ruin of his worldly prospects, but she cannot accept the sacrifice; and she is dying—dying; do you hear that, Miss Harmer? And you are assuredly her murderess,—far, far more so than you allege Sophy to have been of your brother; for he was an old man, suffering from a deadly malady, by which he might at any moment have been carried off, while this is a fair, young, happy girl, whom you have struck down. She is dying;—Miss Harmer, I demand her life of you!"

Miss Harmer cowered back into her chair before the young girl who stood looking down with her earnest face upon her; and raised her hands feebly, as if to keep her accuser at a distance.

"I pity you," Polly went on, "I pity you from my heart; but yet I demand my sister's life; give her back to us again, and you will be doubly—yes, tenfold repaid; for your peace of mind will be restored to you. I know what you must have suffered—your changed face shows it; I know what misery you must have undergone, and the struggle between your conscience, your innate sense of right, and what you had been led to believe. This was terrible before; but it was nothing to what you will feel now, with the thought of my sister, whom you are sending to her grave, before you. You cannot—I see it in your face—you cannot reconcile with your conscience what you are doing; for your own sake, Miss Harmer, and for my sister's, I call upon you to do what is right."

"What would you have?" Miss Harmer asked, wringing her hands in helpless despair; "we offered at Christmas——"

"You did," Polly broke in, "you tried to cheat your conscience, as Ananias did of old, by giving part while you held back the rest; but we could not accept it: not even to save life, could we receive as a gift part of our own, and so become almost participators in the robbery of Sophy and ourselves. No, Miss Harmer, we must have our own, or nothing. I call upon you now, solemnly in the names of your dead brother, and of my dying sister, to give me this will you are hiding. Give it to me, and I promise you in the name of us all, that the past shall never be alluded to; I offer you a clear conscience, and our blessing, as the saviour of my sister's life."

"But my sister!—Father Eustace!" Miss Harmer murmured, in a terrified tone to herself. "Oh, no, no, no, I dare not!" and she again wrung her hands despairingly.

"You dare not refuse, Miss Harmer; you dare not go down to your grave with this grievous wrong and with my sister's death upon your soul; you will have to meet then, One whose wrath will be far more terrible than that of the anger of mortal. Miss Harmer, give me the will,—come," and with an air of mingled entreaty and command, Sophy took Miss Harmer's hands, looking down upon her with her earnest eyes, and Miss Harmer almost unconsciously rose to her feet.

"Come," Polly said again, "save my sister's life, earn peace and happiness for yourself, here and hereafter."

The girl led the old woman to the door, never taking her eyes from her face, for she felt that somehow she was exercising a strange power over her, that she was leading her, as it were, against her own will and volition, and that if nothing occurred to break the spell, the victory was hers. Miss Harmer's eyes were wide open, but she hardly seemed to see, but went mechanically, like a person walking in her sleep; her lips moved, but no sound came from them; then they went out of the door, and up the stairs, and turned towards the door of Mr. Harmer's former bedroom, when a noiseless step came up the stairs behind them, a hand was placed upon Miss Harmer's shoulder, and the deep voice of Father Eustace said,—

"Sister Angela, what are you doing?"

As a sleep-walker startled at some sudden touch from a dream, the old woman turned round with a convulsive start, and then with a loud cry fell senseless to the ground.

"Who are you?" the priest asked of Polly, as he stooped to raise the fallen woman. "Who are you?"

"One of the rightful possessors of this house," Polly said, proudly; and then turning round—for she saw that the prize was hopelessly lost at the moment of victory—she went down stairs and out of the house, telling Sarah, whom she found in the hall, to go upstairs to help the astonished Father Eustace to carry the insensible woman to her room.

Polly, when she got home again, went straight to the library, and told papa of her visit to Harmer Place, and its results, and how nearly she had been to the recovery of the will. Papa looked thoughtful over it for some time.

"It was a dangerous experiment, Polly, but the fact that you so nearly succeeded, proves that it was not a hopeless one, as I should have unhesitatingly have pronounced it to be, had you asked my opinion before starting. It shows that the will is in existence still, and no doubt as she was leading you towards Mr. Harmer's room, she was going down the upper staircase towards the secret chamber, in some closet in which it is undoubtedly concealed. I only hope that Miss Harmer will not, when she returns home, and hears what a narrow escape she has had, destroy the will at once. However, we must do as we have done before, hope for the best."

Papa and Polly had a long talk again over Miss Harmer, and they quite agreed that her religious bigotry and personal obstinacy were both so great that it was hopeless to expect any change in her. Her superstition was the only weak point in her character. So great was this, that papa said that, strong-minded woman as she was in other respects, he had heard her confess that she would not remain without a light at night for any consideration, and that she would not even go into a dark room without a candle on any account.

"It is very strange, papa," Polly said. "How do you account for a feeling so opposed to her general character?"

"We are all anomalies, Polly, and in the present instance the anomaly can be accounted for more easily than it can in many others. As children, the Misses Harmer were brought up in convents abroad, and saw pictures and were told stories of the martyrdoms of saints, until the very air seemed full of horrors. I have no doubt that this is how their feeling originated; but at any rate it is fortunate for us, for there is no question that it is their superstition, heightened by the threat I held over them of their brother's spirit, which has prevented Miss Harmer from destroying the will long ago."

"I wish I could frighten her again," Polly said thoughtfully.

"Come, Polly, no more tricks," papa said, "you might get yourself into some very serious scrape. You must promise me that you will on no account go to Harmer Place again, without consulting me beforehand."

Polly did not like to promise, but papa insisted upon it, and Polly, although very reluctantly, had to bind herself by a promise not to do so again.

Two days afterwards, a short time after breakfast—to which I had not risen—there was a knock at the door, and the servant came in, looking rather surprised, and said that Miss Harmer wished to speak to Miss Mary Ashleigh.

Polly, who was alone, at once ordered her to be shown in. The girl rose to meet her visitor with a bright flush on her cheek, and a little nervous tremor of excitement running through her, for she felt that Miss Harmer was a very different woman to her sister, and that she had a harder battle to fight than the previous one had been, and with even a slighter chance of victory.

Miss Harmer entered stiff and unbending, and her cold stern face at once restored Polly's composure. Her bow of greeting was to the full as haughty as that of Miss Harmer, and she motioned that lady to a chair, and in silence sat down opposite to her.

The two women looked at each other full in the face, and Miss Harmer, fearless as she herself was of all earthly things, could not help admiring the bright unflinching look of the young girl, and feeling that despite the difference of age, she had met an opponent worthy of her. Seeing that Polly waited quietly for her to begin, she said at last,—

"I have called, Miss Ashleigh, to remonstrate with you upon your very extraordinary conduct the other day. My sister has been very ill, and indeed it was only last evening that she was able to give me any account of what had taken place."

"I am sorry to hear that your sister has been ill, Miss Harmer, but for no other reason do I regret what I did. I endeavoured for my sister's sake to persuade your sister to do what was right. I grieve that my attempt failed, but on that account only do I regret what I have done. I did it without the knowledge of my father or sister. I acted as I did because my conscience told me I was right."

"But your conduct is outrageous, Miss Ashleigh," Miss Harmer said angrily. "You first gratuitously assume that this will—which there is every reason to believe is long since destroyed—is in existence; upon the strength of this unfounded and injurious supposition you insult us grossly, and have shocked and alarmed my poor sister beyond description. If such a thing occur

again, or if any similar attempt is made, I shall call in the assistance of the law for our protection."

"I assume that the will is in existence, Miss Harmer, because I am as certain of it as I am of my own being."

"I suppose," Miss Harmer said scornfully, "you imagine that my poor sister—whom your language and manner appear to have affected until she did not know what she was doing—was taking you to my brother's room, and that she would have there unlocked a drawer and given you the will."

"My supposition is founded upon no such grounds, Miss Harmer. I know the will to be in existence, and I also know that it is not in your brother's room."

Polly spoke so calmly and earnestly, that Miss Harmer felt a little startled and uneasy in spite of herself.

"Upon what my conviction is founded I will presently inform you. My attempt failed, and I shall try no more, but leave the matter in His hands who is certain to bring the works of darkness to light in the end. You believe, Miss Harmer," and the girl's voice rose now, and became more firm and impressive, "that you are acting in the interests of God; believe me, He is strong enough to act for Himself. I have a strong, a sure conviction that some day it will be all made straight, and in the meantime I am content to trust my sister's life in His hands, and wait. If she die, it is His will; but I still hope that He will in some way or other make known to me where the will is placed."

Miss Harmer looked scornfully at her. Polly paid no heed to her look; she had turned her eyes from Miss Harmer now, and was looking straight before her, and went on, speaking in a quiet, dreamy tone, as if almost unconscious of her visitor's presence.

"Already I know much. I know that the will is not destroyed, and yet I know not where it is, but I may know yet. I have dreams at night. I see at times before me a small chamber, with a single arm-chair and a table there; a light stands upon the table, and a figure, your brother, sits there writing. The will lies on the table before him. He has risen now, and has taken up the will and the candle, but the light burns dimly, and I cannot see what he does with it; but I know somehow that he has put it into a place of safety, and that it is there still. A voice seems to say to me, 'Patience, and wait: I guard it!' When I wake I know this is no ordinary dream, for it comes over and over again, and I know that the chamber is in existence. I can see it now before me, with its low ceiling, and a stone staircase which seems to run through it, leading both up and down—I know not where. I can see it, with its table and chair, with books and some scattered papers, and a figure is sitting in the chair, and which yet seems to me to be no figure, but a mere shadow; but I know that he is there, and that he will wait until the time comes for the hidden will to be found. Miss Harmer!" Polly said, turning suddenly round upon her, "you best know how far my dream is true, and whether such a chamber as I have seen exists!"

Miss Harmer made no reply, but sat as if stricken with a fit. She had during her brother's life been frequently in the "priest's chamber," and once on the afternoon of his death; and the room rose before her as Polly described it, with its table and candles, and her brother sitting reading, and the stone steps leading up and down. She could hardly keep herself from screaming aloud. The hard, rigid lines of her face relaxed; the tightly-closed lips parted; and the whole expression of her face was changed by this great terror.

Polly saw the tremendous sensation she had created, and rose and filled a tumbler with water from a caraffe which stood on the side board, and offered it to Miss Harmer, but she motioned it away. Polly set it down beside her, and it was some time before the stricken woman could trust her trembling hand to carry it to her lips. At length she did so, drank a little, and then said,—

"One question, Miss Ashleigh: Did my brother ever reveal to your father, sister, or yourself the existence and description of such a place as you speak of?"

"As I hope in heaven!" Polly said, solemnly, "he did not."

There was a pause for some time, and then Miss Harmer said, very feebly,—

"I confess you have startled me, Miss Ashleigh; for you have, I say honestly, described accurately a place the very existence of which I believed known only to my dead brother, my sister, myself, and one other person abroad, with whom it would be as safe as with myself. I went into that chamber on the day after my brother's death, to see if the will was on that table, but, as you say, it was not. Should it be anywhere in existence, which, remember, I am ignorant of—for I give you my solemn assurance that I have not seen it since my brother's death—and should, in your dream, the place where it is hidden be revealed to you, come to me, and you shall be free to examine the place, and take the will if you find it. I will acknowledge the hand of God, and not struggle against it. And now goodbye. You will not come again to my sister?"

"I will not, Miss Harmer. I wait and hope."

"Will you not reconsider the proposal we made?"

"No, Miss Harmer—it is impossible."

Miss Harmer now rose with some difficulty, and went out, attended by Polly, to her carriage, with an air very different to her usual upright walk.

When the door had closed, and the carriage had driven off, Polly said exultingly to herself, "The will is safe for a time anyhow."

Four or five days afterwards papa received a formal letter from Miss Harmer's man of business in London, saying that the Misses Harmer were anxious to clear off all outstanding accounts, and that they did not find any mention among Mr. Harmer's papers of money paid to Dr. Ashleigh for professional services, during the three years prior to his death; that as all other payments were punctually entered by Mr. Harmer, it was evident that no such sum had been paid; and that he, therefore, at Miss Harmer's request, forwarded a cheque for £500, being, she stated, certainly not too large a sum for the constant attendance furnished by him during that time.

Papa did not refuse to accept this money, as indeed he had not, from the time that Mr. Harmer declared his intentions respecting us, ever sent in any account to him. Papa determined to spend the money in making a grand tour for the benefit of my health; and accordingly, in another fortnight—having arranged with some one to take his practice during his absence—he, Polly, and I started for a four months' tour. For that time we wandered through Switzerland, Germany, and the old cities of Belgium; and very greatly we enjoyed it. My health improved with the change of scene, and when we returned to our old home, at the end of November, I was really myself again, and was able to look forward cheerfully to the future, and to take my part again in what was going on round me.

---

# CHAPTER X.

## ALLIES FROM ALSATIA.

And so things went on with the Gregorys through the summer months, and on into the autumn. Still the firm of Gregory and Fielding flourished, and still Sophy wrote their letters for them. Robert remained moody and sullen, staying at home of an evening, but saddening Sophy by his continued indulgence in the bottle, and by his moody sullen temper, which, however, was hardly ever turned against herself. Robert Gregory still tried hard to keep to the resolve he had made. This little girl who loved him so fondly, who had ruined herself for his sake, and who bore so patiently with his faults, he was determined should in addition to her other troubles, have at any rate no unkindness to bear from him; he strove hard for that; he would at least in that respect not be a bad husband to her. He did not love her with the passionate love which he might have given to some women; his feelings towards her were a mixture of love and compassion, mingled with admiration at the unflinching courage and equanimity with which she endured the great change which had befallen her.

Late in the autumn the good fortune which had so steadily accompanied the operations of the firm seemed all at once to desert them, and on the Cambridgeshire and the Cesarewitch, the two last great races of the season, they lost very heavily. For the one, relying upon information they had received from a lad in the stable, they had continued to lay heavily against the favourite, who, when the day came, not only won, but won in a canter. The other, an outsider against whom they had several times laid fifty to one—believing his chance to be worth nothing—won by a neck, defeating a horse on whom they stood to win heavily. These two races were a very severe blow to them, but still they held up their heads. Their previous winnings had been so large that they were able to draw from their bankers sufficient to meet their creditors on settling day, and still to have two hundred pounds remaining in the bank. Heavy as their loss was, it had one good effect—it gave them the best possible name, and, as Fielding said, it secured them a certainty of increased connection and business in the ensuing year.

Throughout the season they had never been a day behind in their payments, nor once asked for time; and their character as straight-forward honest men stood so high, that Fielding was resolved during the winter to enter as a member of Tattersall's, which would secure them a larger business, and give them a better position and increased opportunity for managing the commission part of their business.

On Robert Gregory, however, the loss had one good effect, that of making him determine more than ever that he would give up the business and start for Australia in the spring, unless in the meantime he could find the will; and to this point all his thoughts now turned. He would sit of an evening musing over it for hours, and hardly speaking a word. Sophy, too, was now less able to endeavour to cheer or rouse him, for she, too, had her anxieties—she was expecting very shortly to be confined. One evening after sitting thus for an unusually long time, he rose, and saying that his head ached, and that he should go out for an hour or so for a walk, he got up and went out. He did not walk far, only to the corner of the street, and stood there for some little time smoking his pipe and looking out on the busy road. Then he turned round, and came slowly back to the house, walking in the road so that his tread on the pavement might not be heard. When he came opposite his own door, he paused, then went in at the gate and into the little patch of garden, and knocked at the kitchen door under the steps. Mr. Billow who was dozing at the fire woke up and opened the door, and was astonished into a state more approaching perfect wakefulness than he had been for many a month before, on seeing his lodger from upstairs applying for admission at this door.

"It is all right, Mr. Billow," Robert said, entering and shutting the door behind him. "Just fasten

the other door, will you; I don't wish my wife, and therefore I don't wish yours, to know that I am here. I want half an hour's chat with you."

Mr. Billow fastened the kitchen door in silence, and then sat down again, motioning to Robert, whom he was regarding with great suspicion, to do the same.

"What are you drinking?" Robert asked, taking up a black bottle which was standing on the table, and smelling the contents. "Ah, whisky; that will do;" so saying he took down a glass from the shelf, poured some spirits into it from the bottle, and some hot water from a kettle on the fire, and then putting in a lump of sugar from a basin on the table, took his seat. Mr. Billow imitated his guest's proceedings as far as mixing himself a strong glass of spirits and water, and then waited for Robert to commence the conversation. He had seen so many unexpected things in his trade, that it took a good deal to surprise him. Robert lit his pipe again, swallowed half the contents of his tumbler, and then began.

"My wife, Mr. Billow, as you may suppose by what you have heard, and by what you may remember of her pony carriage and piano which came up when we first came here fifteen months ago, was brought up a lady, and not accustomed to live in such a miserable little den as this."

Mr. Billow here interrupted, "that if it was not good enough for them, why did they stop there?"

"You hold your tongue," Robert said, savagely, "and don't interrupt me, if you value that miserable old neck of yours. She was brought up a lady," he continued, "and was to have come into a large fortune. The person who had left her the fortune died, and the will has been hidden away by his sisters,—two old women who live in a lonely house in the country. Of course, there are servants, and that sort of thing; but they sleep in a distant part of the building, and would not be likely to hear anything that went on. There is no other house within call. One of these women, I understand, is as hard as a rock; there would be no getting her to say a word she did not want to say, if it was to save her life. The other one is made of different stuff. Now I want to get hold of a couple of determined fellows, accustomed to that sort of business, to make an entrance there with me at night—to get hold of this old woman, and to frighten her into telling us where this will is hidden. If I can get it, I am safe, because the house is part of the property; and besides, I should have them under my thumb for hiding the will. If it had not been my own house I was going to break into, I would rather do the job by myself than take any one with me, to give them the opportunity of living on me all the rest of my life. As it is, I am safe both from the law and from extortion. If we are interrupted, and things go wrong, we can get off easily enough, so that there is no great risk either for me or the men who go with me. What do you think, Mr. Billow—this is all in your line? Could you put your hand on a couple of such men as I want?"

"There are such men to be found in London, no doubt," Mr. Billow said, cautiously. "The question is, would it be worth any one's while to find them, and would it be worth their while to go?"

"If from any bad luck we should fail," Robert Gregory answered, "I could only afford to pay a ten-pound note each; if I succeed, I will give them a couple of hundred apiece, which would make it the best night's work they have done for a long time, and I will give you the same I do them."

"I can find the men," Mr. Billow said readily; "they shall be here—let me see, by this time the day after to-morrow."

"No, no," Robert said hastily; "not here. You take me to some place you may appoint to meet them; and your part of the agreement is that you on no account tell them my name, or anything about me. If the plan succeeds, I don't care, for I shall only have broken into my own house. At any rate, if I were punished I should care very little, for I should be a rich man; and I question if the old women dare prosecute me for any violence I may have to use, when they will be themselves liable to imprisonment for hiding the will; but in the case of its failing, I don't want to be in the power of any man. I don't mind you, because I could break up your place here in return; but I intend to go abroad very soon if it fails, and I don't want anything known against me. So make an appointment for me to meet them where you like, and call me Robert Brown."

Two days afterwards, Mr. Billow informed Robert that he had made an appointment for him to meet two first-rate hands that evening, at a quiet place, where they could talk things over without being interrupted. Accordingly, at nine o'clock, Robert Gregory made some excuse to Sophy, and went out. He found Mr. Billow waiting for him at the corner of the street; and although for once he was sober, and had evidently taken some pains with his personal appearance, Robert could not help thinking what a dirty, disreputable old man he looked, and feeling quite ashamed of him as he kept close to his heels along the busy Westminster Bridge Road. They crossed the bridge, kept on in front of the old Abbey, and entered the network of miserable lanes and alleys which lie almost beneath the shadow of its towers. Into this labyrinth they plunged, and went on their way through lanes of squalid houses, with still more squalid courts leading from them, reeking with close, foul smells, which sickened the mere passer-by, and told their tales of cholera and typhus; miserable dens, where honest labour and unsuccessful vice herd and die together; hotbeds of pestilence and fever, needing only a spark to burst into a flame of disease, and spread the plague around—a fitting judgment on the great, rich city which permits their existence within it. Through several of these they passed, and then emerged into a wider street, where the gaslight streamed out from nearly every house, and where the doors were ever on the swing. By the sides of the pavements were stalls with candles in paper lanterns, with hawkers proclaiming the goodness of the wares which they sold; stale vegetables, the refuse of the fish at the public sales at Billingsgate, and strange, unwholesome-looking meats, which

would puzzle any one to define the animals from which they were taken, or the joints which they were supposed to represent. Round them were numbers of eager, haggling women; and the noise, the light, and bustle, formed a strange contrast to the silent, ill-lighted lanes through which they had just passed. In a rather wider lane than usual, leading off this sort of market, was a quiet-looking public-house, offering a strong contrast to its brilliant rivals close by, with their bright lamps, and plate-glass, and gaudy fittings. Into this Mr. Billow entered, followed by Robert Gregory. Two or three men were lounging at the bar, who looked up rather curiously as the new comers entered. Mr. Billow spoke a word or two to the landlord, to whom he was evidently known, and then passed along a passage into a small room, where two men were sitting with glasses before them, smoking long pipes. They rose when Robert and his conductor entered, with a sort of half bow, half nod. Mr. Billow closed the door carefully behind him, and then said to Robert,—

"These are the parties I was speaking to you of; both first-class in their lines. I have had a good deal to do with them in my time, and have always found them there when wanted."

"That's true, governor," one of the men said; "no man can say that either of us ever did what was not right and straight-forward."

"And now, Mr. Brown," Mr. Billow said, "that I have brought you together, I shall leave you to talk things over. I don't want to know anything about the matter. The fewer that are in these things the better. I shall go out for half an hour to see some friends, and after that you will find me in the bar. Shall I order anything in for you?"

"Yes," Robert Gregory said; "tell them to send in a bottle of brandy, and a kettle with hot water."

Mr. Billow accordingly went out, and the two men instinctively finished the glasses before them, in order that they might be in readiness for the arrival of the fresh ingredients. While they were waiting for the coming of them, Robert Gregory had time to examine narrowly his associates in his enterprise. The younger, although there was not much difference in their ages, was a man of from thirty to thirty-five—a little active man. The lower part of his face was, contrary to usual custom, the better. He had a well-shaped mouth and chin, with a good-natured smile upon his lips; but his eyes were sharp and watchful, with a restless, furtive look about them, and his hair was cut quite short, which gave him an unpleasant jail-bird appearance. He was a man of some education and considerable natural abilities. He was known among his comrades by the soubriquet of The Schoolmaster. The other was a much bigger and more powerful man; a heavy, beetle-browed, high-cheeked ruffian, with a flat nose, and thick, coarse lips. He was a much more common and lower scoundrel than The Schoolmaster; but they usually worked together: one was the head and the other the hand. Both were expert house-breakers, and had passed a considerable portion of their time in prison. When the bottle of spirits was brought, the kettle placed upon the fire, the glasses filled, and they were again alone, Robert Gregory began,—

"I suppose you know what I want you for?"

"Thereabout," The Schoolmaster said. "The old one told us all about it. The long and short of it is, two old women have hid a paper, which you want, and our game is to go in and frighten one of them into telling where it is hid."

"Yes, that is about it," Robert answered.

"You know the house well?"

"I have only been in it once, but it has been so exactly described to me that I could find the right room with my eyes shut. She is a timid old woman, and I think a pistol pointed at her head will get the secret out of her at once."

"I don't know," the schoolmaster said, "some of these old women are uncommon cantankerous and obstinate. Suppose she should not, what then?"

"She must," Gregory said, with a deep oath. "I must have the will; she shall tell where it is."

"You see, master, if she is hurt we shall get hauled up for it, even if you do get the paper."

"She is liable to imprisonment," Robert said, "for hiding it, so she would hardly dare to take steps against us; but if she did, you are safe enough. They may suspect me, they may prove it against me, but I don't care even if I am sent across the sea for it. The property would be my wife's, and she would come out to me, and in a year or two I should get a ticket-of-leave. I have thought it all over, and am ready to risk it, and you are all right enough."

"And the pay is ten pounds each down, and two hundred pounds each if we get it?"

Robert nodded.

"We are ready to do it, then," The Schoolmaster said; "there's my hand on it;" and the two men shook hands with Robert Gregory on the bargain. "And now let us talk it over. Of course she must be gagged at once, and the pistol tried first. If that does not do—and old women are very obstinate—I should say a piece of whipcord round her arm, with a stick through it, and twisted pretty sharply, would get a secret out of any one that ever lived."

"I don't wish to hurt the old woman if I can help it," Gregory said, moodily; "besides, it would make it so much the worse for me afterwards. But the will I must have, and if she brings it upon

herself by her cursed obstinacy, it is her fault, not mine."

They then went into a number of details on the subject, and arranged everything, and it was settled that they should start on that day week; but that if any delay were necessary, that Robert should call at the same place on the evening before the start. If they heard nothing from him, they were to meet at the railway station at nine o'clock on the morning named. Robert then took leave of them, and returned home with Mr. Billow.

This delay for a week was because Sophy was daily expecting to be confined, and Robert was determined to wait till that was over. However, on the very next day a son was born to Sophy, who, as she received it, thanked God that now at least she had a comfort who would be always with her, and which nothing but death could take away. She felt that her days would be no longer long and joyless, for she would have a true pleasure—something she could constantly pet and care for.

---

# CHAPTER XI.

## THE COUP DE MAIN.

It was two o'clock in the morning; Miss Harmer was at her devotions. Half her nights were so spent. Not that she felt any more need for prayer than she had formerly done, nor that she had one moment's remorse or compunction concerning the course she had adopted; in that respect she was in her own mind perfectly justified. He whom she had looked up to for so many years for counsel and advice, he who to her represented the Church, had enjoined her to act as she had done, had assured her that she was so acting for the good of the Church, and that its blessing and her eternal happiness were secured by the deed; and she did not for an instant doubt him. The only moment that she had wavered, the only time she had ever questioned whether she was doing right, was when Polly Ashleigh had so vividly described the chamber, and when it had seemed to her that the secret was in the course of being revealed by dreams. She thought it altogether natural and right that the estate of her Catholic ancestors—the estate which her elder brother had actually devised to the Church, and which had been only diverted from that destination by what she considered an actual interposition of the evil one himself—should go as they had intended. So that she never questioned in her own mind the right or justice of the course she had taken.

Miss Harmer rose at night to pray, simply because she had been taught in the stern discipline of the convent in which she had been brought up and moulded to what she was, that it was right to pass a part of the night in prayer, and she had never given up the custom. And, indeed, it was not merely from the force of custom that she made her devotions; for she prayed, and prayed earnestly, and with all her strength, prayed for the increase and triumph of the Church, that all nations and people might be brought into its fold, and that God would show forth His might and power upon its enemies. On this night she was more wakeful than usual, for the wind was blowing strongly round the old walls of Harmer Place, and sounded with a deep roar in its great chimneys. This was always pleasant music to her; for she, like her dead brothers, loved the roar and battle of the elements, and the fierce passionate spirit within her seemed to swell and find utterance in the burst of the storm.

Suddenly she paused in the midst of her devotions; for amidst the roar and shriek of the wind she thought she heard the wild cry of a person in distress. She listened awhile; there was no repetition of the sound, and again she knelt, and tried to continue her prayers; but tried in vain: she could not divest herself of the idea that it was a human cry, and she again rose to her feet. Stories she had heard of burglaries and robbers came across her. She knew that there was a good deal of valuable plate in the house; and then the thought, for the first time, occurred to her, that perhaps it was her sister's voice that she had heard. She did not hesitate an instant now, but went to a table placed against the bed on which lay two pistols: curious articles to be found in a lady's bedroom, and that lady more than seventy years old. But Miss Harmer was prepared for an emergency like this. For the last year Father Eustace had been warning her of the danger of it; not perhaps that he had any idea that a burglary would actually be attempted, but he wished to be resident in the house, and to this, with her characteristic obstinacy when she had once made up her mind to anything, she refused to assent. The Harmers' chaplains she said never had been resident; there was a house in the village belonging to them, which they had built specially for their chaplains to reside in, and which they had so inhabited for more than a hundred years, and she did not see why there should be any change now. Father Eustace had urged that the sisters slept in a part of the building far removed from the domestics, and that if the house were entered by burglars they might not be heard even if they screamed ever so loud.

"I am not likely to scream, although I am an old woman," Miss Harmer had answered grimly; and the only result of Father Eustace's warning had been, that Miss Harmer had ordered a brace of her brother's pistols to be cleaned and loaded, and placed on the table at her bedside; and it was the duty of the gardener to discharge and reload these pistols every other morning, so that they might be in perfect order if required.

Miss Harmer's pistols were rather a joke among the servants; and yet they all agreed that if the time ever did come when she would be called upon to use them, the stern old woman would not

hesitate or flinch for a moment in so doing.

So with a pistol in one hand, and a candle in the other, Miss Harmer went out of her door and along the short corridor which led to her sister's bedroom—a strange gaunt figure, in a long white dress covering her head—in fact a nun's attire, which she put on when she prayed at night, and from underneath which the stiff white frills of her cap bristled out strangely. She walked deliberately along, for she believed that she was only deceiving herself, and that the cry which she had thought she heard was only a wilder gust of wind among the trees. When she reached her sister's door, she paused and listened. Then she started back, for within she could hear low murmured words in men's voices, and then a strange stifled cry: she hesitated but for one moment, to deliberate whether she should go back to fetch the other pistol—then that strange cry came up again, and she threw open the door and entered. She was prepared for something, but for nothing so terrible as met her eyes. The room was lighted by the two candles which still burned in a little oratory at one end of the room before a figure of the Virgin; a chair lay overturned near it, and it was evident that Angela Harmer had, like her sister, been engaged at her devotions when her assailants had entered the room, and when she had given that one loud cry which had at last brought her sister to her assistance. But all this Cecilia Harmer did not notice then, her eyes were fixed on the group in the middle of the room.

There, in a chair, her sister was sitting, a man, standing behind it, held her there; another was leaning over her, doing something—what her sister could not see; a third stood near her, seemingly giving directions; all had black masks over their faces.

Angela Harmer was a pitiful sight: her white nun's dress was all torn and disarranged; her cap was gone; her thin grey hair hung down her shoulders; her head and figure were dripping wet—she having fainted from pain and terror, and having been evidently recovered by pouring the contents of the water-jug over her, for the empty jug lay on the ground at her feet. Her face was deadly pale with a ghastly expression of terror and suffering, made even more horrible to see, by a red handkerchief which one of the ruffians had stuffed into her mouth as a gag.

It was a dreadful sight, and Miss Harmer gave a loud cry when she saw it. She rushed forward to her sister's aid, discharging as she did so, almost without knowing it, her pistol at the man nearest to her. As she fired, there was a volley of deep oaths and fierce exclamations; the one who was holding Angela Harmer, with a jerk sent the chair in which she was sitting backwards, bringing her head with fearful force against the floor. There was a rush to the door; one of the robbers struck Cecilia Harmer a violent blow on the head with the butt end of a heavy pistol which he held in his hand, stretching her insensible on the ground; and then the three men rushed downstairs, and through the hall window, by which they had entered; across the grounds—but more slowly now, for one was lagging behind—and out into the road.

There in the lane a horse and light cart were standing, the horse tied up to a gate. Two of them jumped at once into the cart. "Jump up, mate!" the shorter of the two said, and with the exception of fierce oaths of disappointment, it was the first word which had been spoken since Cecilia Harmer had entered the room. "Jump up, mate! we have no time to lose."

"I can't," the man said; "that she-devil has done for me."

"You don't say that," the other said, getting out of the cart again. "I thought she had touched you by the way you walked, but I fancied it was a mere scratch. Where is it?"

"Through the body," the man said, speaking with difficulty now, for it was only by the exercise of almost superhuman determination that he had succeeded in keeping up with the others.

"Well, you are a good plucked 'un, mate," the man said, admiringly. "Here, Bill, lend me a hand to get him into the cart."

The other man got down, and the two lifted their almost insensible companion into the cart, laid him as tenderly as they could in the straw at the bottom, and then, jumping in themselves, drove off down the hill as fast as the horse could gallop. This speed they kept up until they were close to Canterbury; and then they slackened it, and drove quietly through the town, not to excite the suspicions of such policemen as they passed in the streets. When clear of the town, they again put the horse to his fullest speed. Once, after going three or four miles, they drew up, where a little stream ran under the road. Here one of them fetched some water, and sprinkled it on the face of the wounded man, who was now insensible. They then poured some spirits, from a flask one of them carried, between his lips, and he presently opened his eyes and looked round.

"Cheer up, mate; you will do yet," one said, in a tone of rough kindness.

The wounded man shook his head.

"Yes, yes, you will soon be all right again, and we shan't drive so fast now we are quite safe. There, let's have a look at your wound."

They found that, as he had said, he was hit in the body. The wound had almost ceased bleeding now, and there was nothing to be done for it. With an ominous shake of the head, they remounted the cart, and drove gently on.

"This is a bad job, Bill."

"A —— bad job," the other said, with an oath; "about as bad as I ever had a hand in. Who would

have thought that old cat would have held out against that? I know I could not have done it."

"No, nor I either. I would have split on my own mother before I could have stood that. I am afraid it is all up with him," and he motioned towards the man at the bottom of the cart.

The other nodded.

"What are we to do with him, Schoolmaster?"

"We must leave him at Parker's, where we got the cart. He can't be taken any farther. I will ask him." And he stopped the cart, and told the wounded man, who was conscious now, what they intended to do, and asked if he could suggest anything better.

He shook his head.

"He is a good fellow; he will make you comfortable, never you fear."

The man seemed now to want to ask a question, and The Schoolmaster leaned over him to catch the words.

"Did you take anything?"

The man hesitated a little.

"Well, mate, truth is I did. I grabbed a watch and chain, and a diamond cross, which were laying handy on the table."

The wounded man looked pleased.

"I am glad of that; they will think it is only a common burglary. I don't think the woman will ever tell."

"I don't think she will," the other said, carelessly. "I expect it was too much for her, and Bill threw her over mortal hard. I thought it a pity at the time, but I don't know now that it was not for the best. The old fool, why did she give us all that trouble, when one word would have settled the whole business."

"Do you think we are safe?" the wounded man asked.

"Safe! aye; we are safe enough. We shall drive into the place the same side we went out, and no one will suspect us honest countrymen of being London cracksmen."

Nor would any one have done so.

After passing through Canterbury, they had taken disguises from the bottom of the cart, and even had it been light no one would have guessed they were not what they seemed—countrymen going into early market. The shorter one was in a shooting jacket and gaiters, and looked like a farmer's son; the other had on a smock-frock and a red handkerchief round his neck, and with his big slouching figure looked exactly like a farm labourer.

They drove along at a steady pace for another two hours. They had some time since left the main road, to avoid the towns of Sittingbourne and Chatham, and they were now in the lanes and byways skirting Rochester. The man called Bob was a native of Chatham, and knew all the country well. It was nearly six o'clock, and was still pitch dark, and since they had left Canterbury they had not met a single person.

In a short time they entered the highroad again, about a mile on the London side of Rochester, and turned their tired horse's head back again in the direction of that town. They kept along this till the lights of Rochester were close to them, and then turned again from the main road down a narrow lane, and stopped at a house about a hundred yards from the road.

The morning was beginning to break now, not giving much light, but sufficient to show that it was a small house standing in a yard, which the sense of smell, rather than sight, at once told to be a tanyard.

There was a gate in the wall, which was unfastened, for it yielded easily when one of the men got down from the cart and pushed it; he then led the horse and cart in, and closed the gate after them, and then knocked at the door of the house with his hand. In a minute or two a man's head appeared at an upper window.

"Is it you, boys?" he asked.

"All right, Parker; make haste and come down as quickly as you can."

The door was soon opened, and a man came out—a big man, with a not dishonest face, respectably dressed, and evidently the master of the place.

"So you are come back?" he said. "I don't want to ask any questions, but have you done well?"

"No," was the answer; "as bad as bad can be. Our mate has got hurt—badly hurt, too."

"Where is he?"

"In the cart."

The man gave a long whistle.

"The devil he is! This is a pretty kettle of fish, upon my word. What is to be done?"

"He must be left here, Parker,—that's the long and short of it. There is not the least fear of his being traced here; we have never seen a soul since we left Canterbury."

"I don't suppose there is much fear," the man said gruffly; "but if he should be, I am done for."

"Not a bit of it, Parker; you have only to show the receipt we gave you, and stick to the story we agreed upon, and which happens to be true. Three men called upon you, and said that they wanted to hire a light cart for a day, and that they heard you let one out sometimes. You told them that as you did not know them, you could not trust the horse with strangers, and so they left thirty-five pounds in your hands as security,—that they brought back the cart in the morning, and said one of their number had fallen out and got hurt, and that you agreed to let him stay for a day or so till he got well; and that you did not find, till the other two men had left, that the one who remained had been wounded by a bullet."

Here a slight groan from the cart called their attention to it.

"But what on earth am I to do with him?"

"Put him up in one of the garrets. You don't keep a servant; there will be no one to know anything about it; and as for the pay, there is twenty-five pounds left in your hands, after taking the ten pounds for the hire of the trap—that will be enough for you, won't it?"

"Aye, aye," the man said. "I am not thinking of the money. I would not do it for ten times the money if I had the choice; as I have not, I would do it whether I am paid or not. The first thing is to get him upstairs."

Accordingly the three men lifted him out of the cart, and carried him as carefully as they could upstairs, and laid him on a bed. The tanner then summoned his wife, a respectable-looking woman, who was horrified at the sight of the pallid and nearly lifeless man upon the bed.

"Oh, William!" she said, bursting into tears, "and so it has come to this! Did I not agree to stop with you only on the condition that you had nothing more to do with this business beyond taking care of things, and keeping them hid till all search for them should be over? and did you not give me your solemn oath that you would do nothing else?"

"No more I have, Nancy," the man said; "no more I have, girl. I have had nothing to do with this job. I don't know what it is, or where it came off, no more than a babe, though no doubt we shall hear all about it soon enough. But here the man has come home in our cart, and here he must be, unless you want him put out into one of the sheds."

"No, no, William; we must do what we can for him, but that is little enough. He looks dying, and he ought to have a doctor. But what can we say to him?—how can we explain how he got hurt?—who can we trust? Oh, William, this is a bad business!" and the woman wrung her hands despairingly.

The wounded man made a slight movement, as if he would speak.

"What is it, mate?" the man called The Schoolmaster said, leaning over him.

The wounded man murmured, with a great effort, the words—

"Dr. Ashleigh, Canterbury."

"Dr. Ashleigh, of Canterbury," the tanner said, when the other repeated the words aloud. "I have heard of him as a clever man and a kind one; but how can we trust in him more than another?"

The wounded man tried to nod his head several times to express that he might be trusted.

"You are quite sure?" the tanner asked.

Strong and positive assent was again expressed.

"You know him?"

"Yes, yes."

"Will he come?"

"Yes," again.

"Well, it must be risked," the tanner said; "the man must not die like a dog here, with no one to see after him. Perhaps when the ball is out he may get round it yet. I will take my other horse, and ride over at once. I have been over there several times to buy bark, so there will be nothing out of the way in it. Don't be uneasy," he said, kindly, to the wounded man. "You will be as safe here as you would be in your own place, and I will get the doctor to you before night. Now, boys, you go and put on the changes you brought down from London with you, and get off by the next train. I will saddle up, and start at once. By the way, what name shall I say to the doctor?"

A sharp pang of pain passed over the wounded man's face.

"Come, Bill," The Schoolmaster said, with rough kindness, "we don't want to hear the mate's

name; so we will be off at once. Goodbye, mate. It is a bad job; but keep up your spirits, and you will soon get round again. You are a good plucked one, and that's all in your favour;" and the two men, with this parting, went off to re-disguise themselves previous to their starting for London.

The tanner again leant over the bed, and the wounded man said, with a great effort, "Tell him Robert, Sophy's husband, is dying, and wants to speak with him."

The tanner repeated the words over, to be sure he had them right; he then, assisted by his wife, cut the clothes from Robert, so as to move him as little as possible; they placed him carefully in the bed; and the tanner gave his wife instructions to give him a little weak brandy-and-water from time to time, and a few spoonsful of broth in the middle of the day, if he could take it. He then collected the clothes that he had taken off Robert Gregory, carried them downstairs, and burned them piece by piece in the kitchen fire.

After that he went out into the yard. It was not a large yard, but there were several pits with the skins lying in the tan, and there was a pile of oak bark in one corner. On one side of the yard was a long shed, in which some of the other processes were carried on; on the other side was the stable. The tanner next took out the straw from the cart, which was all saturated with blood, and brought some fresh straw from the stable; this he mixed with it, making it into a pile, and fetching a brand from the fire, set it alight, and watched it until it was entirely consumed; he then scattered the ashes over the yard. Next he carefully washed the cart itself, put fresh straw into the bottom, wheeled it into the shed, and cleaned down the horse which had been out all night; and then, having put everything straight, he saddled the other horse, mounted it, and started for Canterbury.

---

# CHAPTER XII.

## AFTER THE BATTLE.

How well I remember that morning, and the excitement into which we were all thrown by the terrible news. "Burglary at Harmer Place. Reported murder of the younger Miss Harmer." And yet with all the excitement people were hardly surprised. Harmer Place had got an evil name now; folks shook their heads and spoke almost low when they mentioned it. For the last twenty-five years a curse seemed to hang over it and its belongings. The two elder brothers drowned, and all their intentions and plans set aside, and the property devolving to the very person they were so determined to disinherit. Gerald Harmer killed, and all the melancholy circumstances attending his death. Herbert Harmer's adopted child's elopement, and his own sudden death, and all his intentions frustrated—as his brother's had been before—by the will being missing. This was, indeed, a long list of misfortunes, and up to this time it had seemed almost as if Providence had decreed that it should prove a fatal inheritance to the Protestant who had, contrary to the will of his dead brothers, taken possession of the old Roman Catholic property, and wrested it from the clutch of Mother Church. It had brought him no happiness; his son's death had destroyed all his hopes and plans for the future; that son's daughter, whom he had reared with so much kindness and care, had fled away from her home at night, and the news had dealt his deathblow; and then the missing will. It really seemed as if it was fated that the Romish Church should have her own again, and the elder brother's intention be carried out.

The general community had wondered over the chain of events, and told the tale to strangers as an extraordinary example of a series of unexpected events which had frustrated the best-laid plans and baffled all human calculation; while the few Catholics of the town instanced it as a manifest interposition of Providence on behalf of their Church. But now the tables seemed turned; and the "curse of Harmer Place," as it began to be called, appeared working anew against its Catholic possessors.

The news came to us while we were at breakfast, and we were all inexpressibly shocked. Papa at once ordered the carriage, and directly it came to the door he started for Harmer Place to inquire himself as to the truth of these dreadful reports. He returned in about an hour and a half, and brought quite a budget of news to us. When he arrived, he had sent up his name, but Miss Harmer sent down word that Doctors Sadman and Wilkinson were in attendance, and that therefore she would not trouble him to come in. Papa had felt a good deal hurt at the message, but he thought it was probably given because Miss Harmer, knowing how much they had injured him, was afraid that her sister might recognize him, and in the state she was in, reveal something about the will. However, just as the carriage was driving away, Dr. Sadman, who, from the window above, had seen papa drive up, came to the door and called after him. Papa stopped the carriage, got out, and went back to speak to him. Dr. Sadman particularly wished him to come up to give them the benefit of his opinion. Finding that Miss Harmer was not in the room, and that Angela was insensible, and not likely ever to recover consciousness, he had gone up with him. He had found her in a dying state, and he did not think it at all likely that she would live more than a few hours. She was apparently dying from the effect of the shock upon the system, and the terror and pain that she had undergone; for round one arm a piece of string was found which had cut completely into the flesh, probably for the purpose of extorting the supposed place of concealment of plate, valuables, or money. She had not apparently received any injury which in itself would have been sufficient to cause death, but she had had a very heavy fall upon the back

of her head which might have affected her brain. The symptoms, however, from which she was suffering were not exactly those which would have been caused by concussion of the brain; and although the fall had assisted to produce the evil, yet, on the whole, her death would be attributable rather to the mental shock, the terror and distress, than to actual bodily violence.

Papa had heard all the particulars of the night's events as far as Miss Harmer had told the other medical men. She had herself received a very heavy blow from some blunt instrument, either a short stick, or the but-end of a pistol, which had left a very severe wound on the forehead; from this she was suffering so much, that, much as she wished it, she was quite unable to sit up or take her place by her sister's side, but was in bed herself; still, although much shaken, there was nothing serious to be apprehended. Miss Harmer had fired a pistol at one of the assailants, and it was believed that she had wounded him, as a few spots of blood were visible on the floor and on the staircase. She had recognized none of the figures, of whom there were three; they were, she believed, all masked, but whether they were tall or short, or indeed about any particulars of them she was quite ignorant, for she had seen only her sister surrounded by them, had rushed forward, fired almost unconsciously, and been felled to the ground an instant afterwards, first seeing Angela's chair thrown backwards with her in it. The blow which she had received in the fall, and the laceration of the arm by the string, were the only signs of violence which could be found on Angela's person. The police were up there, but had at present discovered no clue whatever to guide them in their search; one of the men on duty in the town remembered that about three o'clock, a light cart, with two men in it, had driven in on that road, and another had seen such a cart go out through Westgate, but there was at present nothing to connect it with the affair. A detective had been telegraphed for at Miss Harmer's request, and was expected down in the afternoon.

Papa told all this in a very grave and serious way. I was very much shocked indeed, and for some time after he had done, we were all silent, and then Polly said, "Was anything stolen, papa?" She asked the question so earnestly that I looked up almost in surprise; with Miss Harmer dying, it seemed such a very indifferent matter whether the robbers had stolen anything or not, that it appeared to me an extraordinary question for Polly to ask so anxiously. But papa did not seem to think so, for he answered as seriously as she had spoken,—

"Only a watch and chain, and a diamond cross from the dressing-table."

"And was any attempt made to break open the plate-closets and places below?"

"No, my dear," papa said, "none at all."

They were both silent again, and I looked surprised from one to the other. What could this question of a few things matter, when a woman we had known so long was dying? And yet Polly and papa evidently thought it did, and that it mattered very much too, for they looked very meaningly at each other.

"I don't understand you," I said; "you are laying so much stress upon what can be of no consequence to people of their wealth; and you both, by your looks, seem to think it really a matter of consequence."

Polly and papa were still silent. "What is it, papa?" I said wearily; "I am stronger now, and I think it would take a great deal to affect me much,—nothing that I could be told here certainly. Please tell me what you mean, for although I really do not see how this robbery at Miss Harmer's can be more serious than it seems, for that is bad enough, still I worry myself thinking about it."

"The idea, my dear Agnes," papa said very gravely, "which has struck me, and which I have been thinking over ever since I left Harmer Place, and which I see has also occurred to Polly, is that this is no robbery at all; that is, that robbery was no part of the original scheme. I am very much afraid that it is an effort on the part of Robert Gregory to get possession of the will."

I had said that I should not be shocked, but I was, terribly—more than I had believed I could be by anything not connected with Percy.

"Why, papa," I asked presently, "what makes you think such a dreadful thing?"

"The whole proceedings of these men, my dear—so different from what might be expected of them. Ordinary burglars, on entering a house, would have proceeded at once to the pantry and plate-room, forced the doors, and stripped them of their contents, and would have done this in the most noiseless manner possible, to avoid disturbing any one in the house. These men, on the contrary, never seem to have gone near these places—at any rate there are no signs of their having attempted to force them; they appear to have gone straight to the bedroom of the younger and weaker of the sisters, to have seized, gagged her, and cruelly tortured her to make her reveal the hiding-place—of what? Surely not of the plate; they might with a little search have found that for themselves. Not of money or jewellery: there was hardly likely to have been much in the house, assuredly nothing which Angela Harmer would not at once have given up rather than endure the pain she must have suffered. What then could they have wanted? To my mind, unquestionably, the will; and as no one but you and Harry are interested in its discovery, with the exception of Robert Gregory, I fear there is no doubt of his being the author of this scheme, and indeed that he was personally engaged in it."

It was some time before I continued the conversation: I was sick and faint at the news. The idea of Sophy, whom I had known and liked so well, being the wife of a man who had committed

burglary, if not murder, was too shocking, and it was some time before I recovered myself.

Polly spoke next: "The only thing, papa, is, why should Angela Harmer—who so nearly revealed where the will was to me—so obstinately refuse to do so even under such terrible pain and terror?"

"My dear, when you saw her, you acted upon her feelings of compassion for Agnes here, and for a time shook her rooted faith that she was acting rightly. In this case, there was nothing to act upon her conviction; she felt no doubt, while refusing to betray where the will was hidden, that she was suffering as a martyr for the good of her Church, and with a martyr's strength and firmness she underwent what was inflicted upon her. I have no doubt that this idea will occur to Miss Harmer as it has done to us, and in that case there is little doubt that Robert Gregory will be speedily arrested; for as I hear he is a well-known betting man in London, the police will be pretty certain to find him. And the last evil arising from it is that Miss Harmer will, undoubtedly, in that case destroy the will. And now, my dear, take a glass of wine, and then lie down upon the sofa till dinnertime; get to sleep if you can, and do not worry yourself about it. As to the will, we have already given up all hopes of ever finding it, so that it will make no difference now, whether it is destroyed or not. Polly, you see that Agnes does as I order her. We must run no risks of her being laid up again."

At about half-past eleven, papa was told that a man wished to speak to him, and the tanner of Rochester was shown in.

"I am speaking to Dr. Ashleigh?"

Papa bowed.

"I am not come to consult you about myself, sir, but about some one else."

"It is of no use describing his symptoms to me," the doctor said, "I cannot prescribe unless I see the patient himself."

"I do not wish you to do so, sir, but it is a very peculiar business, and I hardly know how to begin. The person who sent me, told me that you might be implicitly trusted."

"I hope so, sir!" Dr. Ashleigh said haughtily; "but as I am not fond of secrets or mysteries, I would rather you went to some other medical man. Good morning!"

The man made no motion to go.

"No offence is intended, doctor; but when the safety of three or four men, including perhaps myself, is concerned, one cannot be too careful. At any rate I will give you my message, and if after that you don't come, why I shall have had a ride of nigh thirty miles here, and as much back, for nothing. The words of my message are, 'Sophy's husband, Robert, is dying, and begs you to go and see him.'"

Papa had listened to the first part of the man's speech with evident impatience, but when the message came, his face changed altogether.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "then my suspicions are correct. Unfortunate man! He is dying of a pistol wound, is he not?"

"Something like it," the man answered. "Will you come, sir?"

"Come? Of course I will. I would go to any man to whom my aid could be useful, and to me it is a matter of no consequence whether he is a good or a bad one; in any case I will for Sophy's sake do what I can for her husband, bad as I am afraid he is. And you?" and the doctor shrunk back from the man; "What have you to do with him?"

"Nothing, I am glad to say," the man answered. "Till I got into the town I did not know where or what the job was; but from what every one is talking about at the place where I put up my horse, I am afraid I do know now, and a shocking bad affair it seems; although if what I hear of it be true, I can't make head or tail of what they were up to. Two of the men were at least too old hands to have gone on in the way they did. There is something beyond what one sees."

"You are right!" Dr. Ashleigh said; "they never went for plunder at all. I can guess very well what they did go for, but that is of no consequence now. How, then, are you concerned in the affair?"

"They came to me and hired my horse and cart. I asked no questions, but perhaps had my own thoughts what they were up to; but that was no business of mine. Well, sir, this morning they came back with a dying man in the cart, and I had nothing for it but to take him in."

"Where is he hurt?" the doctor asked.

"Right in the side, just above the hip. I am afraid it is all up with him; the long journey, and the loss of blood, have pretty well done for any chance he might have had. Still we could not let him die like a dog, and he told us he was sure you would come."

The doctor nodded. "How had I better get over there?"

"I looked at the train book, when I went in to get a glass of beer after putting up my horse, and I see there is a train for London at one o'clock which gets there about four; and then you could go down by the Rochester train, and get there between six and seven."

"The very thing!" papa said. "For it is very probable that suspicion will fall upon this man; and as I am known to be, in a certain sort of way, likely to go to him in case he were hurt, it would be sure to attract notice, and might lead to his being traced, were I to take my carriage over as far as Rochester. I am afraid by what you say that it will be of no use, but I will bring my instruments with me: I practised as a surgeon for some years as a young man. How shall I find the place?"

"I will meet you at the station, sir. I shall give my horse another two hours' rest, and shall then get over there easily by six o'clock."

After a brief consultation of a time-table to see the exact hour at which the first train from London, which papa could catch, would reach Rochester, the tanner took his leave. And papa packed up such things as he would require, and then came into the dining-room—where I had gone to sleep on the sofa—and called Polly out. He then shortly told her what had happened, and enjoined her on no account to tell me, but to say only when I woke that he had been sent for into the country, and that it was a case which would keep him all night. He also left a short note, saying that he should be detained another night, for her to give to me the next evening should he not return; and he promised that if it should occur that his absence was still further prolonged, he would himself write to me to explain it in some way. These plans were carried out, and I had not the least suspicion at the time that papa's absence was caused by anything unusual; indeed it was some months afterwards before I heard the truth of the matter.

When Dr. Ashleigh got down to Rochester, at a quarter past six, he found the tanner waiting for him, according to agreement.

"How is he now?" he asked.

"Very bad, sir! Going fast, I should say."

They went out of the station, and through the town, and then out towards the country.

When the houses became fewer, and there was no one to overhear them, the doctor said, "You tell me that three men hired a cart of you: I suppose you knew them before?"

"The other two I knew before, but not this one."

"You live here, then?"

"Yes, sir; I have a small tanyard. The truth is, sir, my father was a tanner down in Essex. He's dead long since. As a boy, I never took to the business, but was fonder of going about shooting,—yes, and sometimes poaching. At last I married a farmer's daughter near, and was pretty steady for a bit; still, sometimes I would go out with my old mates, and once our party fell in with the gamekeepers. Some one fired a gun, and then we had a regular fight, and there were some bad hurts given on both sides. We got off then; but some of us were known, and so I went straight up to London,—and there, sir, I met the men who were here to-day, and a good many others like them, and got my living as I best could. At last my wife, who had joined me in London, got news that some relative had died and left her a little money. So she persuaded me to give it all up; and as we heard of this little place being for sale, we bought it and settled down here—that's three years ago. But I have never been able quite to get rid of my old work. They knew where I was, and threatened, if I did not help them, they would peach on me: so I agreed that I would hide anything down here for which the scent was too hot in London. Of course they pay me for it. But I mean to give it up; this will be a good excuse, as it is a terrible risk. Besides, they have not sent me down many things lately, so I expect they have found another place more handy. At any rate, I mean to give it up now."

"Does your tanyard pay?"

"Just about pays, sir. You see I do most of the work myself, and only have a man or two in now and then, as I dared not trust any one: but I could do very well with it. I have a good bit of money—some my wife's, and some that I have saved; but I did not dare to extend the place before for fear that I might get seized at any time. But I have to-day made up my mind that I will set to work at it on a better scale, and cut the other work altogether. Here we are, sir; through this gate."

The door was opened by the tanner's wife.

"Thank God you are here, sir! I was afraid he would not last till you came."

The doctor followed her upstairs to the wounded man's bedside. He would not have known him again. There was not a vestige of colour now in his face. His whole complexion was of a ghastly ashen hue, his cheeks had shrunk and fallen in, deep lead-coloured rings surrounded his eyes, and his lips were pinched and bloodless, and drawn back, showing the regular teeth between them. His hands, which lay outside the coverlid, were bloodless and thin, and the nails were a deep blue. A slight movement of his eyes, and an occasional twitching of his fingers, were the only signs of life which remained. Dr. Ashleigh shook his head, he could be of no use here. Probably had he even seen him immediately after the wound was given, he could have done but little; now he was beyond all earthly skill. Dr. Ashleigh took his hand in his own, and felt the pulse, which beat so lightly and flickeringly that its action could hardly be perceived. He looked for a moment to see where the ball had entered, not that it mattered much now; and then shook his head, and turned to the others who were standing by.

"I am glad I came over," he said; "it is a satisfaction; but I can do nothing for him now—he is

sinking fast. I do not think he will live another hour."

In less than an hour the change came: for a moment the doctor thought the eyes expressed recognition; the lips moved, and the name of Sophy was breathed out; and then the breath came fainter and at longer intervals, the fingers twitched no more, the fluttering pulse ceased to beat. Robert Gregory was dead.

Dr. Ashleigh went downstairs with the tanner and his wife, and asked them what they intended to do about the body.

"I am thinking, sir, of putting some tramp's clothes on him, and laying him out on some straw in one of the sheds, as if he had died there. Then I shall go to the parish medical officer, whom I know something of, and say that a tramp I gave leave to sleep for a night in my shed is dead; that he gave me a pound he had in his pocket to take care of for him, and that I will put what may be necessary to it in order that he may be buried without coming upon the parish. I have no doubt that he will give me the necessary certificate without any trouble. The most he will do will be to send down his assistant; and in that dark shed, he is not likely, with the minute's inspection he will give, to see anything out of the ordinary way. Should the worst come to the worst, which is not likely, I must make the best story out of it I can; if it come to the worst of all——"

"Then you must say I was present at his death, and I will come forward to clear you. But of course I should not wish it to be known I was here, if it can possibly be avoided; both because his name would then come out—which would be very painful for others—and for other reasons which I cannot explain. Here is some money for the necessary expenses."

"No, sir," the man said, drawing back, "I have been very well paid, indeed. What shall I have put on the grave?"

"Merely R. G., aged thirty. If at any time his friends choose to put up a headstone with more upon it, they can do so; but that will be sufficient to point out the place. And now goodbye, my friend, do as you have told me you intend to do, and you will be far happier, as well as your wife."

"I mean to, sir; I will never touch a dishonest penny again. And now, sir, I will just walk with you far enough to put you in the straight road for the train."

And so the doctor went back to London, getting there at about eleven o'clock. He did not hear from the tanner for some time, but about three months afterwards met him in Canterbury, to which town he had come over to buy some bark. The man then said that he had quite given up the receiver business, and become an honest man; that he had enlarged his place, and now employed three or four men regularly, and was doing very well. He said, too, that the funeral of Robert Gregory had passed off without any difficulty, for that the parish officer had, as he anticipated, given him a certificate of the death without taking the trouble of going to see the body.

---

# CHAPTER XIII.

## A YOUNG WIDOW.

The next morning Dr. Ashleigh started from his hotel after breakfast to see Sophy Gregory. He shrank from what he had to do, for he knew what a terrible shock it must be to her, and he remembered how ill she had been, and how nearly she had gone out of her mind a year before, under the blow of the news of Mr. Harmer's sudden death. But there was no help for it: it was evident that she must be told. He knew where she lived, as letters had been exchanged several times, up to the last, which had conveyed the news of the failure of the attempt to find the will in the secret chamber. Of course, it was possible that they might have since changed their abode; but if so, the people at their last lodgings would be certain to know their present address. However, this doubt was at once removed by the reply to his question, "Is Mrs. Gregory in?"

"Yes, sir, but she is in bed."

"In bed!" the doctor said, rather surprised. "Is she not well?"

"Don't you know, sir, she had a little baby last week?"

"God bless me!" was all the doctor could say; for Sophy had not in her last letter, which, indeed, had been written some time before, made any mention of her expecting such a thing. "Will you be good enough to tell her that Dr. Ashleigh is here, and ask her if she will see him; and do not mention that I did not know of her confinement."

The doctor was shown into the little parlour, where he sat down while Mrs. Billow went in to tell Sophy that he was there. As he looked round on the pictures which he remembered hanging in such a different room, he wondered to himself whether the advent of this little child, who was fatherless now, was for the better or no; and he came to the conclusion that it was. Sophy would have two mouths to feed instead of one, but it would be surely a comfort to her—something to cling to and love, under this terrible blow which he had to give her.

In about five minutes Mrs. Billow came in, and said that Mrs. Gregory was ready to see him now.

"She is rather low to-day, sir," she said, "for Mr. Gregory went away the day before yesterday, and said he should be back yesterday; but he has not come back, and Mrs. Gregory is fretting like about it."

Dr. Ashleigh went into the little room where Sophy was. She was sitting up in bed, in a white wrapper, and her baby was asleep beside her. She looked, Dr. Ashleigh thought, years older than when he had seen her fifteen months before. She had a worn look, although the flush of pleasure and surprise which his coming had called up in her cheek made her quite pretty for the moment.

"Oh, Dr. Ashleigh," she said, "how kind of you to come and see me! how very kind! I suppose you had heard of my confinement. Is it not a fine little fellow?" and she uncovered the baby's face, that the doctor might see it. "Robert did not tell me that he had written to you. I suppose he wanted to surprise me. I am so sorry he is away: he is not often away, Dr. Ashleigh—very, very seldom—and then always on business. He is very kind to me."

The doctor was greatly touched, accustomed as he was, and as all medical men must be, to scenes of pain and grief; yet there was something very touching in her pleading now for her husband, for whose sake she had gone through so much, and who was now lying dead, although she knew it not. He could hardly command his voice to speak steadily, as he answered,—

"I am very glad to see you again, Sophy, and I came up specially to do so; but I did not know till I came to the door that you were confined, or were even expecting it; but I am very glad, for your sake, that it is so, and that you have got over it so well."

Dr. Ashleigh spoke very kindly, but Sophy at once detected a certain gravity in his manner.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked at once.

Dr. Ashleigh hardly knew what answer to make, and hesitated for a moment whether it would not be better to defer the communication of the fatal intelligence for a few days; but the thought of the anxiety Sophy would suffer from Robert's continued and unexplained silence, decided him; for he thought she would probably pine and fret so much, that in a short time she would be in a state even less fitted to stand the blow than she was at present.

"My dear Sophy," he said, sitting down upon the bed, and taking her hand in his, "since I last saw you, things have greatly changed with us all. With you I need not say how much—with us also greatly."

"I am so sorry——" Sophy began, as if about to lament the share she had had in all this.

"My dear Sophy, we do not blame you. That was all over long ago; nor could you, at any rate, have possibly foreseen that my children could have been injured by anything you might have done to displease Mr. Harmer. Humanly speaking, the contrary effect might have been anticipated. I only say that great changes have taken place. Your little friend Polly has grown into a very dear, lovable, clever woman; while Agnes has suffered very much. Her engagement with Mr. Desborough has been broken off, and she has been very ill. However, by God's mercy, she has been spared to us, but she is still in a sadly weak state."

"But there is something else, doctor—is there not?—some new misfortune? It cannot be about Robert?" she said, anxiously; "you could not have heard anything of him?"

Dr. Ashleigh was silent.

"It is, then! Oh, tell me what it is!"

"My dear Sophy, you have judged rightly. I do come to tell you about Robert, but you must be calm and collected. Remember that any excitement on your part now would be most injurious to your child—remember that any illness on your part means death on his."

Sophy, with a great effort, controlled herself, and sat very quiet. The colour had faded from her cheeks now, and the marks of care seemed to come back again very plain and deep; then, after waiting a minute or two, until she felt herself quite quiet, she laid one hand on the cheek of her sleeping baby, and looked up appealingly into Dr. Ashleigh's face.

"My dear Sophy, your husband has met with an accident, and is seriously injured."

Sophy's cheeks were as white, now, as the dress she wore; she spoke not, although her lips were parted, but her eyes—at all times large, and now looking unnaturally so from the thinness of her cheeks—begged for more news.

"I'm afraid he is very ill," the doctor said.

"I must go to him!" she panted out; "I must go to him!" and she made an effort to rise.

"You cannot," Dr. Ashleigh said; "you cannot; it would kill you. Bear it bravely, Sophy; keep quiet, my child, for your own sake and your baby's."

Again Sophy's hand went back to the infant's face, from which in her effort to rise she had for a moment withdrawn it, and rested on the soft unconscious cheek, but she never took her eyes from the doctor's face. At last she said, in a strange far-off sort of voice,—

"Tell me the worst—Is he dead?"

She read the answer in his face, and gave a low short cry; and then was silent, but her eyes no longer looked at him, but gazed with a blank horror into the distance, as if they sought to penetrate all obstacles, and to seek her dead husband.

"Comfort yourself, my poor child," Dr. Ashleigh said tenderly; "God has stricken you grievously, but he has given you your child to love."

Sophy made no answer; she neither heard nor saw him, but sat rigid and stiff, the picture of mute despair. Two or three times the doctor spoke to her, but nothing betokened that she heard him. He raised her hand, which was laying motionless in his; he let it go, and it fell lifelessly on the bed again. He began to be seriously alarmed—he feared that she would awaken from this state with a succession of wild shrieks, and then a series of fainting fits, the termination of which in her condition would probably be death. In the hopes of acting upon her newborn feelings of maternity, he took the child up, and placed it against her, but the arms made no movement to enclose or support it; she showed no sign of consciousness of what he was doing. Then he slightly pinched the child's arm, and it woke with a loud wailing cry. In an instant a change passed over the rigid face; a human light came into the stony fixed eyes; and with a little cry, and a quick convulsive movement, she clasped the child to her breast, leaned over it, and her tears rained down freely now, as she swayed herself to and fro, and hushed it to her bosom.

Dr. Ashleigh knew that the worst was over now, and for a time he let her grief have its way undisturbed; he then persuaded her to lie down, and, enfeebled as she was by her recent illness, in less than an hour she cried herself to sleep.

The doctor sat by her side until she awoke, which was not for some time, and when she did so she was calmer and more composed. He then talked to her very soothingly, but did not enter into any of the details of her husband's death, beyond the fact that it was the result of an accident, and that he had died at Rochester, and would be buried there; that he had sent for him, and that he had been with him to the end, and that her name had been the last word on his lips. The doctor told her he would return again in a few days to see her, and that she must not disquiet herself about the future, for that he would take care of her and her child as if they were his own.

Sophy answered dreamily, although gratefully, to all he said, but she was at present too much stunned by the blow to be capable of fixing her attention; indeed, she scarce understood his words. While Sophy was asleep, Dr. Ashleigh had gone out and told the news to Mrs. Billow; she was deeply concerned at it, although her regret was evidently more for Sophy's sake than for that of her husband. She readily promised to do all in her power to soothe and comfort Sophy, and said she was sure that as soon as she felt equal to it, one or other of her kind neighbours would be glad to come over and sit with her; and she promised that should Sophy be taken worse, she would immediately telegraph for Dr. Ashleigh.

The doctor stayed till late in the afternoon, and then drove round to Sophy's medical attendant to tell him that she had just received the news of her husband's death, and to bespeak his best care and attention on her behalf. He afterwards returned to the station, and reached home at nine o'clock. I was very pleased to see him back again, for it was not often that he was away so long as thirty hours; however, I did not ask any questions, and he did not volunteer, as he usually did, any account of his doings; and so I had no idea that he had been to more than an ordinary visit, demanding unusual time and attention; and, as I have before said, it was some months afterwards before I was told of Robert Gregory's death.

It was fortunate, as it turned out, that papa got back that evening, for while we were at breakfast next morning a servant brought over a letter from Miss Harmer. It was written on the previous evening, and said that as she had declined to see him on the day before when he had called, he might feel a difficulty in coming now to see her; but that she had a particular matter on which she was very anxious to speak to him.

I have forgotten to say that when papa came home the evening before, we had the news to give him, which indeed he had quite expected to hear, that Angela Harmer had died the previous evening.

Papa had a strong suspicion what it was that Miss Harmer wished to see him about. While the horses were being put into the carriage, he had a little consultation with Polly in his study, and they agreed that for Sophy's sake he should try to lull as far as possible any suspicions Miss Harmer might entertain of Robert's having had a part in the affair. Besides, it was quite certain that unless any suspicions which she might have were laid at rest, she would at last destroy the will,—although that was a very secondary matter now, as there did not seem the most remote probability of its ever coming to light, even if it should be in existence, for years. Papa then started for Harmer Place, and on arriving was shown at once into the drawing-room, orders evidently having been given to that effect; in a few minutes Miss Harmer joined him. Her forehead was bandaged up, and her general aspect was more stiff and forbidding than ever. After the first few remarks were over, she proceeded at once to the point.

"It would be a strange step to have taken, Dr. Ashleigh, in the position in which we stand to each other, for me to have asked you to have come over here, had I not had very powerful reasons for so doing. But it appears to me that I have, for I have very strong suspicions concerning the events which have taken place here in the last two days. Have you heard the particulars?"

"Yes, Miss Harmer; when I called here the day before yesterday, Dr. Sadman gave me the details of them, so far as he knew."

"Did you hear that these burglars—" and Miss Harmer strongly emphasized the word—"did not attempt to take anything downstairs?" The doctor bowed assent. "Did you hear that they tortured my sister to make her tell them something?"

"I did, Miss Harmer. I have before heard of people being threatened, or even absolutely tortured, to oblige them to tell where their valuables are concealed; but it is a very rare occurrence, and surprised me at the time, almost as much as it shocked me. As a general thing, burglars when they attempt a robbery, ascertain previously where the valuables are kept, and act accordingly. It is possible that in this case it was not so. These men may have been merely passing vagrants, or they may have been thieves from London, who may have heard that there was a very fine collection of plate here. Taking into consideration the lonely position of the place, and the fact that the only males in it are servants who sleep in a remote corner of the house, they may have thought that it would be at once quicker, and would save them the trouble of breaking open a number of doors in the search for the plate-closet, to come at once to the owners, whom, they imagined, would readily be frightened into revealing its exact whereabouts."

"Your supposition, Dr. Ashleigh, is nearly that of the detective who has been sent down here, and who, knowing nothing of my private affairs, could not without a clue come to any other conclusion. He says it was a strange and unusual, although not an unprecedented affair. This clue I have not yet given him, although I intend to do so upon leaving this room, as I have not the least doubt in my own mind that my suspicions are correct. My sister, Dr. Ashleigh, was not tortured to tell where any plate was hidden: she was treated as she was to make her divulge the supposed hiding-place of what—in spite of all we can say—it still appears that some of you persist in believing to be in existence,—I mean my late brother's will."

Dr. Ashleigh made a movement of astonishment.

"Yes, Dr. Ashleigh, I have no doubt that it was so. I need not say that I do not for a moment suspect you or yours of having the slightest knowledge or complicity in this villainous plot, to which my poor sister has fallen a victim; but there is another who is interested in this supposed will, and who to the murder of my brother has now added the murder of my poor sister. I mean Robert Gregory. Thank God, the law can and will avenge this murder, if it could not the other."

"Miss Harmer," papa said very quietly, "you have had much to agitate and trouble you, and I am not therefore surprised at your thus fixing upon him; indeed in the way you put it, it does seem reasonable; but I believe that you will regret your hastiness when I tell you that you are actually accusing a dead man."

"Dead!—Robert Gregory dead!" Miss Harmer exclaimed, greatly astonished; "I had no idea of that. How long has he been dead?"

"Only a short time," Dr. Ashleigh answered. "I am not surprised that you are ignorant of the fact, for it is hardly likely that Sophy would have written to tell you. This poor young widow was only confined last week. I had to go to town on business, after I left here the day before yesterday, and I called to see her and her child. She has been keeping herself, until she was confined, by giving lessons in music."

"Did you know of her husband's death before you saw her then?" Miss Harmer asked.

"Most assuredly I did," the doctor answered; "I heard of it at the time when he died. And now, Miss Harmer, I trust that I have quite dissipated your suspicions. Robert Gregory is dead, his wife is on a sick bed, and my children, you acknowledge, are very unlikely to have entered into a plot of this sort."

"Quite, Dr. Ashleigh; in fact it cannot be otherwise; and I am exceedingly glad that I spoke to you before putting the matter into the hands of the detective, for it would have perhaps put him off the right clue, and would have led to the discussion of very painful matters. About Sophy"—and here she hesitated—"Is she in very bad circumstances? Because, even looking at her in the way I do, and always shall do, as my brother's murderess, I should not like her to——"

"You need not be uneasy on that score Miss Harmer," papa said rather coldly, "I have already told Sophy that my house is a home for her and her child, whenever she may choose to come. Whether she will use it as such, I cannot say; but I think I can assert with certainty that she would rather lay her head in the streets than owe a shelter to your favour. Is there anything else you wish to ask me about, or in which I can be of any service to you?"

"Nothing, Dr. Ashleigh. I really feel much obliged to you for having set my mind at rest upon a point which has been troubling me much for the last three days. Indeed, by the information that this bad man has gone to his end, you have set me greatly at ease on my own account; for—believing as I did that he was the perpetrator of this dreadful deed—I should have never felt safe until he had met with his deserts at the hand of the law that some such murderous attack might not have been perpetrated upon me. I am, I believe, no coward; still, with the idea that it was my life or his in question, I should have offered a reward for his apprehension which would have set every policeman in England on the look-out for him. I am glad to hear that your daughter Agnes is better. Goodbye, Dr. Ashleigh; I am sorry that we cannot be friends, but at least we need not be enemies." She held out her hand to Dr. Ashleigh, which he took, and then retired, well pleased

that he had, without any actual sacrifice of the truth, been enabled to save Sophy, and perhaps some day Sophy's child, from the pain and shame of the exposure which must have followed, had not Miss Harmer's suspicions been averted.

On the following week papa again went up to London to see Sophy. He found her recovering from the blow; still pale and thin, but upon the whole as well as could have been expected. Papa again offered her a home with us, but she declined, gratefully but decidedly; she had, she said, even when it was supposed that she was an heiress, been looked down upon on account of the misfortune of her birth; and now, with the story of her elopement and Mr. Harmer's sudden death fresh on the memory, she would rather beg her bread in the streets than live there.

"Would she accept money for her present uses?"

Again she thanked papa, but declined. "She had," she said, "plenty of money; she had been putting by nearly four pounds a week for ten months, and was therefore provided for for a long time." All that she would promise at last was, that if she should ever be really in distress for money, she would not hesitate to write and apply to him for it. When this point had been discussed at length, Sophy insisted upon knowing all particulars of Robert's death, and papa—after in vain endeavouring to persuade her to be content with what she knew already—was obliged at last to tell her, softening all the worst points as much as he could; and saying only that Robert had gone at night with two men, in the hopes of frightening Angela Harmer into disclosing where the will was hidden; how they had been disturbed by Miss Harmer, who had fired a pistol, which had wounded Robert, and how he had been carried to Rochester to die. He told her, too—for he feared she might see it in the papers—that Angela Harmer had died the same evening from the fright, but he suppressed all mention of the cruelty or violence. He partly told her how Miss Harmer had entertained suspicions of the truth, and how he had, he believed, succeeded in laying them at rest, and that he felt sure that the subject would not be pursued further in that direction; still, for her sake and the child's, should any one, under any pretence or other, come and make inquiries as to the date of Robert's death, that she should mention that it took place a short time earlier than it really did.

Sophy heard the doctor through more tranquilly than he had expected. She asked a few questions here and there, but was very pale and composed. When he had quite done, she said,—

"You do not surprise me, Dr. Ashleigh. My husband has so frequently asked me questions about the positions of the different rooms, and has so often said that he would try for it some day, that when you came and told me that he was killed by accident, and did not say how, or when, or where, I guessed that it was somehow in trying to get the will. If you please, we will not say any more about it now; I want to think it all over, and my head aches sadly. I am much obliged to you for all your kindness."

And so Sophy held out her hand, and papa came away, still very uneasy about her, and repeating his former direction to Mrs. Billow to send for him at once in the event of Sophy being taken ill.

A week after, a letter came from Sophy to me. It began by again thanking papa for his kindness to her, but saying that she was determined, if possible, to earn a living for herself and child; should she, however, from illness or other cause, fail in the attempt, she would then, for her child's sake, accept his kindness. The letter went on—

> "My child will be one chief object of my life; and I have another, in the success of which he will be interested. I am determined, next to my child, to devote my life to finding the stolen will. You have tried, and failed. Robert tried, and laid down his life in the attempt. I alone, by whose conduct the will was lost, have not tried; but I will do so; it shall be the purpose of my life. Every thought and energy shall be given to it, for the sake of my child, and of you who have innocently been punished for my fault. I am not going to act now; I know it would be useless; but some day—it may be years on—some day I will try, and when I do I will succeed. Do not seek to dissuade me from this; my determination is irrevocable."

We did write, and tried to argue with her. She answered briefly, that nothing would alter her resolve. From time to time we exchanged letters, but at longer intervals, until at last she did not answer one of mine, and from that time years past before I again heard of Sophy Gregory.

## END OF VOL. II.

this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

## Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

## Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

## Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the

solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

## Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.