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(of 3), by Susanna Moodie**

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VOLUME 3 (OF 3) ***

THE WORLD BEFORE THEM.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. MOODIE,

AUTHOR OF "ROUGHING IT IN THE BUSH."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.	Mrs. Gilbert Rushmere.	1
CHAPTER II.	How People Are Taught To Hate One Another.	17
CHAPTER III.	A Dead Dog.	33
CHAPTER IV.	Death In Another Shape.	56
CHAPTER V.	The False Accusation.	85
CHAPTER VI.	A Proposal.	106

CHAPTER VII.	A Confession.	129
CHAPTER VIII.	Mr. Fitzmorris Reads A Temperance Lecture.	164
CHAPTER IX.	The Old Man In Prison.	191
CHAPTER X.	A Long Chapter.	221
CHAPTER XI.	A Painful Recognition.	267
CHAPTER XII.	In Conclusion.	297

THE WORLD BEFORE THEM.

CHAPTER I.

[Pg 1]

MRS. GILBERT RUSHMERE.

The dinner was so well cooked, and so nicely served, that in spite of the unusual hour, Mrs. Rowly and her daughter made a very hearty meal.

Mrs. Rushmere's easy chair had been drawn to the head of the table, and Dorothy sat beside her and carved, Gilbert being unable at present to cut his own food. Dorothy longed to do it for him, when she observed how unwillingly his wife performed this necessary service.

"I am a great trouble to you, Sophy," he said; "but directly my arm is healed, I shall soon learn to help myself, as I have seen others do, who had met with the same misfortune."

[Pg 2]

"It is a good thing to have a wife to help you," suggested Mrs. Rowly.

"Yes, but it makes a fellow feel so dependent. He has to submit through sheer necessity to petticoat government."

"A' don't think that even one arm would make me do that," said Rushmere, "tho' I believe a' had the best wife in Christendom."

Mrs. Rushmere laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh, Lawrence, men be often under their wives' government, an' as ignorant of the fact as babies."

"You speak, I suppose, from experience," said Mrs. Gilbert, in her gentle low voice. "I should have thought the old gentleman a very difficult person for any wife to manage. I find Gilbert a hard case, in spite of his one arm."

[Pg 3]

"There's only one way to rule me, and that's by kindness," returned Gilbert.

Without meaning it, perhaps, his voice assumed a serious tone, almost amounting to sadness. He looked up, and his eyes and Dorothy's met; forcing an appearance of gaiety, he said, "What have you to say on the subject, Dorothy?"

"I never give an opinion on subjects I know nothing about. I am the only person in the room who cannot speak from experience. I should think your plan, however, must be the best."

"It is a pity you have not an opportunity of trying it, Miss, What's your name," said Mrs. Gilbert, "in which case you might perhaps find out that kindness can be thrown away."

"I expected to find Dorothy married when I came home," said Gilbert. "I thought it impossible that the young fellows in the neighbourhood could suffer her to remain single."

[Pg 4]

"She waited for you, Gilly, till she found it o' no use," cried Rushmere passing the bottle to his son.

"Oh that I had waited for her," was the thought that flashed through Gilbert's mind, charged with a deep regret.

"Father will have his joke," said Dorothy, colouring like a rose, "without thinking that it may be at the expense of another."

Mrs. Gilbert left off eating, and listened keenly to what was passing.

"Believe me, Gilbert, that there is no one present who congratulates you more sincerely on your marriage than I do."

"My dear child, will you help me up stairs?" said Mrs. Rushmere, apprehensive of mischief from her husband's blunt indiscretion and want of delicacy.

Gilbert rose, and with his left arm supported her to the foot of the stairs. "Oh, Dorothy," he said, "no wonder that you despise me. God only knows how I despise myself."

[Pg 5]

"It is too late to repent now, Gilbert. You must try like me to forget. You owe it to your wife, as much as to me."

She passed her arm round Mrs. Rushmere's waist, and left Gilbert at the foot of the stairs. He put the cuff of his empty sleeve to his eyes. Was it to wipe away a tear?

His wife looked daggers at him, when he returned to the table. His father proposed a walk round the farm after dinner, an invitation that Gilbert eagerly accepted, and the mother and daughter were left alone together.

"We shall have a nice time of it here," said Mrs Gilbert. "Let us go out, mother, and take a look round the premises. One might as well be in a prison as confined to this dark, dingy room."

[Pg 6]

"I can see no garden attached to the place," said Mrs. Rowly, looking out of the deep bay window which only opened upon the stone-paved court. "That girl who helped at dinner could tell us all about it."

"Don't call her, mamma, I have a perfect horror of that woman. I am certain that Gilbert and she have been very intimate. He never took his eyes off her during dinner."

"You need not be jealous of her, Sophy; I am certain that she cares nothing for him. You are foolish to trouble your head with any love affairs he had previous to his marriage."

"But I am sure he cares for her, and I don't mean to play second fiddle in his father's house to any one but Mrs. Rushmere. If this girl remains in the house I must quit it."

[Pg 7]

"And would you like to nurse the sick mother?"

"I hate sick people. Let her hire a nurse."

"She may not be able to do that. I see no indications of wealth here. A carpetless sanded floor, and furniture old enough to have come out of the ark. One room which serves for drawing-room, dining-room and parlour. I dare say these poor people have enough to do to keep themselves."

"But Gilbert said that his father was rich."

"Pshaw! You see now Gilbert has exaggerated matters."

"But what are we to do? I can't and won't live here."

"Till your debts are paid, you must."

"Oh, dear, I wish I were single again," and Mrs. Gilbert began to cry.

"Sophy, when you were single you were never contented, always lamenting that you were not married. No one ever asked you to marry until I gave out that you would have a fortune."

[Pg 8]

"And what have I gained by that lie?"

"A handsome, honest fellow, if you would only think so. He would not have been so badly off either, if he had not been forced to sell his commission to pay your debts. He had a fair chance too, of rising in the army, if he had not met with that misfortune. I think you very unreasonable to throw all the blame on him. What now remains for you to do, is to make yourself agreeable to his parents, and secure a home, such as it is, for us."

"I can't pretend to like that old man," and Sophy shrugged her shoulders.

"He's rather an amusing variety of the species," said Mrs. Rowly, "and the easiest person in the world to cajole. But once more, let me tell you, Mrs. Gilbert Rushmere, it is no use quarrelling with your bread and butter. Put on your hat, and let us take a turn in the open air, perhaps we may chance to meet the gentlemen."

[Pg 9]

And now they are gone to spy out the nakedness of the land we will tell our readers a little of their private history, and how the young soldier was deceived in his fortune-hunting speculation.

Mrs. Rowly was the widow of a custom-house officer, and for many years lived very comfortably, nay, affluently, upon the spoils which he gathered illegally in his office. Their only child, Sophia, though very far from pretty, was a genteel-looking girl, and educated at a fashionable boarding-school; but just as she arrived at womanhood, the father was detected in his unlawful pursuits, and so heavily fined, that it caused his utter ruin, and having incurred heavy debts to keep up an appearance beyond his station, he ended his days in prison, leaving his wife and daughter to shift for themselves in the best manner they could.

[Pg 10]

With the assistance of a brother, who was in the grocery line of business, and of whom they had always been ashamed in their more prosperous days, Mrs. Rowly set up a small boarding-house, in one of the little cross streets in the Minories, and just contrived to keep her head above water for several years, until Sophia was turned of seven-and-twenty. The young lady dressed and flirted, and tried her best to get a husband, but all her endeavours proved futile.

She was ambitious, too, of marrying a gentleman, and looked down with contempt upon shopkeepers' assistants, clerks in lawyers' offices, and mechanics, until the time had nearly slipped by when she could hope, without fortune, to marry at all.

It was then that her mother, finding herself deeply involved, circulated the report in her neighbourhood, that Sophy had been left six thousand pounds on the death of a cousin, a consumptive boy, who could not reasonably be expected to live many months.

[Pg 11]

The bait took. Miss Rowly was invited to houses she never before had hoped to enter; and at a ball, given by the mother of an officer in Gilbert's regiment, she met the handsome young man, just raised to the rank of a subaltern, who had so gallantly saved the life of Captain Fitzmorris.

Though still rather countrified in his appearance, she was instantly smitten by his frank, free manners, and his fine manly figure. Some foolish fellow, in the shape of a friend, whispered in Gilbert's ear that the young lady would have a fortune. In a rash moment, when a little heated by wine, and won by her soft flatteries, he made her an offer of marriage. This was instantly accepted, particularly as Gilbert, boy-like, had boasted of his old ancestral home, and the noble family from which he was descended. And besides all this, he was an officer in the army, and likely to rise in his profession, under the patronage of a wealthy nobleman like Lord Wilton. Miss Rowly was charmed with her future prospects. [Pg 12]

Gilbert proposed to take her down to Hadstone as his wife, directly the campaign was over. But his charming Sophia was too fearful of losing him during that indefinite period, and got her mother to propose to him that they should be married before he left for Spain, and that she would accompany him abroad.

They were married; but the affectionate bride, when the time for his departure drew nigh, forgot this part of her promise, and preferred staying at home with her mother, to encountering all the hardships attendant upon a soldier's wife, whose husband was on actual service in a foreign land.

During his absence, Mrs. Gilbert and her mother enjoyed every comfort on the credit of their supposed fortune; and when he returned sick and disabled from Spain, he had not been many days at Mrs. Rowly's before he was arrested for the debts his wife had contracted since their marriage. [Pg 13]

It was then that Gilbert discovered what a dupe he had been; that the woman he had taken to his bosom was a miserable deceiver; and he had to sell his commission to avoid the horrors of a prison.

After much recrimination and mutual upbraidings on the part of Gilbert and his wife, they at last came to the conclusion that it was useless to quarrel over what could no longer be remedied; that it was far better to sit down calmly and consider what was to be done.

All Mrs. Rowly's furniture had been seized and sold for the benefit of her creditors, for she was as deeply involved as her daughter. [Pg 14]

"Why can't we go home to your father's?" asked Mrs. Rowly. "I am sure your parents will be glad to see you."

Gilbert had some doubts on that head. He knew how he had deserted them; and never having received a line from them, to assure him of their forgiveness, (though this had been his own fault, in omitting to tell them where and how to direct him,) he was sadly at a loss how to act.

And then he thought of Dorothy, and wondered if she were unmarried, and living still with the old people. If so, how should he be able to meet her, and introduce her to the cold selfish woman he had preferred to her? No, he could not, he dared not go back to Hadstone.

"Why don't you answer, Gilbert?" urged his wife. "What prevents you from going home?" [Pg 15]

"I parted with my father in anger. I am doubtful, for he is an obstinate man, whether he will be willing to receive us."

"Don't put him to the trial," said Mrs. Rowly. "Let Sophy write, and tell him we are coming, and start without giving him time to send a refusal. We must go somewhere; to remain here is impossible, for you cannot draw your pension for the next six months, and we cannot live upon air."

Gilbert was terribly perplexed. While pride forbade him to seek an asylum with his parents, necessity compelled him to do so, and though he now almost loathed both his wife and her mother, he was too manly to leave them in distress.

He therefore sold his watch, his sword and regimental suit, to procure money to prosecute their journey; and when he arrived at Hadstone, he had only a few shillings left in his purse.

The kind reception he met with cut him to the heart, and the sight of that beautiful girl, who might have been his, almost maddened him with grief and remorse. [Pg 16]

When he proposed that walk with his father, he fully intended to open his mind to him, and tell him how he was situated, but shame and pride kept him tongue tied. Besides, was it not his father's fault that he had not married the woman he loved; and could he expect an avaricious man to sympathize with him in the misery he endured, or feel for his present poverty and degradation. So he walked by his father's side over the old fields that had witnessed his labours with Dorothy, without saying a word upon the subject nearest his heart. It was with feelings of inward disgust that he saw his wife and her mother coming over the heath to meet them.

CHAPTER II.

HOW PEOPLE ARE TAUGHT TO HATE ONE ANOTHER.

Mrs. Rowly had been chiding her daughter for showing her temper before her husband's family, pointing out the imprudence of her conduct in such forcible language, that the young lady had promised to behave more cautiously for the future.

She greeted Mr. Rushmere with her blindest smile, and, slipping the little white hand within his arm, told him in her softest voice, "that he must teach her all about farming, as she did not know wheat from barley, or a pig from a calf."

[Pg 18]

"Lord bless your ignorance, my dear. In what part o' the world were you raised?"

"Oh, I'm a cockney, born within the sound of Bow Bells. What else can you expect of me? I never was out of London before. I am afraid I shall rival the renowned citizen, who immortalized himself by finding out that a cock neighed. I don't think however that I could be quite so foolish as that."

Old Rushmere was highly flattered by the attention paid to him by his daughter-in-law. He complimented her upon her sweet little hand and foot, and told her that he envied Gilbert his pretty wife.

Though, if the truth must be spoken, young Mrs. Rushmere had no beauty of which to boast, beyond a slight graceful figure, and the small hands and feet which had attracted the farmer's attention. Her face was something worse than plain. It was a cold, arrogant, deceitful face, with harsh, strongly marked features, and a pair of long narrow eyes, that never looked honestly or openly at any one, reminding you of some stealthy animal, ever on the watch for a deadly spring.

[Pg 19]

She loved to say things that she knew would annoy and irritate, in a cold-blooded contemptuous way, and under those half closed eyelids lurked any amount of malice and low cunning.

Though weak in intellect and very vain, she was as obstinate as a mule, and, though moving in a different position from Martha Wood, there was a great congeniality of disposition between them.

Sophia Rushmere was a petty tyrant. Martha Wood, though less cold and calculating than her mistress, knew how to rule over her, and make her a tool and a slave. The pair were well worthy of each other.

[Pg 20]

Mrs. Rushmere, though simple and natural as a child, had read Sophia's character at a glance. She looked in that dubious face, and felt that it was false. She listened to that low, soft studied voice, and was convinced that the owner could speak in far other and less musical tones, and she wondered how Gilbert could have taken this artificial woman in preference to her Dorothy, and the good mother pitied him from her very heart.

Mrs. Rowly, though sharp and angular, with a ridiculous assumption of consequence, was not so disagreeable as her daughter. She looked like a person who could speak her mind, and that in the coarsest and most decided manner, and carry her point against overwhelming odds, by sheer pretence and impudence, but she could not conceal, like Sophia, her real disposition. If she betrayed like Judas for money, it would not be with a kiss.

[Pg 21]

"What do you think of my poor Gilbert's wife?" said Mrs. Rushmere to Dorothy, that afternoon, as the latter sat beside her bed.

"Don't ask me, dear mother. I have no opinion to give."

"He is an unhappy man, Dorothy, as all men deserve to be, who sell themselves for money. He had better ha' died in yon battle, than tied himself to that woman."

Dorothy thought so too, but she gave no expression to her thoughts. She merely remarked, "that the marriage might turn out better than Mrs. Rushmere expected."

The meeting between Dorothy and her lover had been less painful than she had anticipated. She no longer regretted the separation which had occasioned her so much anguish, but fervently thanked God that his providence had so ordered it, and she knew from the deep sense of gratitude that overflowed her heart, that it was for the best; that Gilbert Rushmere, though greatly improved in his appearance and manners, was not the man to make her happy.

[Pg 22]

The enlargement of her own mind, and the society of intelligent people, had made her crave for something higher and better, mentally and morally, than he could ever bestow. She entertained for him much of the old sisterly affection which she felt for him when they were boy and girl, but nothing beyond.

She did not like his wife, but excused the hostility of her manner towards herself. If she had been made aware of the relation which once existed between her and Gilbert, she thought it perfectly natural. Placed in the same situation as Mrs. Gilbert, she might feel a little jealous of an old love too. In this opinion, Dorothy greatly underrated the high sense of moral rectitude which actuated her general conduct. Under the greatest provocation she would have despised herself for wantonly wounding the feelings of another.

[Pg 23]

She longed to leave the house, for she dreaded the insolence of Mrs. Gilbert and her mother; but Mrs. Rushmere had so pathetically entreated her to stay and nurse her, that she felt that it would be the height of ingratitude to refuse a last request made by a dying friend, and of one to whom

she owed so much.

She wanted to go and consult Mrs. Martin, who would point out the best course to pursue in avoiding unpleasant collisions with Gilbert's friends, but she was kept so fully employed, that no opportunity presented itself.

In the meanwhile, Martha Wood had not been idle in the kitchen; by the dint of cajoling and flattering Polly, she had wormed out of her some of the family secrets, which she lost no time in turning into capital. When called by her mistress to attend her to her chamber at night, she came with a face full of importance, as if she had something very particular to communicate. [Pg 24]

"Well, Martha, how have you got through the day?" cried Mrs. Gilbert, opening her eyes a little wider than usual, as her confidant approached to undress her.

"Oh, badly enough, ma'am; that Polly Welton is a horrid low creature, not above six months out of the workhouse."

"You ought to have a fellow feeling for her, Martha," said Mrs. Gilbert spitefully.

"I was not a workhouse bird, Mrs. Rushmere," returned Martha, swelling and puffing out her broad cheeks. "You know that well enough. My father was a gentleman, and I was brought up at a private institution, at his expense."

"You need not try to fool me about that, Martha. You have attempted often enough, but it won't go down. Your father might, or might not have been a gentleman. You were a natural child, and your mother a poor creature, who got her living on the streets. So no more of your fine airs to me. What have you been doing with yourself all day?" [Pg 25]

"Sitting in the kitchen nursing Jewel," said the girl, with a sulky scowl.

"You might have been doing something. Why did not you offer to help the girl wash the dishes?"

"When you are mistress here, I will do what you bid me. I have no call to wait upon them."

"But they will not keep you for nothing, Martha."

"I don't want them. If you are not satisfied, give me my release and let me go. I could soon get a better place."

"Nonsense! You must do as I bid you, and see that you help that girl Polly in her work to-morrow." [Pg 26]

"You would not wish me to help her, if you knew all the vile things she said of you," replied Martha, in an audible aside.

"Of me! What could she say of me? She knows nothing of me or my affairs."

"She did not say she did. But she said that you were old and ugly, and not to be compared with Miss Dolly. That you had not a single good feature in your face. What do you think of the picture?"

"The wretch! But how came she to say all this?"

"Just because I asked her who the plain dark girl was that Mrs. Rushmere called Dorothy. She fired up, like a vulgar vixen as she is, and defended her friend by abusing you. I thought we should have come from words to blows, for I could not sit by and hear my *own* mistress abused after that fashion. But if you wish me to help her of course I can." [Pg 27]

"I'll tell Gilbert. I'll complain to Mr. Rushmere," sobbed Sophia, crying for rage. "If he suffers me to be insulted by his servant I'll leave the house. I've no doubt that Dorothy is at the bottom of it all—who, and what is she?"

"Some child that Mrs. Rushmere adopted years ago. Polly told me, that it was for love of her that Mr. Gilbert ran away and listed for a soldier, because the old man would not give his consent, and this Dorothy refused to marry him."

Mrs. Gilbert's misery was now complete. She sat down in a chair, with her fair hair all loose about her shoulders, staring at the incendiary in a wild vacant manner. At this unfortunate moment, Gilbert entered the room. Hurrying up to his wife, he demanded the cause of her distress.

"Are you a man, Gilbert Rushmere?" she said, slowing rising and confronting him, "to allow your wife to be insulted by your father's menials?" [Pg 28]

"How, and in what manner, Sophy?" She repeated the tale of her wrongs as Martha had told them. Gilbert's eye flashed—he turned them angrily upon Martha, who was secretly enjoying the mischief she had made.

"Go to your bed, girl, and let me never hear any of this vile tattling again. It is such stories, carried from one to the other, that ruin the peace of families."

Martha knew that the arrows she had launched had struck home, and left the room without a word in her defence.

Gilbert turned sorrowfully to his wife, who was crying violently.

"Sophy, if you will encourage that girl in bringing you tales about other members of the family, how can we ever live in peace? You know the imperative necessity of curbing your temper, until I am able in some way to provide a living for you. Why will you frustrate all my plans for your comfort by this childish folly?"

[Pg 29]

"How dare you talk to me, sir, in that strain; when you had the dastardly cruelty of bringing me down here to live in the same house as your former mistress?" She rose and stood before him, with her hand raised in a menacing attitude, and a smile of scorn writhing her lip.

"Good heavens! Sophia, what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, sir. It is useless for you to deny facts so apparent. Will you have the assurance to say to me that you do not love this girl—this Dorothy Chance?"

"The love I *once felt for her*? Certainly not."

"The love you still feel for her?" demanded the angry wife.

"Sophia, I am a married man."

[Pg 30]

"Yes, sir, I know it to my cost. But that is no answer to my question. I despise the hypocritical evasion. You know in your heart that you prefer this woman to your wife."

"You will force me to do so, Sophia, if you go on at this unreasonable rate. You must be aware that Dorothy Chance was brought up with me under this roof, and it was natural that I should feel something more than brotherly love for a creature so beautiful and good."

"Stop! Hold your tongue. I won't hear another word," screamed Sophy. "Such a confession is enough to drive me mad."

"It has nothing to do with you, wife. All this is past and gone, and happened before ever I saw you. If my father would have given his consent to our marriage, you would never have been so unfortunate as to become my wife, and I should never have been tricked into the belief that you loved me, and were a woman of fortune." He laughed bitterly, for he saw that this latter observation had completely silenced his wife, who slowly and sullenly retreated towards the bed; and he continued:

[Pg 31]

"My love for Dorothy, at that time, was a species of madness. I loved her with all my heart and soul, with every faculty of mind and body. She was young, gay, and light-hearted, and, I thought, returned my passion very coldly. I was impatient of delay, and very jealous. I urged her to marry me without waiting for the old man's consent. She had promised him not to do so, and stood to her word, refusing my hand before his very face.

"My God! shall I ever forget the mortification and rage of that moment. I could have killed her. My red-hot love turned to ice. I left the house wishing never to see her face again, and, perhaps, had I known that she was still here, I never should have thrown myself in her way. Are you satisfied now, Sophia? I think you ought to be, after such a degrading confession."

[Pg 32]

His wife did not answer, though she heard every word. She had slipped into bed and pretended to be sound asleep.

CHAPTER III.

[Pg 33]

A DEAD DOG.

Before Gilbert went to sleep that night, he fully determined to tell his father the real state of his affairs, and throw himself and his family upon his charity, until something should enable him to get a decent living. The loss of his arm was a great drawback, he well knew; but he had the reputation of being an excellent practical farmer, which made him entertain strong hopes of being employed as a bailiff, or overseer, on some gentleman's estate.

He trusted that Lord Wilton would assist him in procuring such a situation, and, probably, would employ him on his own property, in return for the service he had rendered his son.

[Pg 34]

He knew that his father was a close calculator of domestic expenditure; that he would soon be tired of keeping such a large addition to his family, without receiving an equivalent from them in money or services. He might grumble now and then of having to board him and his wife gratis; but the additional expense of Mrs. Rowly and the servant, for any length of time, would make him outrageous.

In everything pertaining to household matters, Sophia was as ignorant as a child. She had been brought up to catch a rich husband, not to soil her pretty white hands with work, to spend her time before the glass in adorning her person, or to lie on a sofa reading novels. He had urged her, before leaving London, to part with Martha, but she obstinately refused to do so.

[Pg 35]

"The idea of waiting upon herself," she said, "was not to be tolerated for a moment. Martha's term of apprenticeship had not expired, and she was bound to keep her. And as to dear mamma, she must accompany them, for she had no money to procure a lodging elsewhere."

What was to be done with such impracticable people, was beyond Gilbert's power to devise. He turned and tossed all night, and the day broke and found him as undecided as ever.

In the morning he walked out after breakfast to the hay-field with his father, and had an excellent opportunity of getting the trouble that perplexed him off his mind, but his courage failed him altogether, and he put off the dreaded disclosure that he was utterly destitute from day to day.

[Pg 36]

His wife at last suggested that he had better tell his mother, and leave it to her to break the matter to Mr. Rushmere, entreating him, at the same time, to spare her in the relation as much as he possibly could.

Since the day of their arrival at Heath Farm, Mrs. Rushmere had rapidly declined, and was now entirely confined to her own room, which Dorothy never left, without it was to arrange with Polly the cooking and the necessary work of the day.

Gilbert generally went up to spend an hour with his mother during the absence of her kind nurse, and in one of these interviews, he informed her of his humiliating position, and implored her advice and assistance in his present emergency.

Mrs. Rushmere was greatly distressed by his communication. Simple and natural as a child herself, she possessed a great insight into character, and though she seldom saw either of the women with whom her son had unfortunately connected himself, she had read their characters, and foresaw, in case of her death, the miserable life that her dear old partner would lead with either of them as mistress of the house.

[Pg 37]

Dorothy, of course, would have to leave, directly she had followed her to the grave. She reproached herself for keeping the poor girl in her present disagreeable position, but Dorothy had promised her to put up with every insult and slight patiently for her sake, and Mrs. Rushmere rightly conjectured that the time of her emancipation was not far distant.

"Well, my poor son, I will speak to your father about this sad business. You must not be impatient, if he feels angry and resentful. I know how he rejoiced in the idea of your being a rich man. This will be a cruel disappointment to him."

[Pg 38]

"Oh, mother dear, it was his fault. Had he been only a little less avaricious, I might at this moment have been a happy man." He laid his head beside her on the pillow, and wept like a child.

That night, Mr. Rushmere was duly informed of the communication Gilbert had made to his mother. He had, however, carefully concealed the duplicity of his wife, with regard to the fortune, by saying that she had fully believed that she was to be heir to her uncle's property, and was as much disappointed as himself. Old Rushmere sat for some time beside his wife's bed astonished and almost stupefied.

"Oh, dang it, wife," he broke out at last, "this is a confounded bad business, and ruination to us all. To think that the boy should be sich a simple fool, to go an' marry a woman older nor himself without being sure o' the money. Sold his commission too, and to pay her debts—worse and worse—an' nothing but the pension for his wound to depend on to keep his wife an' mother from starving. Well, well, that ever Lawrence Rushmere should be father to such a simpleton."

[Pg 39]

"Lawrence," and Mrs. Rushmere took the large brown hand of her husband between her thin pale hands, "you must forgive him for my sake."

"Dang it, wife. How am I going to keep all this posse o' people. It's unreasonable, that it be; a' won't do it."

"He be your only son, Lawrence, all that will soon be left to you o' me."

"Oh, Mary, you are not going to leave me, not yet, not yet. A few more years and then we must both go. But oh, not yet, not yet, my dear, good wife. Get hearty and well, and old Larry will do all you require o' him." The stout old yeoman bent over the pillow, and kissed the pale meek face of his wife, and the tears from her gentle blue eyes.

[Pg 40]

"Well, Larry, dear, you must do this for me whiles I be living. Give your son an' his family a home, until such time as poor Gilly's arm's healed, an' he be able to help himself. You are not a poor man, husband, an' can spare this much for an only son. An' remember he might have done better if ye would only ha' let him."

"Aye, I'm sorry for that now. Doll would have made him a better wife than his butterfly o' a woman. If so be, I have to keep her, Gilly must set her to work, an' the old mother likewise. I'm not going to keep a house full o' sarvants to wait upon them."

"Neighbour Sly wants a girl, an' will take Polly off your hands, Lawrence, an' this Martha Wood can fill her place. But leave me Dorothy, my darling Dorothy, till I be gone. It won't be long."

[Pg 41]

On the whole, Rushmere behaved better than could be expected. At dinner, he told Gilbert that his mother had informed him of his troubles, and he was willing to take him as partner in the farm; he was to manage the concern and dispose of all the produce, sharing the returns equally with him.

Dorothy looked earnestly at the old man, when he made this proposal. She knew enough of human nature to feel convinced that it would never work well. That old Rushmere would never consent to act under the direction of his son, and that his labourers, who were very fond of him,

would never serve two masters. But her influence for good in that house was over. Advice or remonstrance with a man of Rushmere's obstinate character was alike vain.

Gilbert was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, which were echoed by the ladies.

[Pg 42]

"And now, my dear," said the old man, turning to Mrs. Gilbert, "I can't afford to keep idle folk. What can you do for a living; can you cook?"

"I never was brought up to kitchen work, father," returned Mrs. Gilbert, in a very bland voice, "but I can try."

"Dolly can teach you."

"I shan't trouble her," muttered the newly installed mistress of the house. "A woman of sense surely may acquire a knowledge of such trifling matters without any particular instructions."

"Ah, my dear, but it requires experience," said Rushmere. "It don't want a person to be able to read an' write, to brew good ale an' make sweet butter, an' bake light bread; but it do want practical knowledge o' such work, as Dorothy here can tell you. She be a first rate housekeeper."

[Pg 43]

"You need not refer me to Dorothy Chance, Mr. Rushmere, while my own mother is present. She always was considered a capital manager."

"I dessay, I dessay," quoth Rushmere, nodding pleasantly towards the lady in question. "Mrs. Rowly looks like a woman well acquainted with work, an' it would be strange if you could not manage the house an' dairy between you."

"I think, Mr. Rushmere, there will be no occasion to employ so many hands in the kitchen," said Mrs. Rowly, glancing significantly at Dorothy. "Surely my daughter and Martha, with the assistance I can give them, ought to be sufficient."

"Certainly, certainly," cried old Rushmere, "those be exactly my sentiments, ma'am. Too many cooks spoil the broth. Polly goes, when her month expires, to Mrs. Sly's; an' Dorothy, when my dear old wife——" The farmer stopped short. He could not finish the sentence.

[Pg 44]

"Cannot I nurse Mrs. Rushmere?" said Mrs. Rowly. "I have had a great deal of experience in that way."

"No doubt you could," said Rushmere. "Howsomever she won't suffer any one to help her but Dorothy."

"I shall leave you, father, the moment my services are no longer required," said Dorothy. "I have a good home and kind friends to go to. It is only on dear mother's account that I have remained so long. I shall gladly resign to Mrs. Gilbert my place in the house."

The next morning, on going into the kitchen, Dorothy found Mrs. Gilbert and her mother up to their eyes in business, examining the contents of cupboards and pantries, and making a great litter and confusion everywhere.

She was told when she offered her assistance in restoring the place to order, that her services were not required by Mrs. Gilbert, whom she must now consider as mistress of the house, that she must not presume to interfere with Martha Wood and her work, but confine herself entirely to Mrs. Rushmere's chamber.

[Pg 45]

And Mrs. Gilbert commenced her reign over Heath Farm, by treating Dorothy and Polly as creatures beneath her notice, and decidedly in the way, while she encouraged Martha in her mischievous tattling, until she set Polly and her by the ears together.

Old Rushmere grumbled over the badly cooked dinners, the heavy bread and sour butter, and blamed Dorothy for what certainly she could not help.

One morning Dorothy went down into the kitchen to prepare a little broth for the poor invalid. The fire was out, and everything in the greatest confusion. A greasy unwashed floor and dirty towels, and dusters scattered around on tables and chairs. It was impossible to get the least thing done without worry and difficulty.

[Pg 46]

"Polly," she said very gently, "while you remain here you should do your duty to your employers. Why is your kitchen so dirty, and your fire always out, when I want to cook broth or gruel for your poor sick mistress? Things should not be in this disgraceful condition, and you have Martha to help you."

"Martha help me. Lauk, Miss Dorothy, she be no help to a body, she make all the dirt and muddle she can. She do take my nice white dish keeler to wash her missus' dirty dawg. I can't prevent her. I says to her only yesterday, if a' do that agen, I'll tell Miss Dorothy. 'Go to the devil,' says she, 'with yer. Miss Dorothy she be no missus o' mine. Mrs. Gilbert's missus here now. I'd like to hear Doll Chance dare to set me to work.' My heart's a breakin' wi' her dirty ways and her saucy impertinence. I'm right glad I'm going to-morrow; the old house a'nt like it wor."

[Pg 47]

"But this don't excuse you, Polly, for letting the fire out."

"Mrs. Gilbert told me hersel to let the fire go down directly the breakfus wor over. 'Miss Dorothy wull want it,' says I, 'to make the old missus her broth.' 'Let her want,' says she, 'or make it hersel. I don't mean to attend to her wants, I can tell you.'"

"Alas, alas!" sighed Dorothy, "what a house of misrule. Poor old father, how will it be with him by and bye, when they begin to abuse their power so early?"

Like the sailors, she saw breakers ahead, but had no power to steer the vessel off the rocks.

"Missus Gilbert," continued Polly, glad of getting some one to whom she could tell her griefs, "is allers jawing me, for not doing the work. But while her fat lazy girl sits doing naught, but towzleing the dawg, I'm not a' goin to kill mysel wi' work." [Pg 48]

"Bear it patiently for a few hours, Polly. You will soon be free now. Run, there's a good girl to the woodstack, and bring some sticks to rekindle the fire."

In a few minutes, Polly rushed back to the kitchen, and flung an arm full of sticks down with a bang upon the hearth that could be heard all over the house, and holding up her hands cried out at the top of her voice. "A's been an' gone an' done it. I knew a' wud, directly a' got a chance."

"Done what?" demanded Dorothy, her cheeks blanching with terror.

"Ow'r Pincher ha' chawed up yon lump o' white wool."

"Killed Mrs. Gilbert's little poodle?"

"Ah, as dead as a door nail."

"I am sorry for it, very sorry. She will make an awful fuss about it, Polly. Did you see Pincher do it?" [Pg 49]

"No, but Martha says a' did it. She oughter to know. See, she be coming in, crying an' roaring as if it wor a dead child."

Martha ran into the kitchen carrying the dead dog in her arms, screaming and shouting in a state of great excitement.

"Oh the precious Jewel? the darling pet! What will my mistress say? How shall I tell her? Oh, oh, oh."

Hearing from the next room the outcries of her servant, Mrs. Gilbert hurried in and demanded what all the noise was about.

"Oh, ma'am, just look here at your beautiful dog," sobbed Martha, holding up the little creature, from whose throat the blood was dripping all over the floor.

"Who has dared to ill use my dog?" cried Sophy Rushmere, not yet aware he was dead, and she turned and glared at Polly with the ferocity of a tigress. [Pg 50]

"Oh, he is dead!" screamed Martha, "stone dead."

"Who killed him?"

"The horrid brute Pincher."

"Call Mr. Gilbert to shoot the monster."

"A' can't do it, ma'am," said Polly, very innocently. "A' ha' got but one arm."

"Hold your tongue you impudent jade. I have no doubt you set the other dog to worry him." Mrs. Gilbert took the dead dog in her arms and cried aloud.

Dorothy went up to her, and very kindly offered to examine the little animal, and ascertain whether he was really dead.

"Don't touch him!" screamed Sophy, pushing her rudely away. "I dare say you are glad of his death, and know more about it than you choose to say."

Dorothy drew back with an air of disgust. "I can excuse your grief and annoyance at the death of the poor dog, who was a pretty harmless little creature, but not your insulting those who never injured him. Perhaps if it were a fellow-creature, you would not feel the least distress about it." [Pg 51]

"Martha," said Mrs. Gilbert, paying no heed to her, "go and call your master. I will be revenged on that ferocious beast. If he refuses to kill him, I will kill him myself."

Dorothy became suddenly aware of the danger that threatened her old favourite.

"Good heavens!" she thought, "this cruel woman will never execute her threat. Gilbert will not suffer her to destroy the good old dog."

"Mrs. Gilbert," she said in a voice of entreaty, "I hope you do not mean to hurt the dog. It is the nature of these animals to quarrel and fight with each other. The death of Pincher would do you no good, while it would greatly distress Mrs. Rushmere, who loves the dog." [Pg 52]

"Oh, I suppose you care nothing about him, when I see you feeding and caressing him every day. You have no regard for my feelings. There was nothing in the world I loved so well as my dog."

"Not even your husband, Sophy?" said Gilbert, who just then came in. "Now don't expect me to be very sorry for the death of my rival. When Martha came running to me in the field, I thought something terrible had happened."

"Could anything be worse?" sobbed his wife, kissing the head of her dead favourite. "If you have any regard for me, Gilbert, you will just go out and kill the hateful wretch that murdered him."

"Kill Pincher! I would lose my other arm first."

"God bless you, Gilbert!" cried Dorothy, with her eyes full of tears. "I felt certain you would never kill such an old friend."

[Pg 53]

That speech, meant for his good, decided the fate of poor Pincher. A sinister smile passed over Mrs. Gilbert's pale face. She dropped the body of Jewel upon the floor, and left the room.

After she was gone, Gilbert took up the animal and carefully examined the wound.

"Pincher never did this. The dog has been stabbed with a knife. The jugular vein is completely severed. I never cared much for the creature, who gave more trouble than a child, but it was a dastardly thing to do."

"I saw Pincher do it," said Martha, sulkily.

"You saw no such thing," retorted her master. "It is a base lie. It is more likely you did it yourself."

Martha gave way to a fresh burst of hysterical crying and ran upstairs to her mistress. Gilbert called Polly to fetch a spade and bury the dead dog in the garden.

[Pg 54]

"Martha," said Mrs. Gilbert, as that worthy came into her chamber, "shut the door and come here to me. I will give you half a crown if you will hang the dog Pincher."

"La, ma'am, keep your money. It's Dorothy Chance's dog, and I'll hang him to spite her. She's fonder of that ugly cur, than ever you were of Jewel. It will vex her dreadfully if anything happens amiss to him."

"So much the better," cried the amiable Sophia. "I shall then be revenged on them both."

So Pincher was hung without judge or jury, as innocent of the crime for which he paid the penalty, as many a poor creature condemned upon circumstantial evidence had been before him.

Dorothy was the first to discover her old favourite, dangling from the low branch of an apple tree in the orchard. A cry of anguish and surprise brought Mr. Rushmere and Gilbert to the spot.

[Pg 55]

"Dolly, girl! What's the matter?" cried the yeoman, "your face is as white as a sheet!"

Dorothy answered by pointing to the dog, and walked away to hide her tears.

Gilbert, hardly less distressed than herself, guessed the truth in a moment. His father, flew into a frenzy of passion, and threatened to inflict all sorts of punishment on the dastardly rascals who had killed his faithful brave old dog.

"A man would never have done it," muttered Gilbert. "This is the work of a jealous woman."

And he felt the deepest abhorrence for the author of the outrage.

[Pg 56]

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH IN ANOTHER SHAPE.

In the afternoon Mrs. Martin walked up to the farm to see Mrs. Rushmere and Dorothy, and to call upon their new friends. Dorothy had not been to the parsonage for three weeks, and her place at church and in the Sunday school had been vacant. Mr. Martin and his wife suspected that all was not right with Dorothy; that either her mother was worse, or that she was so fatigued with overwork that she was unable to attend to these important duties; both were convinced that Dorothy would never desert her post unless compelled to do so. Mrs. Martin had been confined to the house by the dangerous illness of little Johnnie, whom the doctor had only pronounced that day out of danger. Anxious as she was to learn in what manner Dorothy had borne the meeting with her lover, and whether his wife and mother were agreeable people, she had not been able to leave the sick-bed of her child to satisfy her natural curiosity. When Dorothy opened the door, she was startled by her pale face and altered appearance.

[Pg 57]

"My dear girl, are you ill?"

"Not ill—only heartsick, weary of the world and its ways. If it were not for the love of a few dear friends, I could leave it to-morrow without the least regret."

As she said this, the poor girl looked so sadly and earnestly into Mrs. Martin's face, that it brought the tears into her eyes.

"You must have thought that we had forsaken you altogether; but Johnnie has been very ill, alarmingly so; and I could not leave him to the care of the servant. Henry would have been up to see you, but since Mr. Fitzmorris has left us, every moment of his time has been occupied, as he is obliged to take the charge of both the parishes, with the additional care of the Sunday schools; I have been unable to attend my class, and your absence threw all the work upon him."

[Pg 58]

"Mr. Fitzmorris gone?" Dorothy turned pale and almost gasped for breath. "What took him away?"

"A sad, sad accident. Did no one tell you of it."

"My dear Mrs. Martin, how should I hear the news of the parish. I am confined all day, and sometimes during the greater part of the night, to my mother's sick-room. But tell me about Mr. Fitzmorris; I have felt grieved and hurt at his seeming desertion of us, when Mrs. Rushmere grew so much worse. Is anything amiss with Lord Wilton?"

[Pg 59]

"His lordship has written once to his nephew, since he left England. In his letter he spoke very despondingly of the health of his son. Mr. Fitzmorris' sudden departure from Hadstone had no reference to the Earl or his affairs. In truth, Dorothy, it is a sad tale. His brother is dead. Lost his life by a fall from his horse in a steeple chase. Mr. Fitzmorris was sent for in all haste. He started immediately, and though his brother was living when he arrived at —, he was unconscious, and never recovered his senses before he died. Poor Mr. Fitzmorris feels this dreadfully, and keenly regrets that he was not able to prepare him for the awful change from time to eternity—that his brother should die in his sins among gamblers and men of the world, who had dissipated his fortune and led him astray."

[Pg 60]

"It is dreadful!" said Dorothy. "I know how he feels it; I believe that if he could have saved his brother's soul by the sacrifice of his own, he would have done it. But will he ever return to Hadstone?"

"Directly he can arrange his brother's affairs, which are in a state of great confusion. His reckless extravagance has involved the estate, and Gerard is afraid, that when everything is sold, there will hardly be enough to satisfy the creditors. You know how honest and upright he is, and how it will pain him if he thought these people would suffer loss through any one belonging to him. He carries this romantic sense of honesty so far, that Henry is afraid that he will give up his property to pay these debts."

"He is so noble! How I honour him for it!" cried Dorothy. "How cruel it was of me to blame him for neglect, when he was not only at the post of duty, but suffering such anguish of mind. How cautious we should be in judging the actions of others. I can scarcely forgive myself for harbouring against him an unkind thought."

[Pg 61]

"And how is dear Mrs. Rushmere?" said her friend, anxious to turn the conversation into another channel, when she saw the big, bright tears that trembled on Dorothy's eyelids.

"She is fast sinking. We may not hope to keep her here much longer. I read and pray with her whenever she is able to bear it. But, oh, dear Mrs. Martin, my reading and praying is so different from his! I did so long to see him and hear him again."

"Do not look so despondingly, Dorothy. You will soon see him again. In the meanwhile, tell me about Gilbert, and how you met."

"As friends—nothing more. I might add, scarcely as friends. I am so thankful that my heart was weaned from him months ago. I now marvel at myself how I ever could have felt for him the passionate affection I did, or how his desertion could plunge me into such intense grief."

[Pg 62]

Mrs. Martin pressed her hand warmly.

"I expected as much. And his wife?"

"Don't ask me what I think of her;" and Dorothy waved her hands impatiently.

"Your silence is eloquent, Dorothy. And when can you come to me?"

"When dear mother no longer requires my services. At times she suffers cruel agony, but she bears it with angelic patience. She will be delighted to see you."

Dorothy led the way to the sick chamber. They found Mrs. Rushmere awake and in a very happy frame of mind; she greeted Mrs. Martin with unaffected pleasure, and talked cheerfully and hopefully of her approaching end. She made no comment on her son's marriage, and scarcely alluded to his wife, expressing great thankfulness that she had been permitted to see Gilbert before she died.

[Pg 63]

"Dear Mrs. Martin," she said, "I need scarcely ask you to be kind to Dorothy when she has no longer a mother to love and care for her, or a home here in which she can live in peace. A loving daughter she has been to me, a faithful and devoted nurse. The blessing she has been to me in this cruel and loathsome illness, the good God who gave her to me alone knows. That He may bless and reward her when I am in the clay is my constant prayer. May she never want a friend in her hour o' need."

Mrs. Martin stooped and kissed the pale earnest face of the dying woman.

"God will raise her up friends, never fear. The good Father never forsakes those who love and honour him."

Mrs. Rushmere threw her arms about her visitor's neck, and drew her head down to the pillow, while she whispered in her ear, "Take her out o' this, Mrs. Martin, as soon as I am gone. These strange women are killing her with their hard, unfeeling ways. It is a'most breaking my poor

[Pg 64]

heart to see the dear child pining day by day."

"She will have her reward, my dear old friend, no one ever loses by suffering in a good cause."

Mrs. Martin sat for some time with the invalid, and explained to her the cause why Mr. Fitzmorris and her husband had not been up to see her, and promised that Mr. Martin should visit her on the morrow. On inquiring of Martha Wood for Mrs. Rowly and her daughter, she was not sorry to learn that they had walked down to the village.

"In the humour I feel towards them," she said to Dorothy, "I would rather that they made the acquaintance of my handwriting than of me."

[Pg 65]

It was Dorothy's practice to visit Mrs. Rushmere the first thing in the morning, and carry her a cup of tea before the inmates of the house were stirring. Mr. Rushmere slept in the same room with his wife, but, since her illness, occupied a separate bed. As Dorothy unclosed the chamber door, she was startled by a low, hoarse moaning, that seemed to proceed from the bed of the invalid. Alarmed at such an unusual occurrence, she hurried forward; the cup dropped from her hand, and, with a wild cry, she flung herself upon the bed, and clasped in her arms the still, pale figure that, for so many years, she had loved and honoured as her mother.

Mr. Rushmere was kneeling upon the floor, his face buried in the coverlid, holding in his trembling grasp the thin, white hand that no longer responded to the pressure.

"Mother! dear, blessed mother!" sobbed Dorothy, "speak to me again. One word, one little word. You must not leave me for ever without your love and blessing!"

[Pg 66]

"Alas! my child, she cannot, death has silenced the kind voice for ever," groaned the stricken old man. "My wife! my precious wife! I never knew half your value until now. All that you were, and have been to me. Oh speak to me, Mary, my lost darling, smile once more upon me as in the happy days gone by. Say that you forgive your Larry for all that he has said and done amiss. You were allers an angel of kindness to a stern husband. I have been a hard man to you; but I loved you with my whole heart, though I could not allers tell you how dear you were."

"She was quite sensible of your affection, dear father, and would grieve to hear you reproach yourself; we have all our faults of temper. Mother made every allowance for that. She knew how truly you loved her, that your heart was in the right place. How did she die?"

[Pg 67]

The old man raised his head, and looked long and fondly on the still calm face of his dead wife.

"Sleeping as you see her there, Dorothy, as sweet and peacefully as a little child. The Lord bless her. She was surely one o' his gentle lambs. She generally spoke to me when the sun rose, an' told me to call up the folk to their work. About half an hour ago, I heard her own dear voice call me three times. 'Larry, Larry, Larry! it be time for thee to wake up out o' sleep. The Lord calls upon thee to rise. The night is far spent, the morning is at hand in which thou must give to him an account of the deeds done in the flesh.' I jump up, all in a cold sweat an' cries out trembling all over with a deadly fear. 'Mary, did'st thee call?' An awful stillness filled the room. No answer came. The sun shone right upon the still pale face, an' told me all. It was a voice from heaven that spoke, the dear angel had been dead for hours."

[Pg 68]

Again his heart sank upon the coverlid, and the strong frame shook with the still stronger agony that mastered him. Dorothy thought it best to leave nature to deal with him, who is ever the best physician and comforter of the wounded heart, while she went to rouse the household, and take necessary steps to perform the last sad offices for the dead.

In a few minutes all was hurry and alarm, as the suddenly aroused inmates of the house rushed half-dressed into the chamber of death.

In vain Gilbert Rushmere tried to lead his father into another room; the heartbroken old man resisted every effort to separate him from his wife. The common-place condolences of Mrs. Rowly and her daughter were alike unheeded. It was useless to tell him that it was a merciful release from great suffering, that Mrs. Rushmere dying in her sleep had been saved the pain and agony of a separation from her family, or that she was now an angel in heaven.

[Pg 69]

The bereaved old man admitted all this; but looked upon her death, as far as he was concerned, as the greatest calamity. A loss so terrible and overwhelming, that he disdained to ask of heaven fortitude to bear it, and he drove these Job's comforters out of his room, in the frenzy of his great sorrow.

"Do not torture him," sobbed Dorothy, "with this cruel kindness. However well meant, his mind is not in a state to bear it. Leave him alone with his dead for one little hour, till nature softens his sorrow with the holy balm of tears. The shock has been so sudden that his mind is prostrated with the blow. He will recover himself when left alone with the beloved. The silent eloquence of that sweet calm face will do more to restore him to peace, than all we can say to reconcile him to his loss."

[Pg 70]

"Oh, if she had only spoken to me before she died;" groaned Rushmere. "I should not feel so bad. I could bear my misfortune like a man. If she had only said in her soft kind voice. 'God bless you, Lawrence,' it would ha' been something to think on, in the long lonesome nights afore me; but she left me without a word. How can I sleep in peace in my comfortable warm bed, knowing her to be alone in the cold earth. Oh, Mary! my love, my treasure! How can I live a' wanting thee."

After a pause of some minutes, he looked up from the dead wife to his son, who was leaning against the bed-post, his face covered with his sole remaining hand.

"You may well mourn for your mother, Gilbert, many a salt tear she shed for you. The grief she felt for your cruel desertion broke down her constitution, and brought her to this." [Pg 71]

"Father, I was not alone to blame," said Gilbert, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes—yes, lay the fault on the old man, he has no one now to take his part, but that poor lass whose heart he nearly broke."

"Father," whispered Dorothy, gently taking his hand. "Mother forgot and forgave that long ago. She loved you and Gilbert too well to cherish animosity against either. We are all human and prone to err. If she could speak, she would tell you to banish all these sinful heart-burnings, these useless recriminations, and prepare to follow her to the better land, where she has found peace and assurance for ever."

"I will, I will, if so be I could only find the way," responded Rushmere, with a heavy sigh. "Oh, God forgive me! I am a sinful man. I wish I could follow her dear steps, for I am a' weary o' my life." [Pg 72]

He laid his head upon the pillow beside his wife, and the tears streamed from his closed eyelids down his pale cheeks.

"Come, let us leave him," said Dorothy. "He will feel calmer soon. And here is dear Mr. Martin, who can better soothe him in his grief than we can. Oh, I am so glad you are come," she whispered to the good curate, as she followed the rest of the family from the room. "He is dreadfully afflicted. Poor old father, he loved her so much."

The four days that intervened between Mrs. Rushmere's death and the funeral were very trying to Dorothy. She had to receive so many visitors, and listen to so many unfeeling remarks and questions regarding her future position in the Rushmere family, put to her with the coarse bluntness of uneducated people, who could not realize her grief for the loss of one who was not a blood relation. "Was she going," they asked, "to remain at the farm, or to take service elsewhere?" and they expressed great surprise that young Mrs. Rushmere had suffered her to remain there so long. Then, she was asked to give minute particulars regarding the terrible disease of which her foster-mother had died; of how she bore her sufferings, what doctor she employed, and what remedies had been applied? All this was trying enough to a sensitive mind; but they went further still, and utterly regardless of the wounds they were inflicting, demanded of the weeping girl, "If Mrs. Rushmere had left her anything, and who was to get her clothes?" [Pg 73]

This important piece of information, was urged by no less a personage than Letty Barford, who in company with her mother-in-law and Miss Watling, called to look at the corpse.

"I think Mrs. Rushmere has done enough for her," said Miss Watling as they descended the stairs, "keeping her for so many years after all the trouble she has made in the family." [Pg 74]

This was not said in Dorothy's hearing, but addressed to Mrs. Gilbert and her mother, to whom the party were offering their condolence.

"These interlopers are always a nuisance in families," said Mrs. Rowly. "This Dorothy Chance is a good enough girl, but my daughter will be very glad to get rid of her. It does not do to have two mistresses in a house, and she has been used to have her own way in everything."

"It was but natural," suggested the elder Mrs. Barford. "She was more than a daughter to them, and it must have been trying to Dorothy to give up the place she had held for so many years, with such credit to herself, to strangers. I pity her with all my heart; when does she leave you Mrs. Gilbert?" [Pg 75]

"As soon after the funeral as possible. It is only on the old man's account that I allowed her to remain here so long. She is the only creature in the house that can manage him, but it is high time that all this should be put a stop to."

"You are perfectly right, Mrs. Gilbert," cried Miss Watling. "I think you have shown great forbearance in tolerating the presence of such a dangerous person in the house so long. While she was kept in her place as servant of all work, it was all very well; but since the Earl has taken her under his especial patronage, there is no bounds to her assumption and insolence. Would you believe it, ladies, he is paying for her education, and is actually having her taught to play upon the piano."

"Strange, that we never heard a word of this before," cried both the ladies in a breath. "Is she his mistress?" [Pg 76]

"That's the inference which most people have drawn from such strange conduct on his part," and Miss Watling shrugged her shoulders significantly.

"I don't believe a word of it," cried the elder Mrs. Barford. "I heard just now, that Dorothy was going to live with Mrs. Martin, and she is too good a woman to tolerate such doings in her house."

"It is an easy thing for a man of Lord Wilton's rank and wealth to bribe people to hold their tongues," sneered Miss Watling. "It is nothing to me what she is, I shall never give my

countenance to a person of doubtful character, and one so every way my inferior. It is a good thing for you, Mrs. Gilbert, that it has pleased God to take the old woman, or this artful girl might make mischief between you and your husband."

[Pg 77]

"Oh ma'am, I have no fears on that head," replied Sophia tartly. "I am not afraid of such a mischance. I saw very little of Mrs. Rushmere, and considering the nature of her complaint, I think her death a happy release; and if the old man were to follow his wife, it would not break my heart—"

"Sophia, you should not speak your mind so freely," said her mother shaking her head. "But indeed, ladies, my daughter has been treated with so little respect by the whole family, that you must not wonder at her indifference at the death of a mother-in-law, who hardly said a civil thing to her since she came into the house. Of course it was the interest of this girl, Chance, to set the old folk against us, in the hope, which I have every reason to believe she entertained, that they would leave her all their personal property."

"Has the old woman left her a legacy?" demanded Letty, with breathless interest.

[Pg 78]

"Not a thing. Her sudden death prevented that. The old man wanted to give her all his wife's clothes and some of the fine linen, which he said belonged to Dorothy; but Sophia lifted up her voice against it, and the creature refused to accept the least thing, when she found that she could not get all."

"Just like such domestic sneaks," cried Miss Watling. "I am so glad she was disappointed. It will serve as a warning to others like her."

Shaking hands with Mrs. Gilbert in the most affectionate manner, and hoping that they would soon become excellent friends, Miss Watling and the two Barfords took their leave, all but the elder of the twain, delighted with Mrs. Rowly and her daughter, whom Miss Watling pronounced, a very sweet, lady-like young person.

Until the morning appointed for the funeral, the poor old yeoman had confined himself entirely to his own room, beside the coffin which contained the mortal remains of his wife. On that morning, however, he rose early; washed his pale, haggard face, and shaved himself, and put on with unusual care, the mourning suit his son had provided for the melancholy occasion. Kissing with reverence the cold brow of his wife, he screwed down the lid of the coffin with his own hands, "that no one," he said, "should see her again, or rob him of that last look. It was now time for him to gird up his loins and act like a man."

[Pg 79]

Dorothy hearing him stirring, brought up his breakfast, for he had tasted nothing but bread and water for the last four days, and she knew that he must be weak and faint from his long fast. She found him standing behind the closed curtains of the window, looking mournfully into the court below. At the sound of the light well known footsteps, he turned to her and held out his hand. Dorothy threw her arms about his neck, and for some minutes they mingled their tears together. At length, rousing himself, Rushmere placed his large hand upon her bent head, and solemnly blessed her.

[Pg 80]

"Dolly," he said, "Dolly, my dear child, had I only known the woman that now fills the place in this house that you ought to have held, I would ha' seen my right hand struck from my body afore I would ha' refused my consent to your marriage with Gilbert. I ha' been punished, terribly punished for my folly and sin, ever since yon deceitful woman came into my house to lord it over me and mine. Night and day I hear Mary's voice, repeating to me over an' over again, the words she said to me on that sorrowful morn that Gilly first left his home, an' I turned you out friendless upon the pitiless world. You, who I ought to ha' protected to the last hour o' my life. 'Larry, as a man sows, so must he reap.' Oh, my daughter, what sort o' a crop am I likely to reap with these women when you be gone?"

[Pg 81]

"They will be kinder to you, father, when I am away."

"Not a bit, not a bit. It is not in their natur, child. People cannot act agen natur. The only thing that reconciles me to my Mary's death, is, that she will not have to put up with their evil tempers, and that you, Dolly, will be removed from their malice."

"Dear father, don't vex your mind with anticipating troubles; they always come soon enough without opening the door to call them in. Come with me into the next room and eat a bit of breakfast. You have been fasting too long, and look as weak as a child. I have cooked the steak with my own hands that you might have it nice."

[Pg 82]

"Ay, Dolly, you wor allers a first-rate hand at making good cheer. Yon Lunnon fine lady wu'd starve a body with her dirty ways."

"Don't think of her, father," said Dorothy, leading him by the hand like a child into the adjoining room, where she had a small table neatly spread, and his breakfast all ready. "You must do justice to my cooking. It is the last meal your poor Dolly will ever cook for you in the old house."

"Oh, that it wor the last a' would ever want to eat," sighed Rushmere, wiping his eyes, and consenting to partake of the meal so temptingly spread before him.

After moving the dishes, Dorothy entreated him to go down stairs, and take a turn in the open air, to revive him after his confinement in the close atmosphere of the death-chamber. But this the

old man could not be persuaded to do.

"I wu'd not ha' minded, Dorothy, had the day been wet." And he looked sadly toward the window, where the gay sunbeams were glancing through the closed white drapery, "but such a fine morn as this, wi' the birds singing gaily, as if they never knew sorrow or care, an' the blessed beams o' the young sun laughing in the glistening drops o' dew, an' all things o' God's making, but man, looking so bright and cheery, just maddens me wi' grief, to think that my Mary will never look upon this beautiful world again. It doth seem grievous to the wounded heart, that natur is allers happy; an' to-day I can't stand the smile on her gladsome face; it wu'd comfort me to see it covered up in storm and cloud. You know the old saying, Dolly, 'Happy is the corpse that the rain rains on.'"

[Pg 83]

If there was any truth in the old rhyme, Lawrence Rushmere's wish was gratified. The beautiful morning rapidly clouded over, and just as the funeral procession left the house, the storm burst over the melancholy train in awful thunder-claps, accompanied by floods of rain. Every one was drenched and looked uncomfortable, but the chief mourner. He held up his sad, pale face to the pitiless shower, as if its desolating progress was in unison with his own sad heart; nor did the tempest abate its fury until the sods were piled upon the narrow bed which separated him from the love of his youth.

[Pg 84]

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 85]

THE FALSE ACCUSATION.

Dorothy was not sorry to leave the old homestead. All the old associations that had endeared it to her, and surrounded its gloomy walls with an atmosphere of love, were broken up or changed so completely, that she could no longer recognize them. Even the joyous bark of old Pincher, rushing forth to greet her, on her return from church or market, had been silenced, oh, how cruelly. She could not bear to recall the treachery that had robbed her of an humble, faithful friend.

"I cannot recognize the presence of God in this place, as I once did," she thought, "where every word spoken to me is a provocative to evil, to do as they do, not to do as I would be done by. I have daily prayed to be delivered from evil, and kept from temptation, and have too often yielded to the snares laid to entrap my soul. It is hard to dwell with the scorner, and escape free from contamination."

[Pg 86]

She was just cording her trunk, ready for its removal to the parsonage, when Mrs. Gilbert suddenly entered the attic.

"I wish to look into that trunk before you take it away."

"May I ask why, Mrs. Gilbert Rushmere?"

"To see that you have taken nothing but what belongs to you."

"Certainly, if you are mean enough to suspect me of such baseness," and the hot blood rushed into Dorothy's cheeks, and her dark eyes flashed with a bright light, that made the cold flaxen haired woman recoil before them. "But hold," she cried (as Mrs. Gilbert laid her hand on the trunk,) "I shall not give you the key, except in the presence of competent witnesses, lest the heart that conceived such an insult should belie me also."

[Pg 87]

Springing down stairs, and scarcely feeling them beneath her feet, she encountered Gilbert in the hall.

"Come with me upstairs, Mr. Gilbert."

"Dorothy, what ails you? Why are you so dreadfully excited? Have you seen anything?" He had heard of her encounter with the supernatural on the heath, and for a moment was possessed with the idea that she had seen the apparition of his mother.

"It is no risen angel," cried the excited girl, "but a human fiend! I want you to see. Follow me, Gilbert, if you ever loved me, and vindicate my honour."

[Pg 88]

Alarmed, for he had never seen Dorothy in such a passion before, and anxious to learn the cause of her distress, he followed her swift footsteps into the attic, where he found his wife still standing beside the half-corded trunk, tapping the floor with her foot, and humming the tune of a country dance.

She smiled disdainfully, as Dorothy put the key into Gilbert's hand.

"Here is the key of my trunk; will you please to open it, and empty the contents upon the floor?"

"What for Dorothy? you amaze me—what have I to do with it?"

"To satisfy the suspicions of that woman, I cannot call her lady, the lie would choke me. She has demanded the inspection of its contents, lest I should leave the home of my childhood, on the night of my beloved mother's funeral, with stolen goods in my possession."

At the mention of Mrs. Rushmere's name, who had so loved and trusted her, the hot fire of anger

[Pg 89]

was quenched, and she turned so faint, she had to lean against the low wall of the attic for support.

"What a fine piece of acting," sneered Sophia, "it's a pity the girl had not been brought up for the stage."

"Is it possible, Mrs. Rushmere," and Gilbert looked and spoke sternly, "that you can have disgraced yourself and me in this outrageous manner, and cruelly insulted a noble girl, whose shoe latchet you are not worthy to unloose."

"Open the trunk. Don't talk in that style to me; I have my doubts as to this fine young lady's honour, and I don't mean to leave the room until they are satisfied."

"Mr. Gilbert, do what she requires, or, after I am gone, she may accuse me of theft, when I am not here to defend my character."

"That cannot be recovered, that was lost long ago," said the cold-hearted woman.

[Pg 90]

Gilbert reluctantly opened the trunk, and his wife, coolly kneeling down upon the floor, proceeded to toss over its neatly arranged contents; presently she dived down among the clothes, and, quickly withdrawing her hand, held up two silver table spoons.

"Who do these belong to?" she cried with a laugh of fiendish triumph.

"They are not mine," said Dorothy, trembling from head to foot. "They were never placed there by me."

"Oh, of *course* not. Every thief is honest till they are found out. I suppose you never saw these spoons before."

"I have cleaned them a thousand times," said Dorothy calmly, for she saw that she was in her enemy's power. "They were on the dinner table to-day. I have not seen them since. In what manner you have contrived to produce them out of my trunk, God only knows. This I can declare in His holy presence, that I never placed them there."

[Pg 91]

"You need not assert your innocence, Dorothy," replied Gilbert, who had seen an expression on his wife's face that convinced him that she was the incendiary. "I know you too well to believe you guilty for a moment."

"That's all very fine, Lieutenant Rushmere, but facts are stubborn things. I like to unmask hypocrisy, I would therefore thank you to send one of the men to town for a constable, to convey this virtuous, honest Miss Chance to jail."

"I want further conviction of her having committed an act deserving such rigorous measures," said Gilbert.

"What farther do you need? This is no case of circumstantial evidence. You have the proofs in your hand. Do you think, sir, that I would condescend to deceive you?"

[Pg 92]

"S death! Madam," cried Gilbert in a towering passion, "it would not be the first time;" and, still keeping the spoons which he had taken from her in his hand, he went to the door and called Martha Wood. The girl came up stairs on hearing her master's voice. He went into the passage to meet her, so that no eye telegraphing could take place between her and her mistress.

"Martha, did you wash the two large silver gravy spoons after dinner?"

"Yes, sir. What do you want with them?"

"That's nothing to you. Did you put them into the plate-box?"

"No, sir, I gave them to Mrs. Gilbert: she said she wanted them for a particular purpose. I need not be so nice in cleaning them, she said she would have a good joke to tell me about them before night."

"Woman, do you hear what this girl says?" asked Gilbert, stepping back into the room. "Who deserves to be sent to prison now?"

[Pg 93]

His wife only answered by recommencing the same tune in a louder strain, as she glided snake like from the room.

"Oh, my God, I thank thee!" said Dorothy, raising her clasped hands. "Thou hast delivered me from a doom far worse than death!" Taking Gilbert's sole remaining hand, she pressed it warmly between her own. "How shall I thank you, dear brother, for saving your poor orphan sister from disgrace and ruin?"

"Remember me in your prayers, Dorothy. I can no longer pour out my heart to you, as in the old happy days, when we were all the world to each other; but there is no sin in asking you to pray for me, a disappointed and most unhappy man."

He left the room, and Dorothy's lips quivered, and tears again welled up in her eyes, as she caught a half smothered moan, that told more than words could do, the bitter anguish that was eating out his heart.

[Pg 94]

She found the old man moping on the stone bench in the court-yard, his head bowed upon his

hands, his face completely hidden by the snow-white locks that fell over it in tangled confusion—the beautiful silky hair of which his wife had always been so proud, which she loved to brush over her fingers, before he went to church or market. Who was there to take pride in the handsome old man now? Gilbert had grown reserved and shy; there seemed little confidence or affection between the father and son. Dorothy's heart bled for the lonely old man, left so desolate and uncared for in his heavy affliction.

"Good-bye, dear father, don't fret yourself ill; I shall see you at church every Sunday, and we can have a nice walk together after service on the common, to talk over the good old times. You will be sure to come, won't you?"

[Pg 95]

"Yes, my darling, if only to see her grave. I know you can't bide here, Dorothy, that woman would be the death of us both. But if I wor sick or dying, would you come and nurse the old man who used you so ill?"

"Yes, that I would; if Mrs. Gilbert were to bar the door in my face, I would climb in at the window. But, cheer up, father, God is good, there may be many happy days in store for you yet. You must try and live for my sake."

She put the white locks back from the old man's ample forehead, and, kissing him tenderly, went her way without casting a backward glance on the old house.

Before we follow Dorothy to the pleasant home of her friend, Mrs. Martin, we will step into Mrs. Gilbert Rushmere's chamber, and hear what is passing there.

[Pg 96]

When, detected by her husband in her design to ruin Dorothy, she had borne the exposure of her cruel treachery with an air of insolent nonchalance, and left the room singing—a common artifice with low-bred people, who attempt to hide their malignity by an affectation of gaiety and perfect indifference. The snake hisses before he strikes his victim, perhaps to give him timely warning to make his escape. The human snake hisses to hide its disappointment, that it has shown its fangs in vain.

It was terrible when alone to witness the rage that disfigured the countenance of Sophia Rushmere when she found herself baffled in her cold-blooded treachery. The tune was changed to curses loud and deep, and threats of vengeance against the innocent object of her jealous hatred. She rated Martha Wood in no measured terms for the defeat of her well laid plot. That individual answered her with corresponding insolence.

[Pg 97]

"How should I know what you were after with the spoons? If you had told me, I could have sworn that I saw Dorothy steal them. What's the use of making a mystery about your doings to me? I should think I knew too much about your affairs before your marriage for that."

"But you must have been very obtuse, Martha," said her mistress, softening down, "not to perceive what I had in hand."

"I should, if I had got a sight of your face. In the manner that Mr. Gilbert stood in the open doorway, I did not see that you were in the room until the blunder was out."

"Do you know what he said about it after I left?"

[Pg 98]

"No, but I saw Dorothy go up to him and take his hand, and he bent down and kissed her. I saw *that* through a crack in the door!"

"The shameless wretch!" cried Sophy, stamping with passion. "But for your folly, I should have had her transported. Thank God! she's gone. I have got her out of the house at last, and I'll take good care that she never comes into it again."

"She is too near at hand, I should think, Mrs. Gilbert, for your peace. If your husband is as fond of her, as I hear folks say, that he once was, it is a very easy matter for them to meet on that lonely heath, even in broad day, and no one be a whit the wiser."

The artful girl was heaping fresh fuel on the fire she had kindled in the breast of her weak employer, and when she had nearly maddened her with her base insinuations, she went away laughing at her as a consummate simpleton.

Mrs. Rushmere did not go to bed. She sat up nursing her wrath, and waiting for her husband. The venom of Martha's poisoned arrows was rankling in her breast. She considered herself the injured party now, and no longer dreaded the indignant expression of his displeasure at her conduct to Dorothy. She would begin the battle first, accuse him of infidelity, and bear him down with a torrent of words.

[Pg 99]

Following out this idea, a terrible scene of mutual recrimination took place between the husband and wife, which ended, as such scenes generally do, in total alienation on his part, and frantic jealousy on her's.

Gilbert Rushmere had endeavoured to make the best of a bad bargain, and though he could not respect the woman who had tricked him into making her his wife, he had treated her with more consideration and kindness than she deserved.

The consciousness of having married her for money, involved a moral sense of degradation, which made him more lenient in his judgment, of the deceit practised against him; for had it not been mutual, he could not blame her without including himself in the same condemnation.

[Pg 100]

For a long time he listened in silence to her maddening speeches, trusting that the heat of her passion would wear out, that her tongue would grow tired with continual motion, and that, not meeting with any opposition, she would give it up as a useless task, and go to sleep. He was fully aware of her weakness, but not of her obstinate strength of will.

"Sophia," he said, when utterly wearied with her reproaches for imaginary injuries, "after the disgraceful scene this afternoon in the attic, it would be wiser in you to hold your tongue and go to sleep. If you wish me to retain any affection for you, let me never have a repetition of such conduct again."

[Pg 101]

"I shall not keep silence, sir, because you dare to tell me to hold my tongue. I shall speak when I please, and as I please, without asking your leave."

"Well, don't expect me to listen to such nonsense. My heart is overwhelmed with grief for the death of a dear mother. You surely take a strange time to distress me with your foolish and groundless jealousy."

"And you to show your preference for that vile woman, that hired mistress of your patron, Lord Wilton!"

"Good heavens! Sophia, what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, what all the world knows but yourself. Do you think that I will condescend to be placed below this infamous creature in my husband's estimation, to be told that I am not worthy to untie her shoes. You don't know Sophia Rowly, if you can imagine that I will submit to such an indignity for a moment. *I*, who was born a lady, received the education of a lady, and was always treated as such, until I became the wife of Gilbert Rushmere, the son of an ignorant illiterate tiller of the soil."

[Pg 102]

"Who has given you a home when you had none, madam, when the debts you dishonestly incurred during my absence had made beggars of us all. This illiterate tiller of the soil made you mistress of his house, and placed you at the head of his table; and this is the way you abuse his generosity. It was an evil day for him, and those dear to him, when your foot crossed his threshold."

"You would rather have seen Dorothy Chance at the head of the table?"

"She would be the ornament of any table. You cannot make me believe the vile scandals propagated against Dorothy by such women as Nancy Watling. They are just as true, madam, as your accusations against her this afternoon, when nothing would appease your hatred to this beautiful girl, but sending her to prison, or getting her transported. It was murder, however you may disguise the fact; and in perjuring your soul to ruin her, you dared the wrath of God to damn yourself."

[Pg 103]

"Fine language, this, to address to your wife," said Sophy, cowering before her husband's withering and contemptuous glance.

"You deserve it!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

"I scorn it!" she returned, with a faint laugh, and pointing at him with her finger.

"It is time, Sophia, that you and I came to an understanding," said Gilbert, becoming suddenly calm. "If you mean to persevere in this line of conduct, we must part!"

[Pg 104]

"The sooner the better!" she said in the same taunting tone, though inwardly terrified lest he should carry out his unlooked-for proposal; for, cold and selfish as she was, she entertained for him a passion that shed a vivifying heat into her torpid nature; it would have been love, had she been capable of the devotion and self-sacrifice that are the leading characteristics of that glorious sentiment. She saw the gulf that yawned at her feet, but was too obstinate to yield. Gilbert now spoke in a more earnest and decided manner.

"Sophia, do you really mean what you say?" There was something in the look and manner that was startling; he, at any rate, meant what he said. She would not retract, but remained obstinately silent. "Will you answer me?"

"Can you give me a separate maintenance?" she sobbed out at length. "Will you turn me and my mother out to starve?"

[Pg 105]

This difficulty had not occurred to him before. It was insurmountable. He had no means but what he derived from his father, and though as perfectly divorced in affection as the sanction of a legal tribunal could have effected, he was compelled, by a dire necessity, to wear the chain that avarice and ambition had rivetted.

They might henceforth sleep in the same bed, eat from the same board, and in public act towards each other as husband and wife, but they were as much divided in heart and confidence as if the wide ocean flowed between them. Gilbert kept his own secret. Sophia Rushmere gave hers to Martha Wood, who told it, as a greater secret, to Mrs. Rowly.

[Pg 106]

CHAPTER VI.

A PROPOSAL.

Dorothy felt like a captive long incarcerated in prison who has just got his release, and awakes once more to life and liberty. A year ago, and she would have considered it impossible for her to feel glad at leaving Heath Farm, or any place that Gilbert Rushmere called his home. Gilbert she had ceased to respect, and where he was could no longer be a home for her.

She pitied him because he was miserable, but he had brought his sufferings upon himself in a manner that she could neither excuse nor justify, and her compassion was of that mixed sort that made her feel ashamed of its object.

[Pg 107]

The insults she had received from his wife were still rankling in her breast; their low, base character made them unendurable to a sensitive mind, and she thought less of her former lover when associated with this woman whom he had accepted in her place for six thousand pounds. His bargain would have been a dead loss to him at treble that sum. He had ventured his all upon it, and had lost everything which makes life desirable: the love of a true heart, his own self-respect, and the fair prospect of domestic happiness. Dorothy felt it painful to witness his degradation, and the situation in which she had been placed precluded any attempt on her part to elevate his mind, and inspire hopes of a more exalted nature. She had a sad foreboding that this false step, though the first, was not likely to be the last, in a rapid downward career. What better could be expected from constant association with such a partner as he had chosen?

[Pg 108]

The mother, whose loss at that moment was pressing heavily on her heart, to whom Gilbert had always been an earthly idol, had been mercifully taken from the evil to come, and, much as Dorothy had loved her, she no longer wished to recall her to life, to preside over a home that Mrs. Gilbert's temper would render a domestic hell.

Dorothy was thankful for her emancipation from that house of misrule. She breathed more freely in the fresh air, and her heart once more expanded to the genial influences of nature. The evening was warm and balmy after the thunderstorm, and the golden sunset shed upon wet leaves and dewy grass a glory as from heaven. The birds sang in the glistening bushes by the roadside, and the air was rife with delicious odours, as if an angel had scattered his censor over the rebaptized earth.

[Pg 109]

The holy tranquillity of the scene chased away the dark shadows that, like spirits of evil, had been brooding for several weeks upon her mind, thoughts which were not of heaven, the remembrance of all those injuries that had been heaped upon her, making her angry and resentful, and anxious that her tormentors might be paid in their own coin.

Nature's vesper song to her Creator, poured from a thousand warbling throats, once more attuned Dorothy's sad heart to prayer and praise. Her soul fell prostrate to the earth, the green footstool of His glorious throne, and was gently raised by ministering spirits, and lifted towards heaven.

Near the parsonage, she met Mrs. Martin and the children coming to meet her. With what joy she kissed and embraced them all. What charming little tales they had to tell her of domestic life. Their rabbits had multiplied, their pigeons had all accessions to their families. Harry had discovered that very morning a nest of young kittens in the stable, belonging to Mrs. Prowler, the cat, and they were not to be killed or sent away, until dear Dolly had picked out the prettiest for little Arthur, who was going to name it Dolly, in honour of their dear friend. Then they told her that Johnnie had been ill, but was able to sit up now, and he wanted to hear all the nice stories she used to tell him, and sing to him his favourite hymns; and Dorothy's weary heart overflowed with happiness to find herself once more among faithful and loving hearts.

[Pg 110]

After having taken her the round of the garden, to look at all the flowers she had helped them in sowing and planting, and pointing out the prettiest blossoms, and gathering her a choise nosegay, they went gamboling before her into the house, wild with joy that she had come to live with them never to go away again.

[Pg 111]

"There is another friend very anxious to see you, Dorothy," said Mrs. Martin, as they passed the well known study door. "Mr. Fitzmorris arrived by the mid-day coach. He looked ill and fatigued, and I persuaded him to lie down for an hour or two, until Henry returned from Storby, where he had to attend a vestry meeting after poor Mrs. Rushmere's funeral. I wonder if he is awake." She gave a low rap at the door, and Dorothy's heart leaped to the sound of the gentle voice that bade them come in.

"Go and speak to him, Dorothy. The sight of you will do him good, and help to dissipate his melancholy."

At that moment the door opened, and Gerard received them with his usual frank kindness. Dorothy's black dress informed him of what had happened. He took her hand and led her into the room, making her sit down in the study chair while he drew his seat beside her.

[Pg 112]

"My dear friend, I see how it is. You have lost that excellent mother. I did hope I should see her again, and administer to her the glorious symbols of Christ's undying love, before she sank to rest. God has ordered it otherwise. Did she suffer much in that last conflict, which all foolishly dread and shrink from?"

"She was spared all its terrors, Mr. Fitzmorris; she died in sleep. To judge from the beautiful serenity of her face, her waking was in heaven."

"I too have looked on death since last we met. In death itself there is nothing terrible; it is but the

returning wave of life flowing back to Him, and may be regarded as the birth of spirit to its higher destiny. But oh, Dorothy, the death that I lament, that I would have given my own life to avert, was one of such a painful nature, so sudden, so unlooked for, by the dear thoughtless being, who cared not for his soul, scarcely knew that he possessed one, that I can feel little hope in his case. Struck down in a moment in the vigour of manhood; of all the wasted years of a misspent life, he could not redeem one hour from time, to prepare for eternity. It is terrible, heart-crushing, but it is God's will, and what am I that I should dare to murmur at a just decree!"

[Pg 113]

"But did you ever warn him of his danger?" asked Dorothy.

"I have nothing to reproach myself with on that head. After my own conversion, I besought him with tears and prayers, with all the eloquence which conviction can give, to turn from the errors of his ways. He laughed at my enthusiasm, and called me a madman and a fool, refused to listen to my earnest appeals, and finally shunned my company. I loved him too dearly to be baffled thus. I wrote constantly to him, and laid my own heart bare, in the hope of winning his, but he refused to answer my letters, and at length returned them to me unopened. I had no other resource left, but to pray for him. But my prayers have returned into my own bosom, and my brother went down to his grave, and gave no sign. He lived two days after his accident, but was never conscious for a moment."

[Pg 114]

"It may be better with him than you suppose," suggested Dorothy. "Though unconscious to you, his soul may have been vividly awake to its spiritual danger; and petitions for mercy which he could not utter in the hearing of man may have been heard and answered in heaven."

"Thank you for that thought, dear girl, it is suggestive of some comfort. The thief on the cross might have been as regardless of his duty to God and his fellow men, as my poor brother; yet, his petition received a gracious hearing and a blessed promise. We cannot judge others as the great Searcher of hearts judges them. Many a criminal in our estimation may shine hereafter a gem in His crown."

[Pg 115]

There was a pause for some minutes, and Gerard Fitzmorris continued pacing the study with rapid steps, so wrapt up in his own thoughts, that he had almost forgotten the figure in black that sat so pale and still in his easy chair.

"Come and take a turn with me in the open air," he said, suddenly returning to her side. "The atmosphere of this place is close and stifling, the evening excessively warm. I can always think and speak more freely beneath the canopy of heaven."

Dorothy had not removed her bonnet and shawl, and they strolled out upon the heath. During their ramble, he made her recount all that had happened since Gilbert's return, and was shocked at the manner in which she had been treated.

[Pg 116]

"There is only one way to punish such people," he said, "to return good for evil. It is not only the best, but the easiest way, and the peace and satisfaction it confers, repays the injury a thousand fold. I have tried it in many instances, and have experienced its happy results."

"It sounds excellent in theory," said Dorothy, "but I find it a hard doctrine to reduce to practice."

"Nay, Dorothy, it is the theory which is difficult; for our sinful human nature with its perverted reason, rebels against it, the other course being more in unison with its vindictive feelings, and the spirit of retaliation by which we are more or less governed. If, however, we make the slightest effort on the side of mercy and forgiveness, the Spirit of God working with our spirit, makes it not only easy, but brings with it the utmost peace and satisfaction, verifying even the old pagan maxim, 'that virtue is its own reward.' Our blessed Lord would never have promulgated a doctrine which could not be reduced to practice, and which he carried fully out in his own person."

[Pg 117]

"But then, He was so different from us."

"Not while He partook of our nature. He was subjected to temptations as great, or even greater than those that He taught us by precept and example to shun. If there had been no conflict with evil, there would have been no victory. Remember He fought the battle for us alone and single handed, without praying for the legion of angels to assist Him in the awful struggle. We have not only His example to help us, but the powerful aid He promised to all who would take up the cross and follow Him. Our very weakness constitutes our strength when upheld by His saving arm."

[Pg 118]

After a walk of some minutes in silence, he said in a more lively manner. "Dorothy, you must forgive this cruel woman, and only indulge the God-like revenge of doing her good for the evil she has done to you. Take her conduct as a life trial, and bear it with the courage of a Christian."

"I will endeavour to do so," returned Dorothy, "and when you are near to advise and strengthen me, I do not feel it so hard to restrain these resentful feelings; but, directly, I am left to myself, I grow fierce and angry, and wish that my persecutors may meet with the punishment they deserve."

"Dorothy!" said Mr. Fitzmorris, stopping and looking earnestly into her face. "Will you answer me truly, a simple and straightforward question?" His companion looked up with a wondering smile. "Would you like to remain always with me, Dorothy? Will you become my bosom friend—my faithful counsellor—my beloved wife, bound to me by that blessed and holy tie, 'the love of Christ.' One with me in heart and purpose, in the bond of faith and love and charity with all

[Pg 119]

mankind. Answer me, Dorothy, fully and freely, with the beautiful candour which makes you so charming in my eyes. Can you love me, as well as you loved Gilbert Rushmere?"

"Yes better than anything on earth," whispered Dorothy, without venturing to lift her eyes, or wipe away the tears she was unable to restrain, and sinking into the arms which were held out to receive her. "I never knew what it was to love truly, devotedly and with my whole heart until now."

"We are one, my own Dorothy, my beloved, in heart and soul, and henceforth I trust for ever," and he sealed the contract of their engagement with a kiss as pure from the dross of passion, as the young mother bestows upon her firstborn child.

[Pg 120]

"Oh, Mr. Fitzmorris, I am not worthy of your love;" sobbed Dorothy. "A highly connected man like you should seek out a fitter mate than me."

"You should have thought of that before you gave your sanction to my proposal, little wife." And the old beautiful smile lighted up his face. "It is too late to draw back now. If I did not love you better than the world and its foolish conventionalisms, I should not have asked you to be mine. I value the gift that God has bestowed upon me, too highly, to give it up for the prejudices that belong to wealth and caste. You have made me very happy, Dorothy darling, as little Henry calls you. Poor little fellow, I am afraid that he will feel very jealous of his big rival."

And Dorothy was happy, too happy to waste her joy in words. As she leaned upon the strong arm of her noble protector, she realized the delightful consciousness, that she was no longer alone in the world.

[Pg 121]

The lovers lingered upon the heath talking over their future prospects, until the moon rose and shed her melancholy loveliness on ocean and heath.

They were not to marry until after Lord Wilton's return, and Gerard thought it advisable, that both should write to him and make him acquainted with their engagement. He did not wish it to be kept secret. He thought that Dorothy's claim upon his protection would prevent unpleasant scandal, silence the foolish tattling of her former acquaintance, and conduce to her own peace and comfort. His character stood too high for his conduct to be attributed to base and dishonourable motives; and as his affianced wife, Dorothy would rise in the estimation of her worldly neighbours.

They found Mrs. Martin waiting tea for them, and wondering what had detained them so long from the social meal. The shy, conscious look on Dorothy's face revealed the mystery, which Gerard wholly cleared up, when he pleasantly introduced her to his old friends as his future wife.

[Pg 122]

"Lady Dorothy Fitzmorris," said the curate, rubbing his hands with great glee, "I wish you much joy."

"The title is rather premature," returned Gerard, gravely, "though it may fall to her only too soon. You know, Henry, that Gallio careth for none of these things. For the last three years I have been looking for a wife that would answer Solomon's description, 'A woman whose price is above rubies,' and I am fully persuaded that I have found my ideal in the dear girl before you. It little matters to me whether she be a peasant or a princess. The highest of all titles is comprised in that of a Christian."

[Pg 123]

"Mr. Fitzmorris, I honour you for your choice!" cried Mrs. Martin, "and rejoice at the good fortune of our young friend."

Dorothy, overwhelmed with the unexpected turn that her affairs had taken, sat with downcast eyes and averted head, in order to conceal her quivering lips and fast-coming tears; yet she was happy, far too happy to speak, and would gladly have left the table, to escape observation and commune with her own heart in the solitude of her chamber.

Gerard saw her confusion, and in order to restore her self-possession, called out gaily, "I hope, Mrs. Martin, you have reserved for us a good cup of tea, and have not been guilty of destroying Henry's nerves by giving him the strength of the pot. I assure you, I feel viciously hungry after a long day's fast, and am not yet sufficiently spiritualized to live wholly upon love."

Strangely enough, this speech, which was meant to raise Dorothy's spirits, recalled forcibly to her memory the conversation between herself and Gilbert Rushmere at the stile, when she had rallied him for saying, in such passionate terms, "That if she refused to marry him, he would die of love." And now she was the betrothed of another, with a heart overflowing with joy and gratitude that she could never be Gilbert's wife, while he had united his destiny with a woman whom he could neither love nor honour, and was more likely to die the victim of avarice than love. "How inscrutable," she thought, "are the ways of Providence. How little human wisdom could predict such a result."

[Pg 124]

Dorothy was no longer banished from the sacred study. Gerard insisted on her taking possession of the great leathern chair, while he composed those heart-searching sermons that were making his name known as an eloquent preacher.

When absorbed in his own meditations, the pale, fair-haired priest seemed scarcely conscious of her presence; but if, by chance, he encountered her look of devotional tenderness, the wonderful eyes responded with an earnest gaze of love and peace—their owner sometimes observing, with a

[Pg 125]

sigh, "Dorothy, darling, I am too happy." Then Dorothy would creep to his side, or sit down on the stool at his feet, just to feel the pressure of his large white hand on her ebon ringlets, and hear him say, in his rich, deep voice, "God bless you, my dear girl."

And when the writing was laid aside for the day, and she accompanied him in his visits to the poor and suffering, she enjoyed with unspeakable delight the walk over the heath, and the share he allotted to her in his ministrations of charity.

Poor old Francis died during Mr. Fitzmorris' absence, but he still continued his visits to Hog Lane, to read and pray with its half-heathen inhabitants. He had made slow progress in the conversion of old Mrs. Bell, but her grandson, Ben, had become a reformed character, and was a monitor in Storby Sunday-school. Speaking of the grandmother, he said:

[Pg 126]

"It was difficult to make any religious impression upon minds whose feelings and faculties were deadened and rendered indifferent by age and infirmity. If they do not seek God in youth or middle life, they seldom draw near to Him after reaching the appointed age of man."

Returning from one of these parochial visits, Dorothy reminded her lover of a promise he had once made to her, of telling her some of the events of his former life, and the circumstances that had led to his conversion, and induced him to become a minister of the Gospel.

"I am glad you have asked me, Dorothy, I feel quite in a communicative mood this evening. You have made me acquainted with every page in your short eventful history; it is not fair that you should be kept in ignorance of mine, uninteresting as it may appear."

[Pg 127]

They sat down upon a sloping bank, crowned with a screen of tall furze bushes, among whose honeyed blossoms, bees and butterflies were holding a carnival. The sun had not yet set, and his slanting rays gleaming over the wide heath, obscured every object with their golden radiance.

"It is a shame to turn our backs upon that glorious sunshine," said Dorothy, "but my eyes are dazzled and blinded by excess of light."

"What a type of the beautiful but fallacious visions of youth," said Gerard, "when we behold everything through a false medium, coloured by fancy to suit our own taste. Truth lies at the bottom of the picture, like the ragged landscape that the golden sunset hides from our view. While attracted by the brilliancy of his beams and building castles among the clouds, we forget the barren soil and the bare rocks beneath our feet. Mine is no tale of romance, gentle wife, though I have been a great dreamer in my day, but one of sad reality; and that I may avoid trespassing too much upon your patience, I will endeavour to be as brief as possible."

[Pg 128]

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 129]

A CONFESSION.

"My father, Colonel Gerard Fitzmorris, was brother to Sir Thomas, the father of the present Earl of Wilton. Gerard was many years younger than his brother; a large family having died between their respective births. He held the rank of colonel in the army, and served the whole of the American War of Independence, and had gained the reputation of a brave and distinguished officer. After the termination of the struggle, he returned to England, and married Lady Charlotte Granville, sister to the Lady Dorothy Fitzmorris. These beautiful and accomplished women, were the only children of the late Earl of Wilton.

[Pg 130]

"This was an excellent match for my father, in the common parlance of the world; but was one entirely of convenience on his part. He was a handsome dashing soldier, and was held in great esteem by men of his own class, who considered him the model of a perfect gentleman and a leader in the ranks of fashion, where he shone as a star of the first magnitude. In short, he was one of those easy-going reckless men, who are known among their companions as excellent fellows. Men, whose hearts are in the right place, who spend their money freely and are only enemies to themselves. They may drink, and swear, and gamble, and break God's commandments with impunity; drawing others into the same maddening vortex by their vile example; but the world, for which they live, excuses all their faults. They are of it, have sworn allegiance to it body and soul, and as long as they retain wealth and influence, it will continue to make idols of them.

[Pg 131]

"Colonel Fitzmorris, in addition to all these conventional advantages, possessed the act of pleasing in an eminent degree, and was admired and courted by the other sex as the beau ideal of manly beauty and elegance. Doubtless it was these external graces that captivated and won the heart of my mother.

"People wondered that the proud Earl should give his consent to the marriage of his daughter, with a man of moderate fortune and dissipated habits; but she was the child of his old age, the sole fruit of a second marriage; another petted idol of his heart. From a baby she had been used to have her own way, and the doting father could not withstand her passionate appeals to his parental affection, to be allowed to marry the man of her own choice.

"The Earl, in this case, appears reluctantly to have yielded to her wishes; and delayed the marriage until after she had attained her majority; hoping that time and the gaities of London would divert her affections from my father, and concentrate them upon a more eligible object.

[Pg 132]

She, however, remained firm to her attachment, and their marriage was celebrated with unusual magnificence. A prince of the blood royal gave away the bride, who inherited a fine fortune from her mother, which, I fear, was the sole inducement my father had in making her his wife.

"My poor deceived mother, I have every reason to believe, was passionately fond of her husband; but retiring in her habits, she lacked the art to secure the affection of a man of the world, and such a general lover as Colonel Fitzmorris was known to be.

"She was his legal wife, but not the mistress of his heart. In public he treated her with marked attention and politeness, which he considered due to a woman of her rank; in private she was neglected altogether, or regarded with cool indifference; and having no inclination for the ostentatious show of a life spent in public, my dear mother passed most of her time in the country with her infant sons, at the beautiful seat which had formed a part of her noble dower. [Pg 133]

"While she continued to love my father, his conduct must have occasioned her great anguish of mind. A faithful female attendant has since informed me that most of her solitary nights were spent in tears. After every tender feeling had been torn and estranged, and indifference succeeded to love, she, unfortunately, transferred the affections which had never been reciprocated by her faithless partner, to a man who, had she known previous to her ill-starred marriage, would have been worthy of her love.

"General Halstead commanded the brigade in which my father was colonel, and was a constant visitor at the house. He was a man in middle life, with a fine, gentlemanly presence, frank, brave, and independent, had read and travelled much, and could talk well on most subjects. He was very kind to us boys, and we both loved him, for we saw a great deal more of him than of our father, who never kissed or played with us as General Halstead did. [Pg 134]

"But to hasten a sad story. General Halstead sought and won the heart my father had trampled and spurned, and my mother eloped with her seducer to France. I have often since wondered how she could leave her two young sons, who were rendered worse than orphans by her rash desertion.

"I can just remember my mother. She was always gentle and kind to Francis and me. We so seldom saw our father that we loved her with the most ardent affection. I recollect the fatal night of her departure as well as if it were but yesterday. The weather was July, and oppressively warm, and Mrs. Starling, the nurse, put us early to bed, that we might not disturb Lady Charlotte, who was dressing to go to a large party, she said, 'and could not play with us that night.' [Pg 135]

"I was a nervous, irritable boy. I could not sleep for the heat, and lay awake watching the moon, and the strange shadows thrown by the vine-leaves that encircled the window, upon the white curtains of my bed. At last I grew frightened by the grotesque shapes, which my too active imagination endowed with life and motion, when the summer breeze from the open window stirred the drapery.

"I began to cry piteously.

"A figure glided into the room, and sat down beside me on the bed. It was my mother. She was dressed for a journey, and wore a dark cloth riding habit, and a broad black velvet hat and white feathers. She was a tall, elegant-looking woman, more remarkable, I have been told, for her exquisite form than for her face. She was, if anything, too fair, with dark blue eyes and flaxen hair like my own. She used to call me her dear, white-headed boy, and congratulate herself on my being a Granville—her maiden name—and not a Fitzmorris. That night she looked very pale and sad, and seen in the white moon-light, appeared more like a ghost than a creature of warm flesh and blood. [Pg 136]

"'What ails my darling boy?' she said, and took me out of the bed into her lap, pressing me tightly to her breast, and kissing the tears from my wet cheeks.

"'I am afraid, mamma.' I trembled and looked timidly towards the curtains.

"'Afraid of what?' and her eyes followed mine with a startled expression.

"'Of those things dancing on the bed curtains. Don't you see the black, ugly creatures, mamma?' [Pg 137]

"'They are only shadows; they cannot hurt you, Gerard.'

"'Oh, yes, they can. They are coming for me. Don't let them carry me away.' I clung to her, and hid my face in her bosom. 'Oh, do stay with me, dear mamma, until I go to sleep! Don't leave me alone!'

"I felt her warm tears falling fast over my face. She kissed me over and over again, then tried to lay me down quietly in the bed. I did not want to go to bed, and I flung my arms round her neck, and held her with desperate energy.

"'Don't go! If you love me, mamma, don't go!'

"'I must go, my dear boy.'

"'What, to-night, mamma!'

"'Yes to-night, the carriage is waiting.'

"Her lips quivered, she wrung her hands with an impatient gesture. 'Don't ask any more questions, Gerard, I am going a long journey with a friend. Now lie down like a good boy, and go to sleep.'

[Pg 138]

"And when will you come back?"

"She was weeping passionately, and didn't answer.

"To-morrow?"

"She shook her head.

"Then take me, too. I will be a good boy—indeed I will. But don't go away and leave me.'

"I can't take you, Gerard. Where I am going, you cannot come.' She tried to unclasp my clinging arms, but it was some time before she succeeded, I held her so fast.

"Oh my poor little boys! my poor little boys!' she cried, in an agony of grief, as she bent over me and kissed my sleeping brother. 'What a wretch I am to leave you to the care of such a father. Gerard,' she said softly, 'if I never come back, will you sometimes think of me, and continue to love your poor mother?'

[Pg 139]

"I was growing sleepy, and was too young to comprehend the terrible truth concealed by those words. I dimly remember, as in a dream, a tall man leaning over us, and extricating my mother from my clinging arms.

"He is going to sleep, Charlotte, dearest, you should have spared yourself this trying scene.'

"How can I live without them, Charles?' she sobbed, and stretched her arms towards us.

"You must now live for me, Charlotte. We have ventured too far to go back. Come away, my love, it is time we were on board.'

"That was the last time I ever saw my mother. Before she left the room I was asleep, in blissful ignorance of the great calamity that had befallen me.

[Pg 140]

"Though guilty of a terrible crime, I have never been able to banish her from my heart—where she must ever remain, as one of the most beautiful visions of childhood.

"Poor, gentle, affectionate, ill-used mother, with a heart brimful of love and kindness, how dreadful the conflict must have been, between duty to a husband who never loved her, and fidelity to the man by whom she was passionately loved. Terrible must have been her mental struggles, before she resolved to burst those sacred ties asunder, and leave for ever the children so dear to her.

"Was she more guilty than the husband, who in defiance of his marriage vows, lived in open adultery with another woman, on whose children he bestowed the parental love he withheld from those born in lawful wedlock, wasting the noble fortune he obtained through his injured wife among disreputable companions, in low scenes of debauchery and vice.

[Pg 141]

"The world can always extenuate the fault of the male offender, and lay the blame solely upon his unhappy partner; insinuating that faults of temper, and a want of sympathy in his tastes and pursuits, was most probably the cause of his estrangement—unscrupulously branding her name with scorn and infamy.

"There is One, however, who weighs in an equal balance the cause and the effects produced by it in the actions of men, who will judge her more leniently. The merciful Saviour who said to the erring woman, dragged into His presence to be made a public example and put to a cruel death, 'Woman where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.'

"Oh, how my bosom thrilled and my heart burned within me, when I read that text seriously for the first time, and thought of my poor mother, and was comforted with the blessed hope that she, too, might be forgiven."

[Pg 142]

Gerard's voice faltered, and Dorothy felt the strong frame tremble with emotion, but the stronger will conquered the human weakness, and he continued:

"My father's sense of honour, in the world's acceptance of the term, was stung by the desertion of his neglected wife. He learned that the fugitives had been seen in Paris, and lost no time in tracing them out. A duel was the result, in which my father received a mortal wound. His body was brought home and buried with due pomp in the family vault. My brother was seven years of age; myself a little chubby boy in frocks and trowsers; and we had to act as chief mourners in that melancholy pageant. We saw the coffin that contained the mortal remains of our father, the once handsome and admired Colonel Fitzmorris, placed in due form among the forgotten members of his ancient house; and after the nine days wonder was over, he was as much forgotten by his fashionable associates as if he had never been. The night before my father died by the hand of the man who had dishonoured him, he made a will leaving everything he possessed to my brother Francis. The settlement made from my mother's property on younger children, alone falling to my share. As there were no other younger children, and the property was considerable, I was nearly as independent as my brother.

[Pg 143]

"We were left to the guardianship of the Earl of Wilton, who you will remember was our maternal grandfather. The brothers Fitzmorris having married two daughters of that noble house, and females not being excluded from the succession, Sir Thomas Fitzmorris, the present Earl's elder brother, was the heir presumptive to the title and estates.

[Pg 144]

"Lord Wilton was a cold proud man of the world, and the slur that my mother's elopement, and subsequent marriage with General Halstead, had cast upon the family, did not enhance his love for her children.

"He took more to Frank than he did to me, though he said that he greatly resembled his rascally father. He was a handsome dashing boy, with the same winning popular manners that had contributed to the ruin of Colonel Fitzmorris. Fond of money, but only with the intent to spend it, from a child he paid great court to his wealthy grandfather, in the hope of becoming heir to the immense private fortune he had the power to bestow. In this fortune hunting, Edward Fitzmorris, the present Earl, was quite as much interested as my brother, but he pursued his object with a great deal more tact. The Fitzmorrises, though an old family, and highly connected, were not a wealthy family, and Captain Fitzmorris was a younger son, with little more to depend upon than a very handsome person, and his commission in the army.

[Pg 145]

"He watched us lads with a very jealous eye, giving us very little cause to regard him with affection. He was many years our senior, his father having married early, and ours late in life—in fact, he was a man, when we were noisy boys, not yet in our teens. It was only during the holidays that we ever met, as we were sent to Eton and then to college.

"It is of no use to tell you, Dorothy, of all the thoughts and follies, which too often mark a schoolboy's and a student's life. Suffice it to say that your grave Gerard was no better than the rest. A more frolicsome mischievous imp, never drew the breath of life, always in trouble and difficulties of some sort or another, and when at Oxford, the most daring leader of the wildest and most reckless set of young fellows that ever threw away fortune, health and respectability, at that famous seat of learning. How little I thought of religion in those days, still less of ever mounting a pulpit, or teaching the poor and ignorant.

[Pg 146]

"At twenty-one, I received from my grandfather a cadetship for India and went out as a soldier, to fight under the present Lord Wellington, who was then Sir Arthur Wellesley.

"You start, Dorothy. Your future husband a soldier! It is pleasant to read your astonishment in those large wondering eyes. I bear the marks of some hot service too, in sundry ugly scars which I regarded as badges of honour in those world-loving days. It was while suffering severely from one of these wounds, that I was sent home, to see if my native air could restore me to health.

[Pg 147]

"Before leaving India, I determined, if possible, to obtain an interview with my mother. I had never met her husband, though I had eagerly sought an opportunity to revenge upon him the death of my father.

"My mother, I found, had been dead several months, and her husband had been appointed to command a division in Spain. I was terribly disappointed that I could not shoot this man, who had been the best and kindest of husbands to the woman he had led astray from the path of duty, and was reported as almost inconsolable for her loss.

"When I returned to England, great changes had taken place. My grandfather was dead. My cousin Sir Thomas was likewise dead, and the present Earl, who had been for some years a widower, had come in for the title, and all the immense private fortune belonging to his grandfather.

"Of course, Francis and I felt ourselves very much aggrieved, that we were not mentioned in his will, and my brother who had been living a life of reckless extravagance, and hoping to pay off his debts with his share of the spoil, was terribly disappointed.

[Pg 148]

"My aunt, Lady Dorothy, for whom I had always felt the deepest regard, invited me to spend the time I remained in England, at her beautiful residence in Devonshire. It was here that I first met her charming cousin, Miss Julia Curzon, with whom I fell in love at first sight.

"Don't be jealous, little one, more episodes of this kind occur in the lives of men than women, and the first love, though remembered the longest, is not always the wisest or the best.

"I did love this fair accomplished girl with all the energy of youthful passion, and my love was not only returned, but accepted, and I looked forward to our union, as the consummation of my earthly happiness. I did not then suspect that she loved the world better than she did me, and was more afraid of incurring its censure than of rendering me miserable for life.

[Pg 149]

"Several months glided away in that earthly paradise, and in constant companionship with the woman I adored, I considered myself the happiest of men. I saw no clouds in my smiling horizon, and never anticipated a storm. The dark days came at length, that shrouded the sunbeams of hope in gloom and obscurity.

"The summer had set in with intense heat, and much sickness prevailed in the neighbourhood. A slight cold I had taken was succeeded by typhus fever of the most malignant type. When the nature of my malady was made known to the household, all the leading members becoming alarmed for their own safety, left the house, and fled to the sea-side. Julia deserted me without venturing to bid me farewell. Even my brother, who was on a visit with Lady Dorothy, abandoned

[Pg 150]

me, as all supposed, on my death-bed, to the care of hirelings, who were indifferent about me, and more anxious that I should die than live, as in the former case, it would remove from them the sense of danger and responsibility.

"Oh, Dorothy, selfish and worldly as I had been, unguided by the holy precepts of religion, I hardly think that I could have deserted any one so near and dear to me as a betrothed wife and an only brother in such sore extremity. I was anxious to keep Julia and Francis out of danger, but their selfish conduct went home to my heart. I thought about it continually, and raved about their cruelty during the hours when fever and delirium were in the ascendant.

"One friend, however, remained constant to me in the hour of need, never deserting his post by my bed-side, a most tender and self-constituted nurse. He was the son of a small yeoman, who for the sake of good wages, with which he helped to maintain his widowed mother and her family, had undertaken the care of my horses, of which I possessed several splendid animals, being a keen sportsman.

[Pg 151]

"Charles Harley had formed a strong attachment to me, though I often laughed at him for his pious propensities. The young fellow, however, was so conscientious in the discharge of his duty, that he had won my respect, and, for his humble opportunities, was a man of superior endowments, possessing a fine intellect and strong good sense. In my rational mood he took great delight in reading the Scriptures to me. The monotony of his voice wearied me. I was so much indebted to him for his kind attention to me in my helpless state, that I did not like to wound his feelings by telling him to desist, that I wanted faith to believe in his dogmas, but I considered them a great bore, often pursuing my own train of thought without listening to him.

[Pg 152]

"The first night that the fever took a favourable turn, and my burning eyelids at last closed to sleep, I had an awful dream, or inspiration, I will call it, to rouse me from a state of careless indifference to the future, and set before me the urgent necessity of self-examination and repentance.

"I thought I was travelling with a gay and joyous set of companions, fellows to whom I was well-known, through a beautiful and highly cultivated country. My father and brother and my affianced bride formed part of the pleasure-seeking crowd. Some were on horseback, some on foot, and some in splendid carriages, but all intent on one object, and evidently bound to the same place.

[Pg 153]

"As I journeyed onward, somewhat behind the rest, there gradually rose before me in the east, the walls of a magnificent city, sloping back from the banks of a wide deep stream, in the depths of whose clear pellucid waters, towers and spires and majestic trees were reflected in golden splendour, the very sight of which created in me an intense desire, and impelled me forward to reach the height on which it stood.

"While feasting my eyes upon the novel spectacle, so different from anything I had ever before seen, a sudden halt took place in the foremost ranks of our jovial company, when noisy shouts and acclamations were changed into groans and shrieks and melancholy wailings.

"I hurried forward to ascertain the cause of the delay, and learn the reason of such frantic lamentations.

"It was then that I first discovered that, between us and the shining river that flowed beneath the walls of the golden city, extended a fearful gulf, of unknown depth, and shrouded in utter darkness, which completely intersected the country, precluding the possibility of any advance in that direction.

[Pg 154]

"From the yawning jaws of this frightful abyss, a lurid mist continually floated up, hiding the celestial city from my view. Into this hideous chasm, as if driven by an irresistible impulse or dire necessity, the crowd, so lately full of noisy merriment, slowly and surely disappeared. Some made desperate efforts to escape, and clung to the rocks and bushes, and called upon their comrades to save them from destruction; others plunged sullenly into the awful gulf, with stoical indifference to their fate, without asking assistance from their companions in misery, or uttering one prayer for mercy.

[Pg 155]

"I watched them one after another disappear, till my mind was overwhelmed with horror—till my hair stiffened on my head, and my limbs were paralyzed with fear.

"I could not utter a sound, or make an effort to escape from a doom which appeared inevitable. But my soul sent up a cry through that dense darkness, which reached, though unspoken, to the throne of the great Judge—'Save me, Lord, for I perish!'

"A flash of vivid lightning dispelled for a moment the black horrors of the scene, and revealed to me a cross towering above the dreadful abyss, and planted upon a rock, and one bound thereon like unto the Son of Man, pale, bleeding, and dewed with the death-agony, and written above his head, in characters of light, which revealed all the ghastly horrors of that dismal scene, I read these words: 'Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.'

[Pg 156]

"That light pierced my soul like a two-edged sword, and pointed out the only way by which I could escape. I sprang forward. I toiled on hands and knees up the steep acclivity, and sank down gasping at the foot of the cross, embracing it with desperate energy in my arms.

"I awoke bedewed with a cold perspiration, and trembling in every limb.

"Thank God, it is but a dream!" I cried, as I felt the clasp of Harley's hand, who had heard me scream in my sleep, and had hurried to my assistance. But such a dream—oh, such a frightful dream! So terrible—so real—it looked like truth.

"He gave me a composing draught, and, after a while, begged me to tell him what had frightened me so much in my sleep.

"I was ashamed to tell him my dream, for fear he should think me a coward for quailing before a mere vision of the night. But it haunted me continually. Waking or sleeping it was ever present to my mind. I still imagined myself standing upon the brink of that dreadful precipice—still heard the cries of my lost companions ringing in my ears, as the cloud received them in its sable folds, and the yawning gulf swallowed them up for ever.

[Pg 157]

"I no longer turned a deaf ear to Harley's prayers, or listened with indifference while he read to me the Word of Life. My heart responded to every petition, and I listened with intense interest to his simple exposition of passages of Holy Writ. My heart was now opened to conviction, and hungered and thirsted for a knowledge of divine truth with desperate eagerness. A horrible consciousness of guilt pressed so heavily upon my mind that it is a wonder my brain did not yield to the mental pressure.

[Pg 158]

"After a long struggle with pride, I revealed to Harley the state of my mind, and with many tears besought his advice and assistance. With what joy he embraced me, and mingled his tears with mine, and assured me that I was in the right path, that no man without repentance could ever hope to see God. That my dream was a solemn warning sent by Him, to show me the danger of delay, and called upon me to abandon my wicked courses, and lay down the burthen of my sins at the foot of the cross. He besought me, in the most eloquent language, not to neglect the heavenly vision, lest I should share the fate of those I had seen in my dream.

"I was still too weak to leave my bed or read for myself, and I fear I taxed the poor fellow's strength too much, in making him read to me for hours at a time. And then I prayed.

"Oh, Dorothy, have you ever experienced the mingled joy and agony of earnest, heartfelt prayer. When shocked at the cold indifference of your own heart, you have bowed your head in the dust as one bereft of all hope; when a sudden gleam of light has shot into your soul, revealing glimpses of heaven, and filling your mind with contentment and holy peace. Such a happy moment came for me at last, which repaid me a thousand fold for all my past sufferings, and the image of Christ was formed in my soul the hope of glory. I awoke to a new life—awoke to rejoice in Him for evermore, and cheerfully took up the cross to follow Him, and suffer—if called upon to do so—gladly for His sake.

[Pg 159]

"The first trial that awaited me after my recovery was the death of my dear friend, Harley, who took the fever from which a merciful God had suffered me to escape. I nursed him with the same devotion he had shown to me, and it was in my arms he passed from earth to heaven.

[Pg 160]

"If anything had been wanting to confirm my faith, and strengthen the resolution I had formed, of devoting myself to the Master's service, Harley's death-bed would have done it. His faith in Jesus was so perfect, his victory over the last enemy so triumphant, that it left no room for cavil or doubt.

"When my friends heard of my intention of leaving the army, and studying for the church, they pronounced me mad; and it was publicly reported through the country that I had lost my senses during the fever. My conversion was a standing joke among my gay companions, and my brother was never tired of quizzing me about it, and making it the subject of ribald jests. This was hard enough to bear; but when Julia Curzon whom I loved so truly, joined with the rest in ridiculing my absurd fanaticism, as she was pleased to call it, and declared that if I persisted in such folly she never would become my wife, I was sorely tempted to step back into the old path, and resign for her sake my new-born hopes of heaven. Fortunately for me I was saved from such wickedness by the young lady herself, who ran off with a rich country squire, with whom she had been flirting desperately at the sea-side during my illness.

[Pg 161]

"This ended my romance of life. I felt heartily ashamed of myself for having loved such a worldly-minded woman. My love for her was sincere, but I had no other basis to support it than mere beauty, and a certain amount of fashionable accomplishments. My castle was built upon the sands, and the foundations yielded readily to the first shock, and when it fell, though humbled and mortified, I regained my freedom. After this disappointment, I returned to college to redeem the time I had wasted there in the days of my reckless youth, and to study diligently for my profession. It was more than two years before I was satisfied with the sincerity of my belief, and my fitness for so sacred a calling, when I gladly accepted from Lord Wilton the parishes of Hadstone and Storby as Vicar under him.

[Pg 162]

"And now, little wife, you are acquainted with the leading points of my history, and nothing more remains to be told, so let us up and be walking home-wards, or we shall be too late for the school examination this evening."

Kissing the small hand that insinuated itself into his own, he lifted her from her lowly seat, and they returned to the parsonage in time for tea.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 163]

MR. FITZMORRIS READS A TEMPERANCE LECTURE.

Mr. Fitzmorris lost no time in writing to Lord Wilton, and informing him of his engagement with Dorothy Chance, not because he considered that the Earl had any power to influence her choice, but as a matter of courtesy, he having proved himself a kind friend to the orphan girl.

That she was his daughter, he had little doubt. If a legitimate child, such a worldly-minded man, as he knew the Earl to have been in his younger days, would never have consented to see her the wife of Gilbert Rushmere, a man so much beneath him, in birth and education. The idea was preposterous, and fully convinced him that she was the offspring of some unfortunate connection, in which the Earl had suffered loss of honour, and perhaps a woman whom he had passionately loved.

[Pg 164]

Henry Martin represented him as a conscience stricken and unhappy man, who seemed anxious to make atonement for the evil acts of his past life, by deeds of benevolence and kindness.

"He has stumbled upon that great stumbling stone," said the good curate, "in thinking it possible to obtain the forgiveness of sins through acts of charity and self-sacrifice. If this could be done, there was no need of an atonement, and the cross would never have groaned beneath the weight of the Son of God."

Whatever was the nature of the tie that bound Dorothy to the Earl, it was involved in mystery, which Gerard Fitzmorris cared very little to solve. His love for Dorothy was so pure and disinterested, that had he found her begging along the highway, and been convinced of the noble qualities of heart and mind with which she was endowed, he would have thanked God, with all the fervour of his large heart, for giving him such a wife.

[Pg 165]

He made no allusion in his letter to these matters, but merely stated, that the admiration he felt for Dorothy Chance, and her unaffected piety, had kindled in his heart a sincere and ardent attachment, which had overcome the prejudices of education and caste, and induced him to make her his wife. That having lost her foster-mother, she had no place which she could properly call her home, or any legal protector to silence the shafts of calumny, that were already assailing her character in all directions. That he was happy in having secured the affections of the woman he loved, and he was certain that his noble kinsman as a friend to both parties, would rejoice in this happy union.

[Pg 166]

And Dorothy wrote to her absent friend all that was in her heart.

"Hadstone Parsonage.

"Dear Lord Wilton,

"I am no scribe, and never attempted to write a letter before in my life; so you must excuse the cramped hand, and all the other blunders and blots, which really I cannot help. I was in great trouble when I got your kind letter, for my poor mother was dying a cruel, painful death from cancer, and my heart was very sore with having to dress her wounds and witness her sufferings.

"I read your generous expressions of love and friendship, with the deepest gratitude, and entered into your sorrows with tears of true and heartfelt sympathy, wondering who *I* was to awaken such an interest in the mind of a great lord.

[Pg 167]

"Pondering this over and over in my own way, a sudden thought struck me. I will not mention it for I know it would pain you, perhaps, more than it did me. But it had reference to my unknown mother, and I felt very angry, and hoped that what I expected might not be the case, and that I might still continue to love and honour you, as heretofore, which indeed I could not do, if those wicked thoughts were true.

"They took such a hold of my mind, that I was going to tear your letter, and the draft you sent me to pieces, and trample them under my feet.

"I was saved from committing such an outrage, by my poor friend Mrs. Rushmere, who told me that I was acting very foolishly. You may know by this, that I am not so meek as I look, but a very vixen when bad thoughts get into my head.

[Pg 168]

"Oh, my good lord, you need not have told me that you were not my *lover*. Indeed, indeed, I never was so vain or presumptuous, to imagine such a thing, though if I had been such a little simpleton, it would not have been half so bad as the other crime of which I suspected you.

"I thank you much for your generous gift, but I have had no occasion to use it, and when you come back, I will return the draft to you.

"A great many things have happened since you went away. Gilbert came to visit his parents, and brought down with him his wife and her mother, and a very disagreeable servant girl, which put me sadly about, and mother so sick.

"When I saw Gilbert again, I wondered how I had ever loved him so much and made myself so miserable. He is far handsomer, is better dressed, and externally improved in every way, yet I felt glad that I could never be his wife.

[Pg 169]

"He was kind enough, but his women folk treated me very cruelly, and insulted me in every way they could. Their conduct was such, that if I had not promised dear mother to stay with her till all was over, I would have left the house the very day they entered it.

"They were not contented with insulting me themselves, but set the vulgar impudent girl they had with them to harass and annoy me in every way.

"These women called themselves ladies, but to me they seemed like ill-bred pretenders, who asserted their claims to respectability by treating with insolence and contempt those whom they considered inferiors.

"Oh, my lord, I was really ashamed of shedding so many tears about their unkind speeches and unwomanly remarks, but I found their conduct was making me as wicked as themselves.

[Pg 170]

"You knew my old dog, Pincher, the Scotch terrier, that you said should be called old Faithful, because he loved me so well. The vile girl, Martha Wood, actually murdered her mistress's pet poodle, that she might lay the blame upon poor Pincher. Tom, our farm servant, told me he saw her do it over the hedge. And Mrs. Gilbert Rushmere gave the wretch half a crown to hang my noble Pincher. I believe this treacherous girl would have betrayed our blessed Saviour for thirty pieces of copper. This, which will appear but a light matter to your lordship, caused me the keenest grief. When we have few friends to love us, the attachment of these simple creatures seems to me so touching.

"My dear mother was found dead in her bed on the tenth of last July. She had had a long conversation with me about her end, (which everybody saw was fast approaching) the night before, and was so tranquil and happy, and spoke so cheerfully of it, as a blessed release from great suffering, and of the perfect peace she enjoyed in the assurance of her Saviour's love, that it seemed an act of impiety any one wishing to detain her from her promised rest.

[Pg 171]

"I stayed until after the funeral to comfort the dear old man, and restore something of order to the house. While I was busy packing up my few things, to remove to dear Mrs. Martin's, young Mrs. Rushmere came into the room, and demanded of me the key of my trunk, that she might see if *I had taken anything that did not belong to me!* It made me feel dreadful. Oh, my lord, *your good gentle Dorothy* was turned into a fiend. But for the restraining hand of God, I believe I should have murdered her. Well, my lord, when she did examine my trunk—for I called up her husband, and made her do it before him, did she not produce the two large silver gravy spoons that belonged to the old covenanter, Sir Lawrence Rushmere, of whose picture father is so proud, as if by magic from the bottom of the box? Though I knew I was innocent, I am sure that I looked as if I was guilty. I could not have felt worse, if Satan himself had accused me before the throne of God.

[Pg 172]

"I was so bewildered, that I did not know how to defend myself, and when she told her husband to call in a constable, and send me to gaol, to be tried for theft, and I knew that the evidence might hang or transport me, I felt dumb with horror. Gilbert, however, suspected treachery, and proved my innocence past a doubt, through the evidence of Martha Wood, whom she had only partially made acquainted with her scheme to ruin me, and so a merciful Providence turned the tables against her.

"You may be certain that I was not long in leaving a house that contained such inmates, pitying Gilbert the possession of such a wife, and doubly pitying the poor forlorn old man, who must depend upon her for all his future comforts.

[Pg 173]

"And now, my lord, that I have wearied you with an account of all my troubles, I must tell you something that has made me very glad—so glad, that I consider myself the happiest woman in England.

"Mr. Fitzmorris loves me, and has asked me to be his wife. I know that I am not worthy to be the wife of such an excellent man, but if I am always with him, I cannot fail in becoming wiser and better, for I love him with all my heart, and feel in very truth that our union cemented on earth will last for ever.

"Mr. Fitzmorris has recently lost his brother, and our marriage will not take place before the spring. With sincere wishes for the speedy recovery of your son, and that your lordship may enjoy many years of health and happiness,

[Pg 174]

"I remain,

"Your grateful little friend,

"DOROTHY CHANCE."

Lord Wilton received this quaint and singularly candid letter a few days after the death of his son, and just as he was embarking for England, to carry the loved remains to their final resting place in the family vault.

This was not exactly the sort of letter Lord Wilton had waited so impatiently to receive. He had

expected sentiment mingled with a dash of youthful romance, and he found only an unvarnished truthful statement of plain facts. One passage in Dorothy's epistle, however, instantly riveted his attention.

"Francis Fitzmorris dead!" he exclaimed, "and Dorothy's future husband heir to the earldom and estates. How strange! What an unexpected interposition of Providence to save me from exposure and disgrace, while she will lose nothing by that sad affair remaining an impenetrable secret."

[Pg 175]

What the Earl alluded to has yet to be explained.

Dorothy's engagement to the Vicar could not long be concealed in a small village like Hadstone; whether through servants, or the shrewd observation of neighbours, it soon leaked out.

Miss Watling was in arms in a moment, and stoutly denied the facts wherever she went. While old Mistress Barford insisted that the report was true, that she had heard it from the very best authority, from Mrs. Martin herself.

The dispute was at its height when the two women stepped into the hall at Heath Farm, in order to return a friendly visit from its present mistress.

"Have you heard the news, Mr. Rushmere?" said Mrs. Barford, addressing the old gentleman, who had greatly failed since his wife's death, and was composing himself for an afternoon nap in the great chair.

[Pg 176]

"What news?" quoth he, "there's very little news that can interest me now."

"Your old favourite, Dorothy Chance, is going to be married."

"Ay, that's summat, though," and he leaned eagerly forward, and quite wide awake. "She'll make an excellent wife whoever has the luck to get a'. Who's the man?"

"No less a person than the Vicar, young Mr. Fitzmorris. There's a chance for her."

"What our Dolly marry the parson!" and he rubbed his hands in great glee. "Good for her."

"I beg, Mr. Rushmere, that you will not believe a word of it," cried Miss Watling. "A very likely thing indeed, for a man of his condition to marry the child of some miserable vagabond. It's a story all got up, between Dorothy and Mrs. Martin, to throw discredit on Mr. Fitzmorris, who everybody knows, is not a marrying man."

[Pg 177]

"No discredit, I should think, to him or to any one," said Gilbert, turning with a flushed face from the window, where he was standing, "if marrying a beautiful virtuous woman can be a disgrace."

"That's right, Gilbert, speak up for your old love," sneered Nancy, unrestrained in venting her spleen by the lowering brow of Gilbert.

"But, ladies," she continued, "is it probable that this man, who is now Lord Wilton's heir, will ever make such a woman as that a countess?"

[Pg 178]

"Ah," said Mrs. Barford, "I told you more than a year ago, Nancy, that we might live to see Dorothy Chance ride to church in her carriage."

"I'll believe it when I see it," remarked Mrs. Rushmere; "I should as soon expect seeing Martha Wood a countess."

"The girl is very pretty," said Mrs. Rowly, "there is no denying that; but I don't believe that she is either virtuous or over honest. My daughter caught her stealing silver spoons."

"How—what's that, who dares to call Dorothy a thief?" cried old Rushmere, starting to his feet. "If it were Goliath of Gath, I would tell him he lied. That a' wud."

"My wife did," replied Gilbert sullenly, "and had to eat her words. I think, Sophia, considering the part you took in that infamous affair, it would have been better for you to have held your tongue."

[Pg 179]

"Always against your wife, sir. But I know the reason why you are so savage this afternoon. You don't like to hear that Dorothy Chance is going to marry a better man than yourself," replied Sophia, in her softest tone.

"She deserves it, as much as I did a better wife."

He left the room slamming the door after him. Miss Watling raised her eyebrows, shrugged her shoulders, and cast a pitying look towards his wife. Sophia smiled, "that's a warning to all young unmarried ladies, Miss Watling, not to be too eager to get a husband. I can assure them, that it is far better to remain single."

"You may spare such advice, Mrs. Rushmere, it will never appear rational, except to the initiated," said Mrs. Barford. "From the time of Eve down-wards, old maids and young maids never will give up the hope of getting married. I had a maiden aunt of sixty, who put this proviso in her will: 'I leave all my personal property to my nephew, James Stanton; but in case of my marrying, an event not impossible, though rather improbable, I revoke the said bequest.'"

[Pg 180]

"If men are such bad folks," said old Rushmere, "I want to know, Mrs. Barford, why all the widdies are so anxious to thrust their heads again under the yoke?"

"They have met with one bad husband, and hope to get a better," returned Mrs. Rowly, thinking that in duty bound she ought to speak up for them. "There is one piece of advice, however, which I, who have been some years a widow, would give to both widows and maids. Never to marry a cross superannuated old man!" and she cast a scornful glance at the master of the house.

[Pg 181]

"Sour grapes," muttered the old Rushmere. "One she-fox is enough in a house, without having two to eat the grapes."

"What did you say about foxes, Mr. Rushmere?" asked Miss Watling, very innocently. "Have they been troubling your poultry lately?"

"Yes, Nancy, eating me out of house and home. I wish a' could get rid of such troublesome vermin."

"*You* must feel the loss of your wife very much?" remarked the same kind individual.

"More an' more every day. While Mary lived, I had a quiet comfortable home, but now, I am no longer master o' my own house. Ay, times are changed, but it won't be for long." And taking up his staff he hobbled out.

"The poor old man is failing very fast," said Mrs. Barford. "What a hale strong man he was a year ago."

[Pg 182]

"Oh, he frets, and fumes, and finds fault with everything," returned Mrs. Gilbert. "It's of no use attempting to please him—in fact, I now never try. A nice house it would be if I allowed him to interfere. Between him and his son I lead the life of a dog."

"How do you get on with the dairy, Mrs. Rushmere?" asked Mrs. Barford. "Heath Farm was always celebrated for its butter and cheese."

"I have given all that up," returned Mrs. Gilbert. "I can tell old Rushmere and his son that they won't make a dairy-maid of me."

"But how will you live without it? The farm is fit for nothing else?"

"I don't care. I just get Martha to make enough butter to supply the house. The old fellow grumbles and says, it's only fit for cart grease. But if I can eat it, I am sure he may. I won't put up with his airs."

[Pg 183]

"Poor old man!" sighed Mrs. Barford, as they left the house. "It's very plain to me how all this will end. Gilbert can't work, and this wife of his won't, and the old place will soon come to the hammer, if all we hear of Gilbert's constant visits to the ale-house be true."

"How dirty and untidy everything looks," said Miss Watling. "I was afraid the dusty chairs would spoil my black silk dress. How neat and clean the house used to be."

"In Dorothy's time," suggested Mrs. Barford. "Rushmere did a foolish thing, when he hindered Gilbert from marrying her. However, the poor girl will be much better off."

"Oh, don't talk about her. I hate her very name."

[Pg 184]

"Nancy, it is all envy," returned Mrs. Barford, laughing; "you will like her very much when she is Countess of Wilton."

What Mrs. Barford had hinted about Gilbert's visits to the public-house in the village, was but too true. The young man had no peace or happiness at home. His wife and her mother insulted and abused his old father, who gave way alternately to fits of passion and sullen gloom. He would appeal to Gilbert, when he felt himself unusually aggrieved, but for the sake of peace, for he was really afraid of his wife, Gilbert chose to remain neutral.

This enraged the old man, who would call him a poor hen-pecked coward, to stand by and see him ill-treated. Then Gilbert, roused in his turn, would tell him that it was his own fault, that if he had let him marry the woman he loved, they might have been all happy together.

[Pg 185]

One evening, when Dorothy and her lover were returning home through the lane, from visiting a sick man in the country, they observed a tall man staggering along before them, making very ludicrous efforts to keep his balance, which was greatly frustrated by the want of an arm.

"That's poor Rushmere," said Gerard. "Walk home, dear Dorothy. I must speak to him. I cannot see a fellow-creature in this state without attempting to warn him of his danger."

Directly Dorothy was out of sight, for she took the path over the heath, he followed Gilbert, and, laying his hand gently on his shoulder, said,

"My friend you are in the wrong path, take my advice and I will guide you into a better."

[Pg 186]

"Go to—!" was the awful rejoinder from the intoxicated soldier.

"No, my friend, I should be very sorry to travel one step in your road. It is to save you from the frightful termination of your journey, that I now address you."

"I neither care for your cant, nor your companionship. Begone, and leave me to pursue my own way," and Gilbert turned fiercely round, and struck Mr. Fitzmorris a heavy blow with his left hand. "Do you like that? You see," and he laughed bitterly, "though I am drunk and have only one

hand, I have some strength left."

"Gilbert Rushmere," said Gerard very quietly, "I do not mean to resent your blow. Though now a *canting* parson, I was for five years a *soldier*. You lost your arm in one great battle. I have received wounds in four. I am no coward. Those who fight under the banner of the Prince of Peace must use other weapons than those wielded by the arm of flesh—patience, temperance and brotherly love. I cannot be angry with you, I pity you from my very heart, and would save you, if you would allow me to do so."

[Pg 187]

"If I had known you had been a soldier, Mr. Fitzmorris, and fought and bled for old England, I should have been the last man in the world to strike you. Can you forgive me?"

"With all my heart. There is my hand."

"The blow I gave you was a severe one."

"Rather, I could have returned it with interest. I was once a good boxer, but I wish to be your friend. Cannot I persuade you, Rushmere, to renounce this vile habit, and escape from the ruin which it involves."

[Pg 188]

"I cannot promise you, Mr. Fitzmorris even to try. It is the only relief I have. The only antidote to misery like mine. The sooner it kills me, the sooner I shall get rid of this wretched world. I hate and loathe my life, and want to die."

"That would be all very well, if you could kill your soul. But though you may sinfully abuse and destroy the machine in which it dwells, to destroy that, is beyond your power. It is only the God who made it, that can destroy both body and soul in hell. Suppose that you succeed in killing yourself, you will find the second state worse than the first, a whole eternity of misery, instead of a few years spent on earth. Don't push me off, Rushmere, I can't see you perish in this foolish way, without trying to convince you of your sin."

"I will listen to you some other time. I have heard enough for one night. If you could tell me how to get rid of my wife, I would listen to you patiently all day."

[Pg 189]

He brushed hastily past, his foot caught on a stone, and he measured his length upon the dusty road.

"See, you are not in a fit state to guide yourself." And Gerard once more set him on his feet.

"Go out of my way. I can get on without you. If you knew how jolly a glass makes me feel, you would get drunk too," and he staggered on singing at the top of his voice:

"Which is the properest day to drink? Sunday."

"That, parson, won't do for your shop. Good night."

"Unhappy man," said Gerard, "what good angel can arrest your downward course? if he will not be persuaded by me, I must try what Dorothy can do. I could almost love the fellow, for having had taste enough to love her."

[Pg 190]

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 191]

THE OLD MAN IN PRISON.

Several weeks passed away, happily enough for Dorothy and her lover, who every day became better acquainted with each other, and more deeply sensible of the congeniality of character, which though different in many trifling points, yet harmonized so well together. While they advanced hand in hand, along that narrow path, whose steep ascent towards perfection no human being ever trod unrewarded or in vain, a very different line of conduct had been adopted by Gilbert Rushmere and his wife.

Private quarrels had increased to public brawls, insulting language, and mutual recriminations, and the house was kept in such a miserable state, that few of the old friends and associates of the family ventured across the threshold. Lawrence Rushmere had cause enough to repent of his interference between Dorothy Chance and his son, and found, to his cost, that little peace or comfort remained for him in his old age.

[Pg 192]

The farm was going to ruin; Gilbert was never home until late at night, when he generally was conducted to the house by some neighbouring toper, as fond of losing his senses in the bowl, but in a lesser degree of brutal intoxication.

Mrs. Gilbert raved, and her mother reviled and scorned; and the wretched old man, if he attempted to make his voice heard in the domestic uproar, was silenced by Mrs. Gilbert telling him to hold his tongue, that she wanted no advice from such a superannuated dotard.

[Pg 193]

The report of these doings at Heath Farm were not long in reaching the ears of the Vicar, and gave great pain to Dorothy. What was to be done to rescue Gilbert from ruin? that was the great question.

Mr. Fitzmorris tried to obtain an interview with him, and for that purpose called several times at

the house, but always received the same answer from Martha Wood, "that young Mr. Rushmere was not at home."

"Where was he to be found?"

"She did not know. Perhaps at Jonathan Sly's, at the 'Plough and Harrow,' may be at Storby, where he was looking for a man, to whom he had sold a team of horses."

So to Storby the Vicar went, and inquired of every likely and unlikely place in the town for Lieutenant Rushmere. At one low tavern the landlord told him that he had been there with a horse jockey, that they had some liquor, and went out again, he believed, to bet in the cock-pit. [Pg 194]

"Where may that be? I did not know that you had such an abomination in the town," said Mr. Fitzmorris.

"Well, it's not zactly in the town, sir. There's a little low hedge ale house, by the road side, as you come in by the back way. A hole, kept by old Striker, that was a smuggler, and made to suffer some years agone. He keeps the 'Game Cock.' It is a bad place, only resorted to by thieves and swindlers; and a dreadful pity that the Leaftenant ha' got in with such a set. He'll soon bring the old man to a gaol, and hisself is going to the devil as fast as he can."

Mr. Fitzmorris perceived the great urgency of getting Gilbert out of the clutches of these men, and after thinking over the matter for some minutes, he proposed to the landlord to go with him to the "Game Cock," and tell young Rushmere that a friend wanted to speak to him on a matter of great importance. [Pg 195]

"Na, na, I would not venture my nose in amongst them wild chaps for a crown piece. You see, sir, I'm but a little man of a quiet turn. I never could fight in my life, an' it's only farm labourers that ever frequents my tap, an' they have but little money to spend, and are too heavy and loompish to quarrel, and kick up a bobbery. They only laughs and grins, and jokes one with the tother, whiles they drinks a glass of beer or yeats a mouthful of bread an' cheese, on their way down with their teams to the wharf, where they ships loads of corn, an' then return with coals. These poor creturs are just harmless as lambs. The fellows that Rushmere has got in with are a set of noisy dare devils, who'll knock a man down as soon as look at him. I think yer Reverence had better not go near them." [Pg 196]

"My duty lies in such places, and while in the performance of it, I feel afraid of no man. Can you give me directions as to the situation of the cock-pit, without the necessity of my going into the house?"

"Just beside the house there runs a high brick wall. Open a low door about the middle of it, and you'll find yourself in a shed, with a set of rude fellows swarming round it, looking down upon the pit with the cocks. It's exciting work, sir, that fighting with the bonnie birds," continued the little man, with a knowing twinkle in his eye. "But 'tis reckoned a vulgar, low pastime now. In my young days, lauk a mercy, sir, it was played by high and low, and fortins have been won an' lost on a game cock. Did your Reverence ever see a match?" [Pg 197]

"I have seen, my friend, more than is good in my short life, when I foolishly thought more of the amusements of this world, than of the endless happiness and glory of the next."

"Ah, sir, a man can't allers be thinking of Heaven and reading the Bible, and saying prayers all the time. I'm sure if I were your Reverence I should find it very dull work."

Mr. Fitzmorris smiled good-naturedly.

"There are many ways, my friend, of serving God besides reading the Bible and praying. When we endeavour to follow our Blessed Lord's example, in trying to do good to our fellow-creatures, we award Him the best praise of which our nature is capable; and the man who loves Him, and does all for His sake, without claiming any merit for himself, enjoys in acts of love and charity the most exquisite pleasure." [Pg 198]

Laying his hand emphatically on the little publican's shoulders, he continued, "Seek the Lord earnestly, diligently, and with your whole heart, and serve Him faithfully, and you will know the truth of what I say, and experience such joy and inward satisfaction as you never dreamed of before. The Heaven of a true Christian commences on earth. For where God is, there is Heaven. If His Spirit dwells in you, old things pass away, and all things become new."

Before he had finished the sentence, a farm-servant came up to the little tavern in hot haste.

"Hullo, Barnaby!" he cried, "can yer tell 'un aught o' young Measter Rushmere? The bully-bailiffs are in the house—old measter raging like a wild bull—mistress crying an' wringing her hands—the old 'un scolding and fussing; the blackguard of a servant-girl laughing in her sleeve, to hear what she calls the fun—an' the old man threatening to blow the fellows' brains out with the rusty old blunderbuss that has na' been fired off since King George came to the crown. If Measter Gilbert does na' come whome quick, there'll be the devil to pay an' no pitch hot." [Pg 199]

"It seems hot enough, Joe, by your account already," returned Master Barnaby. "This will be a good excuse for your Reverence to get him away from that sink o' iniquity."

"Let us lose no time," said Mr. Fitzmorris, turning to the man who was standing gaping at him with open mouth and eyes. "My good fellow, can you show me the way to the 'Game Cock?'" [Pg 200]

"Why, yeas, sir. It's on our way whome, supposing yer goes round the back o' the Heath. Yer sartainly won't find Measter Gilbert there?"

"He is there." And Gerard swung his strong oak stick in the air, and followed his conductor at a rapid pace down a narrow footpath that led across the marshes to Hadstone.

It was a lonely, desolate tract, intersected with wide ditches, full of stagnant water, generally crossed by a single plank.

The sluggish river crept its lazy length to the sea, between high banks of mud, and when the tide was out, its dimensions contracted to a tiny stream, which flowed through a wide bed composed of the same alluvial deposit that filled the air for miles with a rank, fishy smell. A footpath ran along the top of the mud-bank, and Mr. Fitzmorris and his guide followed this till they came to a low stone bridge with one arch, of very ancient structure, which crossed the main-road to London, where the heath sank down to the level of the salt flats. A few paces from the bridge, and below the heath, a low dwelling, composed of wattle and daub, bore the ostentatious sign of a large, fiery, red game cock, in the act of crowing, as if to give notice to the tired pedestrian that he could get refreshments for man and beast, at the house kept by Jonas Striker.

[Pg 201]

"Well, Measter Fitzmorris, this be the place. An' yer wud know't by the uproar that's going on in the shed, without the help o' the bird that's allers crowing, but never do crow, outside the door. But don't yer hear the crowing an' clapping o' wings o' the bully birds within, an' the shouts o' the men that ha' won on the conqueror!"

Mr. Fitzmorris did not answer. He pushed open the door of which Barnaby had spoken, and entering the yard with a firm, decided step, walked up to the drunken and noisy crowd.

[Pg 202]

Some drew back as he advanced, as if ashamed of being caught by the parson in such a disreputable place, while others turned and faced him with an audacious stare. Gilbert Rushmere, who was leaning on the rail, cried out in a sneering tone:

"You are too late for the main, parson, but just in time to perform the funeral service over the black cock. There he lies—his last battle ended. As brave a knight as ever wore steel spurs. I'll be chief mourner, for I ventured upon him my last guinea."

Without taking the least notice of this speech, or the ribald crew by whom he was surrounded, Gerard went up to Gilbert, and drew him forcibly apart.

"Rushmere, I have bad news for you. Come home with me. The bailiffs are in the house, and everything in confusion at Heath Farm. You know what the feelings of the proud, independent old man must be in such circumstances. Leave this disgusting place and your vicious companions, and I will see what I can do to save your family from disgrace."

[Pg 203]

Gilbert looked in Gerard's face with a half-stupefied stare of blank incredulity.

"Now, parson, you are only funning me—this is one of your pious dodges to get me out of this. I know I'm a fool to be here—but having once passed the Rubicon, I don't mean to go back."

"What I tell you is perfectly true. Here is your man-servant, ask him. Surely, surely, Mr. Rushmere, you have enough of manhood left in you not to suffer your wife and poor old father to bear the weight of such a calamity alone?"

[Pg 204]

"As to father, let him take it. He deserves it all. But for him, you would not be in my shoes, rejoicing that the woman who ought to have been my wife will shortly be yours. You might be contented, I think, without following me like my shadow, to triumph over me."

"Gilbert Rushmere," said Mr. Fitzmorris, very gravely, "I never saw Dorothy until after you were the husband of another. Your desertion of her, when you knew how much she loved you, was no deed of your father's, but your own voluntary act, for he never knew of your marriage until a few days before you came down to Heath Farm. And let me tell you, that any man who could desert such a noble woman as Dorothy Chance for the sake of a few thousand pounds, was most unworthy to be her husband. But she has nothing to do with the matter now in hand. It is profanation to breathe her name in such an assemblage as this. Do you mean to come home with me, or not?"

[Pg 205]

"I won't go home in your company. I have nothing to say against you. I believe you to be an honourable man and a gentleman, but I hate you for supplanting me in the affections of the only woman I ever loved. The very sight of you makes me wish to break the sixth commandment."

"Why act the part of the dog in the manger? You cannot marry Dorothy yourself. Why entertain such uncharitable feelings towards me, because I have taste enough to prize a jewel that you cast from you. Come, Rushmere, let better feelings prevail, dismiss this unreasonable jealousy, and listen to the advice of one who sincerely wishes to be your friend. Can you tell me the amount of this execution? If it is within my power, I will try and settle it, for Dorothy's sake."

[Pg 206]

"You'll be a—fool, for your pains if you do," and he laughed scornfully. "It is the first, but it will not be the last. I want no man, especially you of all men, to ruin himself for me. Every thing has gone wrong with me since I married that woman. If she would have put her shoulder to the wheel, and worked for me, I would have forgiven her the folly and wickedness of deceiving me. But she does nothing but run up bills, and make me miserable. She's not a bad looking woman, and I might have learned to love her in time, but there's no chance of that now. I'm not sorry for this

business, for I hope it will be the means of my getting rid of her. Go home, I won't; they may fight it out the best way they can." And turning suddenly on his heel, he disappeared among the crowd. Full of grief at his want of success, Mr. Fitzmorris took the road that led to Heath Farm.

[Pg 207]

Here to his grief and indignation, he was informed by Martha Wood that the old man had been taken off to prison for debt, and the ladies were shut up in their own room, and could not receive visitors. Tired with a long fruitless walk, and feeling sad at heart, he determined to visit Lawrence Rushmere early the next morning, and, if possible, to pay the amount of his debt.

Anxious to save Dorothy from useless distress, he did not inform her of the cause that had kept him away so long. She only remarked, as he kissed her cheek, "My dear Gerard looks tired and paler than usual."

"Oh, Dolly," he replied. "It is a sad world; one is never allowed to feel happy in it long. If it were always the paradise that you have made it for the last few weeks, I should never like to leave it. All things, darling, are for the best. The purest pleasures are born in the lap of sorrow, as the brightest sunshine succeeds the darkest storm."

[Pg 208]

Directly after breakfast he ordered his horse and gig, and telling Mrs. Martin that he could not be home before night, drove over to the town of ----, in which the gaol was situated.

Before going to visit the old man, he went to the lawyer, at the suit of whose client he had been incarcerated, to discover the amount of the debt, which he found to be under three hundred pounds, including the law costs.

It was a large sum for Mr. Fitzmorris, having expended all he could well spare from his own income in settling his brother's affairs, paying funeral and law expenses, and other items. Any thought of his own comfort or convenience seldom stayed the too generous hand, that was never held back by selfish motives, if it could possibly relieve the necessity of a fellow creature. "It was only retrenching a few needless luxuries," he would say, "for a few months or years, and the interest would be amply repaid. There was no bank in which a man could invest his means, which made such ample returns, as the bank of Heaven, in which there was no fear of losing your capital, as it was chartered for eternity."

[Pg 209]

He wrote a check upon his banker for the sum, and received the release from Mr. Hodson, the man of business.

"I am afraid, Mr. Fitzmorris, that you have sacrificed this large sum of money to little purpose. This, though certainly the largest claim against the Rushmere estate, is not the only one. It would require more than a thousand pounds to keep the place from the hammer."

[Pg 210]

"I thought that Lawrence Rushmere had been a person who had saved money?"

"He had to the amount of a few hundred pounds, but the farm is a very poor one, which, for half a century past, has barely supplied the necessary outlay to continue its cultivation. When the lieutenant returned, the father sacrificed his little earnings, to enter into a speculation with his son, for furnishing horses to the Government, for the use of the army. Such a traffic requires large means, and constant attention. The young man who was the sole manager, got among dissipated companions, from buying horses, to betting upon them, and has not only lost all the money advanced by the father, but has involved himself irretrievably. The creditors thought it better to bring things to a crisis, as the sale of the property might possibly leave a small overplus, to keep the old man from the workhouse."

[Pg 211]

"He is such an impatient, obstinate creature," observed Mr. Fitzmorris, "that he may choose to remain in prison rather than pay these creditors, that he will be sure to regard not as the injured party, but as personal enemies to himself."

"In that case, you had better retain in your possession the draft you have just given me, until after you have seen and conversed with Lawrence Rushmere."

"Would it be possible to stay proceedings against the estate, until after Lord Wilton's return, which is expected daily, and remove the old man from prison? He is so proud and independent, the disgrace of having been inside a gaol will kill him."

"The creditors, who are all decent yeomen, might be inclined to serve the old man, who has always been respected in the county as an honest fellow. But being associated in this horse traffic with the son, whom they look upon as a great scoundrel, throws more difficulties in the way. The father was unprepared, nay, never expected this blow, or he might have arranged matters to save himself. I could, perhaps, stave off the other creditors, if this first claim were settled, for two or three months, and a bond were given that they should receive their money at the end of that term. The old man who is honest as daylight, might indemnify you by turning over to you the estate, and continue to farm it for your benefit."

[Pg 212]

"I will own, Mr. Hodson, that I do not exactly wish to sacrifice my money, for the benefit of Gilbert Rushmere, without he were a reformed character. If the estate were mine, I could give it to Lawrence Rushmere rent free for his life."

[Pg 213]

The lawyer promised to make all the necessary arrangements to secure Mr. Fitzmorris from unnecessary loss, and he left him to communicate to the prisoner the result of his morning's work, and to relieve him from duance.

He found the old man in the debtors' room, pacing to and fro with a restless stride, which proved how much vigour still remained in the tough heart of oak. On perceiving Mr. Fitzmorris, the caged lion suddenly came to a stand still, and confronted him with a gloomy brow, and proud defiant eye, as he said in a low voice,

"Are you come, Parson, to speak to Lawrence Rushmere in a den like this, to seek an honest man among felons an' thieves? I was allers laughed at for holding my head so high. I must carry it a foot higher here to look above a lawless set of ruffians and ragamuffins."

[Pg 214]

In spite of his affected bravado, the tears stood in the old man's eyes, and, staggering to a bench, he sunk down helplessly upon it, and covered his face with his hands.

"I came to seek a friend," said Gerard, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder, "one whom I esteem, or I should not be here."

"Oh, dang it," cried Rushmere. "Take off your hand, Mr. Fitzmorris. No offence, I hope, but it do put me in mind o' the tap that rascal gave me; he said, in the king's name, as if the king, God bless him, had ever a hand in sending a honest loyal subject like me to prison. I had the satisfaction, however, of knocking the fellow down. It did me good, I can tell you."

The cold, clear blue eye was lighted up with a gleam of fire, which cast an angry glare around, like a flash of summer lightning leaping from the dark clouds.

[Pg 215]

"The man was only in the performance of his duty. It was expending your wrath upon a wrong object."

"He just deserved what he got. None but a rascal would ever fill such a post, none but rascals ever do fill it, men far worse in moral character than the villains they take. An honest man would sweep the streets before he'd earn his living in such a mean way."

Gerard could scarcely forbear a smile at this tirade, when Rushmere asked him abruptly the cause of his visit.

"To take you out of this place, and carry you back to your own home."

"And who pays the debt?"

"I have agreed to do that."

"You! What business ha' you wi' paying my debts? If Lawrence Rushmere can't do that, he must content himsel' to stay here."

[Pg 216]

"You must not refuse me this great favour. Consider me as a son, willing and anxious to serve you."

At the mention of the word son, the old man sprang to his feet, and, clenching his fist, exclaimed,

"I have no son! The rascal who has brought me to this, wi' his drinking and gambling, is no son of mine. I disown him now and for ever—and may my curse—"

Mr. Fitzmorris put his hand before the old man's mouth, and, in a solemn voice that made him fall back a few paces, said,

"Who are you that dare curse a fellow creature, especially a son, though he has rebelled against you? It is committing an outrage against your own soul—against the excellent mother that bore him—against the most High God, who, through his blessed Son, has told us, that only as we forgive those that injure us can we ourselves hope to be forgiven."

[Pg 217]

"Oh, Mary, my wife. My dead angel! it is only for your sake I revoke my curse. He be your child, but oh, he has wounded me in the tenderest part."

Again the old man sank down upon the bench, and, for a few minutes, Gerard thought it best to leave him to his own thoughts. When he seemed more calm, he urged him more earnestly to accompany him back to Hadstone.

"To go back to that she-cat? No, a' won't, I tell you. Why, gaol is a paradise compared to living wi' her. You must not urge me, sir. If I don't curse the scamp that has brought me to this—I fear I should kill him if we met!"

"But you would not refuse to live with Dorothy?"

"Ah, Dolly—she was a good lass. I have naught to do wi' her now. It would ha' been well for me if a' had never set eyes on her."

[Pg 218]

"But Dorothy loves you so sincerely."

"What, after I have used her so ill? Howsomever, it was a great service I rendered her, when I hindered her from marrying that scoundrel."

"Unintentionally on your part, my friend. You can take no merit for that. Your son might have turned out a noble character but for that act."

It was of no use urging the old man to leave the gaol. His pride was offended at the idea of Mr. Fitzmorris paying his debts; he was hurt, too, that Gilbert had sent no message, to let him know

how matters really stood, or if there remained any chance of paying the creditors by the sale of the property.

"You see, Mr. Fitzmorris, I trusted all to him. I never thought that my own son would neglect the business and ruin me. No, no, I deserve to be here for my folly, and here I will remain until all the creditors are paid."

[Pg 219]

Seeing that he was obstinately bent on adhering to his purpose, Gerard told him that he would send Mr. Hodson to talk the matter over with him, and he would come and see him again when he heard that he had come to a decision. He was willing to give him a fair price for the estate, and let him remain in it rent-free for his life.

The old man seemed struck with this last suggestion, and promised to listen to reason, and so they parted.

On Mr. Fitzmorris' return to Hadstone, the first news that met his ears was, that Gilbert Rushmere had gone off to parts unknown with Martha Wood, who had dexterously fomented the quarrels between him and his wife to further this object; and that Mrs. Gilbert and her mother had packed up and left for London, "never," they said, "to return to a beggarly place like Hadstone."

[Pg 220]

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 221]

A LONG CHAPTER.

The various plans formed by Gerard Fitzmorris for the future comfort of Lawrence Rushmere, were temporarily suspended by the receipt of a letter from Lord Wilton, who had just landed in Liverpool with his sad freight.

He earnestly requested his cousin to meet him in London, and join in the melancholy cortège that would accompany the mortal remains of the young viscount to their last resting-place, in the family vault in Hadstone church.

"I have much to say to you, my dear Gerard," he wrote, "upon the important subject which formed the leading topic in the letters received from you and Dorothy just as I was about to sail for England. But while the arrow rankles in my heart, for the death of a justly beloved son, I cannot yet bring my mind to dwell upon marrying and giving in marriage. This must suffice you both till time has cicatrized the wound. The marriage of my daughter, Dorothy, with the last male representative of our ancient house, cannot fail to be regarded by me with entire satisfaction. I will explain everything when we meet."

[Pg 222]

Gerard folded the Earl's letter and sat for some minutes in deep thought. Most men in his position would have felt more joy than sorrow for the death of a relative they had scarcely known, which made them heir to a title and vast wealth. Gerard Fitzmorris cared very little for either distinction. He had for some time past felt a deep and growing interest in Lord Wilton, and he sympathised with him most sincerely in the loss of a noble and deserving son.

[Pg 223]

He was much struck by the decided manner in which he had avowed, without entering into the particulars of the case, that Dorothy Chance was his daughter. If legitimately he would have no claim to the earldom, which came through a Granville, and would only be entitled to the baronetcy held by his descent from Sir Thomas Fitzmorris, their mutual grandfather. Dorothy would be Countess of Wilton in her own right.

He could not bring himself to believe, if this were the case, that the Earl would have suffered her to remain so long ignorant of her just position.

Time would explain all, but he could not fathom the mystery. He instantly complied with the Earl's request to meet him in London. Before he left Hadstone, Dorothy begged, as a great favour, that she might accompany him on his journey as far as — to take Mr. Rushmere out of gaol, and bring him back to Heath Farm.

[Pg 224]

"It would be better for me, Gerard, to break to him the elopement of his son, and if he will return with me, to stay with him at the old place, till you come back."

"Just like my own Dorothy," he cried, pressing her to his heart. "Go like a good angel, as you are, and my blessing go with you."

During their journey, Gerard gave his betrothed the Earl's letter to read, and watched her countenance during the perusal. There was no other passenger inside the coach but themselves. They could talk to each other without reserve. He saw her start, and her cheeks crimson, when she came to the paragraph in which his lordship spoke of her as his daughter.

[Pg 225]

"Oh, Gerard," she said, bursting into tears, as her head sank upon his shoulder. "Had I not better go with you to London, to comfort him in his sorrow? My father, my poor father! I can never supply to him the loss of his dear son."

"Had he wished it, my sweet cousin, he would have made the request. Public taste has dispensed with the presence of female mourners at the funerals of relations and friends. The gentle hearts that loved the truest and the best are denied by the tyrant fashion the blessed privilege of seeing

the last sad rites performed for the beloved dead. After Lord Fitzmorris' funeral your presence will be more needed. It is not until the earth closes her bars for ever on the loved and lost, that we can fully realize the fact that they can no more return to us."

[Pg 226]

On reaching the county town, Dorothy and her lover parted—one to act as chief mourner in a solemn and useless pageant, which the good sense of mankind ought to banish from the earth, with all its artificial trappings and hired mourners; the other to visit that grave of the living, a prison, and carry hope and comfort to the care-worn heart of the victim of a cruel and oppressive law, which demands of a man to pay his debts, while it deprives him of the chance of doing so.

Following the directions she had received from Gerard, Dorothy went first to Mr. Hodson, and learned from him that the debt for which her foster-father was in gaol, had been settled by her lover; that everything had been satisfactorily arranged with the other creditors, Rushmere having concluded to sell Heath Farm to Mr. Fitzmorris for the sum of two thousand pounds, which would pay all the demands upon the estate, and leave the old man at liberty.

[Pg 227]

The dry man of business was much struck by the extraordinary beauty of the young lady, who had deigned to visit his dusty office in behalf of the prisoner, and being a widower of some years' standing, without any incumbrance in the shape of children, it struck him that so charming a girl would make him an excellent second wife.

With this wise project in his head, he cross-questioned her very closely, on their way to the gaol, as to her parentage and station, to all which questions she gave such frank and straightforward answers, that he soon became acquainted with her private history.

Mr. Hodson had been employed to make old Mrs. Knight's will, and well remembered the remarkable clause it contained with regard to the child of the poor vagrant found on the Heath, which, if proofs could be actually obtained that Dorothy was the daughter of Alice Knight, whether legitimately or illegitimately, would entitle her to a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, with all its immense accumulations of interest and compound interest, for so many years.

[Pg 228]

It was a case worth looking into.

The old woman's death-bed confession, which had been made in his presence, to Mr. Martin, fully established a fact only known to them—that the conscience-stricken murderess of the mother had discovered in the corpse of the poor vagrant, her grandchild; so that all that was now required to entitle her child to inherit this large fortune was the registration of its birth. If it had taken place in any workhouse, or public charitable institution, this might be obtained by offering suitable rewards, without the said Alice Knight had adopted a fictitious name.

[Pg 229]

As the light began gradually to dawn upon his mind that this lovely girl was no other than Mrs. Knight's heiress, he rubbed his hands gleefully together, and told his fair visitor, that if she made him her friend, he might be able to put her in the way of obtaining a handsome fortune.

Dorothy laughed, and looked incredulously at the plain, matter-of-fact lawyer.

"How can I do that, sir? I have no money to give you."

"Not at present, my dear; but you can bestow upon me more than the worth of money, this dear little white hand!"

"Oh!" said Dorothy, snatching her hand from him, before he could convey it to his lips, and without adopting the affectation of pretending not to understand his meaning, "I cannot do that, for it is given away already."

[Pg 230]

The lawyer's fine castle of a moment's building evaporated slowly into air, as he asked in a disconcerted tone:

"To whom?"

"A gentleman you know quite well. The Reverend Gerard Fitzmorris. It was he that directed me to you."

"Oh, I see. The gentleman that was here a few days ago, Lord Wilton's cousin, and successor to the titles and estates. That is, in case the Earl does not marry again. Young lady, I offer you my sincere congratulations, on your prospect of becoming a countess, and I hope," he continued, with great emphasis, "that you will forgive me, for wishing to secure the affections of such a charming young lady."

[Pg 231]

"Oh, certainly. You are not much to be pitied, on so short an acquaintance," and Dorothy laughed merrily. "Had not the fortune something to do with it?" and she looked archly up in his face.

"No, upon my honour, I was struck with your appearance before you told me who you were. But really, Miss Chance, or Knight, or whatever we can prove your name to be, we must not lose sight of this fortune, and if you will pay me say five thousand pounds provided I am able to establish your claims, will you empower me to take the necessary steps?"

"But should you fail?"

"In that case, I should not claim a farthing."

"We will consult Gerard and Mr. Martin," said Dorothy, who thought that this might bring about

proofs of her identity, that would satisfy Lord Wilton, and she felt in high spirits at the possible result of such a legal inquiry. So, quite forgetful of the sly lawyer's proposal to make her his second wife, she chatted with him during their way to the gaol, in the most friendly and confidential manner.

[Pg 232]

She found Lawrence Rushmere, moping in the corner of the debtor's room, looking pale and haggard, with beard unshaven, and his uncombed locks falling round his face in tangled confusion. Running up to him, Dorothy flung her arms about his neck and tenderly embraced him. Rushmere looked up, and clasped her to his heart. "Dolly, is that you?"

"Yes, dear father."

"My dear girl, I be hearty glad to see thee. But what brought'ee, Dolly, to this confounded place?"

"To take you out of it."

"Where's Gilbert?" he asked, lowering his voice, and looking cautiously round lest the other debtors should hear him ask after his unworthy son.

[Pg 233]

"Gone, father, no one knows whither. He went off with that bad girl, Martha Wood, who, I believe, has been at the bottom of all the mischief."

"The young limb of iniquity. A fit companion for my son. And what has become of the wife?"

"Gone back to London."

"Joy go with her, she was a bad 'un. An' the cunning old witch, the mother?"

"Has left Hadstone never to return."

"An' the old place. What have they done with it?"

"It is open to receive you, father, when you return with me. I will soon make it bright and cosy again."

"Ah, well a day, Dolly. I hardly wish to see it again. It will only remind me o' happier days, o' a wife that I loved with my whole heart, o' a son that I can consider mine no longer. Who would ha' thought that such an excellent mother could ha' been parent to such a graceless bairn; that a good beginning should make such a sorry ending? Na, Dorothy, I cannot go back; even the bright black eyed lass, who might ha' been my daughter, but for my folly, is going to carry joy an' sunshine into another home. Let me bide, Dorothy, where I be! I can die as well here as in the old homestead."

[Pg 234]

"I cannot lose my dear old father yet. Where I am, there shall always be a warm nook by the fireside for him."

"Dolly, my darling, thou art one in a thousand. Yes, I will go with you. Reach me my hat and staff."

The shrewd man of business thought with the yeoman that Dorothy was one in a thousand, and was not a little affected by her filial piety. He then accompanied Dorothy and her charge to the inn, and ordered a good dinner at his own expense, for the refreshments of the travellers. Over a glass of excellent home brewed, he told Rushmere of the hopes he entertained of securing Mrs. Knight's large bequest for the beautiful foundling. This news, however gratifying to the old man, on Dorothy's account, only served to increase the deep regret that was ever brooding in his mind, that his unreasonable obstinacy had been the cause of Gilbert's ruin and his own.

[Pg 235]

It was night when they got to Heath Farm.

Mrs. Martin and the good curate were there to welcome Rushmere back to his old home.

With the assistance of Polly and Mrs. Sly, who had been at work all the day, Mrs. Martin had succeeded in restoring the house to its original order, the absence of which, during the misrule of Mrs. Gilbert's brief reign, had been such an eye-sore to the sturdy yeoman. He was perfectly astonished, and no less gratified, to find everything in its accustomed place.

[Pg 236]

A bright fire was roaring up the huge chimney, as in the winter nights long passed away. A comfortable hot supper was smoking on the oak table, which was covered with a spotless cloth of Dorothy's own spinning. His easy chair in its own place, at the head of the hospitable board, fronting the portrait of his venerated ancestor, which had been cleaned from dust and fly spots, by Mrs. Martin's own hands.

The grand old soldier of the covenant looked down from his lofty height, and, by the glow of the genial fire, seemed to smile benignantly on his care-worn descendant's sorrowful face.

The old yeoman fixed his eyes long and lovingly on the time-honoured picture, then, stretching his large hands to the cheerful blaze, muttered to himself,—"The last. Am I to be the last o' his race that will leave the old place with an untarnished name? Oh, Gilbert! oh, my son! I had expected better things o' thee."

[Pg 237]

The cheerful conversation of the good curate and his wife, and the caresses of Dorothy, succeeded at last in winning Lawrence Rushmere from his melancholy, and something of his former honest hearty expression beamed forth from his clear blue eyes. He joined earnestly in

Henry Martin's beautiful evening prayer, which he declared had done him a world of good, and refreshed his weary spirit. When Dorothy lighted him up to bed, he whispered in her ear at parting, "I thought this morning, Dorothy, that a' never could feel happy or comfortable agen."

It had been previously arranged by her friends that Dorothy was to remain at the Farm, as mistress of the establishment, until after Gerard's return, and do all she could to make her foster-father forget his past sorrows and present desolate position. Though such a result could hardly be expected at his age, she accomplished more than she had anticipated.

[Pg 238]

She read to him the newspapers, sang to him the old ballads he loved so well, in her clear dulcet voice, and talked to him cheerfully of his future prospects,—of the pleasant days yet in store for him, if he would resolutely abandon vain regrets, and trust in the goodness and mercy of a loving God.

Several days glided tranquilly away before she received a letter from Gerard, which informed her that the funeral procession would reach Hadstone at noon on the following day, when the burial of the young viscount would take place, Lord Wilton and himself being chief mourners, and Mr. Martin reading the service for the dead. He told her that he had found the Earl in better health and spirits than he expected. That his son had died in such a happy frame of mind, that it had done more to establish his belief in the great truths of the Christian religion, than a thousand homilies.

[Pg 239]

We will pass over the funeral, with all its black and melancholy details, which seem to have been invented by our progenitors to add unnecessary horror to death. The pagan rites of Chinese idolaters have a far more spiritual meaning than our dismal funereal processions. The mourners wear robes of spotless white—young children strew beautiful flowers along the path to the grave, and accompany the dead to their peaceful rest with music and song, rejoicing in the birth of the spirit to a better world.

[Pg 240]

The day after the funeral, Gerard Fitzmorris came in Lord Wilton's carriage to bring Dorothy up to Heath Hall, as the Earl was impatient to see her.

On arriving at the stately mansion, they were immediately ushered into the noble library that had haunted Dorothy's dreams, since the day she first met her titled father.

The Earl was standing, with folded arms, before the portrait of his beautiful mother, the resemblance between her and Dorothy having been rendered yet more striking by the air of refinement that education, and the society of superior minds, had given to the latter.

At the sound of her light steps, the Earl held out his arms. Dorothy sank upon his breast, only uttering the simple word, "Father!"

[Pg 241]

"My child, my beloved child!"

For a long while he held her where nature had placed her, next his heart, and they mingled their tears together. Gerard walked to the window not less affected by their emotion.

The Earl at length mastered his feelings, and, placing Dorothy on a sofa, he called Gerard to him, and taking a seat between them, held firmly a hand of each.

"My dear children," he said, in a voice that still trembled with emotion, "the time for an explanation, of what must seem to you a strange and needless mystery, has arrived; and while I reveal my past sins and folly, I beg your earnest attention and forgiveness.

"You, Dorothy Chance, are my child, born in lawful wedlock, the only fruit of my marriage with Alice Knight, the beautiful and unfortunate young *protégée* of my mother, Lady Dorothy Granville.

"You both know that I was a younger son. My eldest brother, Sir Thomas, being a strong healthy young man, I never entertained the least expectation of being called to fill his place. I was proud and poor, depending solely for my future position on my mother's jointure at her death, and my chance of rising in the army.

[Pg 242]

"I was always haunted by a terrible dread of poverty, not that I loved money for its own sake, for I was reckless in the extravagant expenditure of my limited means, but I valued it for the power and *prestige* that it always confers upon its fortunate possessors. To be esteemed as a man of fortune by the world, was at that time the height of my ambition, I was not aware of the little satisfaction that mere wealth, unconnected with better things, confers.

"My grandfather, the late earl, had early singled me out as his future heir. I was his godson, and had been called after him, Edward Granville. He did not like my eldest brother, who was an honest, generous fellow, frank and independent to a fault, the very beau ideal of a soldier and a gentleman. He never would condescend to flatter the avaricious old man for the sake of his money.

[Pg 243]

"My grandfather had a high veneration for rank, a feeling which my dear mother shared with him in common; both had an unmitigated horror of a *mésalliance*. This terror of mingling their pure old Norman blood with any one of inferior degree took a strong possession of my own mind, which was greatly strengthened by the often reiterated threat of the proud old aristocrat, that if I married beneath my rank, I should never possess a shilling of his vast wealth.

"This great fortune he inherited from an uncle, who for many years had been governor of India, and died childless. I must confess that I was dreadfully jealous of the infant sons of his youngest daughter, by a second marriage. Not so much of you, Gerard, who, from an infant, shewed a proud and independent spirit; you were a sturdy democrat from your very cradle, and fearlessly urged the rights of man to the old earl, and laughed at his absurd prejudices, as unworthy and truly ignoble.

[Pg 244]

"I entered hotly into all the vices and follies of a young man of fashion. The Earl forgave all these peccadilloes, paid my gambling debts, and excused every fault, so long as I flattered his weakness, and held his opinions. My regiment was ordered to America, and I saw some hot service, and soon acquired rank and position in the army. On my return to England, the Earl used his great influence to get me into Parliament. His wealth overcame all opposition, and I made no insignificant figure in the house, and was considered a rising young man of great promise.

[Pg 245]

"It was during this period, the brightest and best in my life, as far as my worldly interests were concerned, that I married, with my grandfather's consent, the Lady Lucia Montessor, who, though an earl's daughter, was one of a large family of girls, who had no claims to wealth, but were handsome, accomplished women, looking out for rich and advantageous settlements. As the reputed favourite of the rich Earl Wilton, and considered by the public a man of talent, mine was considered a very eligible position.

"I was really attached to my young wife, and sincerely grieved when she died in her beautiful girlhood, leaving me the father of a fine boy, only a few hours old.

"My dear mother was much interested in my bereavement, and took home my motherless infant, while I went abroad on a secret mission for the Government. It was during my absence that lasted over two years, that she saw the neglected grand-daughter of a woman by the name of Knight, who kept a shop furnished with expensive foreign silks and laces, and much frequented by ladies of rank in the town of Storby.

[Pg 246]

"Struck with the extraordinary beauty of the girl, who was in her fifteenth year, she took her under her own protection, to be nursery governess to my little Edward, and wait exclusively upon her person.

"When I returned to Heath Hall, I found this incomparable girl, high in favour with Lady Dorothy, whom she accompanied with the child, in all her walks and drives. In this way we were often thrown together, when I found the charms of her mind equal to the graces of her person. I fell madly in love with her, and it was only then that I realised the truth that I had not loved before. My frantic passion absorbed my whole being. Obligated to be wary, I could make no outward demonstration of my admiration for my beautiful Alice, for fear of alarming the jealousy of my mother, which restraint served only to increase the vehemence of my attachment. To my infinite joy, I discovered that it was mutual.

[Pg 247]

"The fear of losing my grandfather's patronage and with it his fortune, for a long while presented, as I supposed, an inseparable barrier to my making her my wife. To my grief and shame be it spoken, if I could have obtained her on less honourable terms, I should not have hesitated in adopting such an infamous course, but I found the innocent girl as virtuous as she was fair.

"Then the thought struck me of marrying her privately and enjoining upon her the strictest secrecy, until after the death of my rich relative should leave me at liberty, to make a public acknowledgment that she was my lawful wife. To this arrangement, Alice readily consented. An opportunity was not long in presenting itself.

[Pg 248]

"Lady Dorothy spent a few weeks every summer at Bath. On this occasion I went with her; and Alice, as a matter of course, accompanied us with my child, of whom she was passionately fond, and I believe the little fellow loved her with as much devotion as he did his father.

"There was a small retired old church, which, though belonging to the parish in which we lodged, was never frequented by aristocratic worshippers; my aunt having engaged seats in one situated in a more fashionable quarter of the town, where a celebrated preacher drew together large congregations.

[Pg 249]

"In the little church of St. Mary's, Alice and I were married by banns, and the old superannuated incumbent delivered our names to his small flock in such mumbling tones, that they were unrecognised among a long string of unknown and unhonoured ones. Early one morning after the third publication of the said banns we were united by the old clergyman, whom I bribed pretty highly to keep our secret.

"And we were happy, blessed beyond measure in our boundless love. If she had been dear to me before, she was doubly so now; if ever a man worshipped a woman, I did her. Our stolen meetings used to take place in a lonely unfrequented opening in the park, beneath the shade of a large oak tree. There we were once nearly surprised by poor Henry Martin, who had been brought up with Alice, and still entertained for her a violent passion.

[Pg 250]

"Our dream of happiness vanished only too soon. My mother had gone to make a visit to the seat of a nobleman, about thirty miles distant, and could not return till next day, when I received a sudden notice from Government that my services were required in a most important mission to the court of Russia, and that I must leave for London without a moment's delay.

"My uncle had been very active in obtaining for me this appointment, which, if well conducted,

might lead to the governorship of some important colony among the British possessions. I dared not hesitate in accepting a post from which such great future results were to be expected. Even for her sake it behoved me to go.

"But how could I leave Heath Hall without one last embrace, one last farewell to the beloved?"

[Pg 251]

"I got this appointment by the evening mail, and had to appear in London by ten o'clock the next morning, receive my dispatches, and sail immediately for St. Petersburg, where it is probable that I might be detained for some months. I was, however, determined, if possible, to see her before I went, and rode a noble horse to death to obtain that object.

"When I arrived at — Hall, it was long past midnight, the family had retired to rest, and the idea of obtaining an interview with my wife was utterly preposterous. I had nothing for it but to return to the London road, which skirted the park, and wait for the coming up of the night mail, my impatience having out-riden the coach.

"I was so dreadfully fatigued with my previous ride, that I had scarcely taken my seat before I fell asleep, and did not awake until the rumbling of the wheels upon the stones told me that I was in London.

[Pg 252]

"Though dreadfully pressed for time, I wrote a brief letter to Alice, explaining the reason of my absence, and directing her to write to me through my agent in town. In a postscript I charged her most solemnly to keep our secret if she valued my peace and happiness. She had hidden from me the important fact of her pregnancy.

"My poor darling kept our secret only too well. It was during that visit to — Hall that some prying domestic discovered her situation, which was whispered to other members of the household, till it reached my mother's ears.

"I can well imagine Lady Dorothy's grief and indignation. A woman of stern morality, she was not very likely to forgive a dependent to whom she had been a sincere friend. Calling Alice into her presence, she taxed her with her crime, and demanded of her to name the father of the child. This the poor girl steadily refusing to do, my mother reproached her with ingratitude, and dismissed her from her service before she returned to Heath Hall.

[Pg 253]

"I can well imagine the despair of the dear young wife when she found, upon reaching Storby, that I had left the country; no one could tell whither, without letting her know the cause of my seeming desertion. She never could have received my letter, though I paid a private messenger highly to deliver it into her own hand.

"In this emergency she applied to her grandmother for protection, who, at first, ignorant of her cause for leaving Lady Dorothy, received her into the house. I have no doubt that had she taken the wise course of making a confidant of this wicked old woman, her pride and avarice would have been so highly gratified, that she would have given her a home without paying any regard to the disgrace attached to her name.

[Pg 254]

"The discovery of her situation exasperated the old woman to fury. She did not even ask for an explanation, but thrust her from her doors with cruel words and coarse usage.

"Thus far, I was informed by a man who waited in the shop, who told me that he was so much affected by the distressed looks of the affrighted girl, that it moved him to tears. After the shop was closed, he sought her through the town, but no one had seen or could give him any account of her retreat.

"A report got into circulation, which made my mother very sorry for the part she had played in this tragedy, that Alice Knight had walked into the sea when the tide was coming in, and buried her shame and sorrow in the waves. I never could believe this story. I felt in my soul that she was still living, and loved me too well to have taken such a rash and wicked step. From the hour she left Mrs. Knight's house, her fate remained till very lately a mystery. How she passed the intervening period between the birth of Dorothy and her own melancholy death while in search of me will never be accurately known.

[Pg 255]

"I was retained at the Court of St. Petersburg for nearly three years. I wrote constantly under cover to my agent, to Alice, often sending her large sums of money, and was astonished when my man of business informed me after the lapse of twelve months, that all my letters had been returned from the dead letter office, as no such person as Alice Knight was to be found.

[Pg 256]

"I then wrote to Lady Dorothy, confessing to her that I was the father of Alice Knight's child, and imploring her to tell me what had become of the mother and her babe.

"Lady Dorothy died before this letter reached England, and her father, the Earl of Wilton, only survived her a few weeks, leaving to me the fortune for which I had sacrificed my wife and child, too late to afford me any pleasure.

"The death of my eldest brother, which happened abroad, gave Lady Dorothy such a shock that she never got over it. I thus suddenly and unexpectedly became a wealthy and titled man.

"I had married in the summer of the year 1797, and returned to England in July, 1800. On my way to Hadstone, I must have passed over the heath, during that dreadful storm, unconscious that the beloved object whose loss had plunged me into a state of incurable grief, was dying, exposed to its pitiless fury, in the wet hollow beneath.

[Pg 257]

"From that hour until I met Dorothy, I could obtain no reliable information concerning my poor wife. When this dear girl first presented herself before me, and I saw in the glass the wonderful likeness, (which you, Gerard, cannot fail to recognize) between the country girl and my aristocratic mother, and through her to me, and heard the sound of her voice, so like my lost wife's, I could hardly refrain from clasping her in my arms, and telling her that she was my child.

"The story of her mother's sad fate, the sight of the ring with which we were married, which belonged to my first wife, and had her initials and my own engraved on the reverse side, and the tress of Alice's exquisite golden brown hair, corresponding with a lock, which, at that moment, was lying next my heart, removed all doubts, if such indeed had ever existed, that the poor dead wanderer was my wife."

[Pg 258]

"Forgive me, my lord, for interrupting you," said Gerard. "But how could you, being satisfied that this was the case, encourage an alliance between Dorothy and Gilbert Rushmere, a person so inferior to her in birth?"

"She loved him, Gerard; was quite unconscious of her real position, and I thought the knowledge of it would not conduce to her happiness, if it separated her from her lover. Rank and wealth had been the means of destroying mine for ever. Besides my son was living, and likely to live, and I had no wish to reveal to the world that sad and blotted page in my life, for the sake of securing an heir.

"Had Alice lived, I should have owned her as my wife to the world, exhibited the proofs of our marriage, and there the matter would have ended. But in legally claiming Dorothy, I should subject myself to the most painful and humiliating investigations, which going the rounds of the public papers, would be bruited abroad throughout the land. My children," he cried, in a tone of earnest entreaty, "it is in your power to save me from this terrible degradation."

[Pg 259]

A frown was gathering upon Gerard's brow, and he said, with some asperity:

"My lord, I do not quite understand your meaning. If you possess the legal proofs of Dorothy's legitimacy, you surely would not rob her of her birthright, to cover your own sin."

"What does it matter to her, Gerard? if she becomes your wife, she would still be Countess of Wilton. I am certain by what I know of Dorothy's unselfish character, that she would rather receive her title through her husband than through a law process, which would make her father the most miserable of men.

[Pg 260]

"What do you say, my daughter—will you insist upon the legal restitution of your rights, or be contented to receive them through your husband?"

Dorothy rose from the Earl's supporting arms, and stood up before him, her eyes brightened, and a vivid flush crimsoned her cheeks, as she said, with an air of decision, which admitted of no misinterpretation:

"My lord, I care neither for rank nor wealth. The vindication of my mother's honour is dearer to me than either. I will not bear the title of your daughter branded with an epithet I need not name."

"Dorothy is right," replied Gerard. "I would not purchase her birthright on such dishonest terms. It would be a cruel injustice to both mother and daughter to let them bear the brand of shame, which a small sacrifice of personal vanity could remove."

[Pg 261]

The Earl remained for a long time leaning his head upon his clasped hands, without speaking. At length, looking up with a deep sigh, he said, "Gerard, you press me very sore. I declare to you that I would rather die than expose my mental weakness in a court of justice."

"It will clear your character from a foul stigma, my lord, the seduction of a beautiful young girl, and her supposed death in consequence of your desertion. But have you positive proofs of Dorothy being her child?"

"I had not, until the day before I wrote to Dorothy, and I obtained them by a most singular chance.

"When going up to London to meet my poor Edward, a wheel came off my carriage, and it required the aid of a blacksmith to repair the damage. I walked forward to the village, and went into a neat public house, while my servants found a smith. I thought I recognized in the master of the house an old tenant of mine, who had once kept a similar place of entertainment at Thursten, the village on the north of Hadstone.

[Pg 262]

"Years had changed me so much, that he scarcely knew me again. After talking for some time about indifferent subjects, he told me, that the very day before, he had stumbled over a letter, that was given to him by a poor, miserable, sickly young woman, who stopped at his house late one July evening, eighteen years ago, and begged for a cup of milk and a bit of bread for her child, a beautiful little black eyed girl, barely two years old. 'My missus asked her,' he said, 'who she was, and where she was going?' She replied,

[Pg 263]

"'That she had friends in Storby, whom she wanted to see. That she was very ill, and was going home to them to die. But in case she was too weak to get there, she wished me to send a letter she had in her pocket to Lord Wilton, as she expected that if he were at the Hall he would help her.'

"I took the letter, and thought that it was only some begging petition, and of little consequence, and our people were busy in the hay-field, and I forgot all about it. In the autumn I removed with my family to this place. I heard of the death of a young person answering to the description of the poor young woman, who had been at my house on the night of the tenth of July, who had been found on the heath by farmer Rushmere, who had adopted the little girl, but did not trouble myself to go and see the corpse.

[Pg 264]

"A few weeks ago, my wife died, and in looking over some of her little traps, to find a receipt, I stumbled on this letter, and though I daresay it is of little consequence to your lordship, or to any one else now, I may as well give it to you.'

"This long forgotten document, contained a few lines from my poor Alice, enclosing the registration of the birth of Dorothy, in the lying-in hospital in London. You will find it enclosed in the packet I sent to Dorothy in case I should never return to England, and it fully identifies her as my child, and heiress to the title and estate of Wilton. There is, therefore, no difficulty in a legal point of view, and if you are both determined not to spare my feelings in the matter, I will immediately take the necessary steps for her recognition as my daughter."

[Pg 265]

"I would, dearest father, willingly save you from any exposure, as far as I am myself concerned," replied Dorothy. "But would it be just to my poor mother? I am certain that your own good heart will acquiesce in my decision, that when you come to reflect more deeply on the matter, you will own that I am right. If this proof had been wanting, I think another one could have been obtained."

She then related her interview with Mr. Hodson, and his proposal of trying to gain legal evidence of her being the child of Alice Knight, in order to put her in possession of the large fortune left to her by her grandmother, which, if followed up, would likewise involve the discovery of her title to the estates of Wilton.

"What I am to do with all this wealth puzzles me," she continued. "It is a great trust placed in my hands by the Almighty, which will enable me, if rightly applied, to do much good to my less fortunate fellow creatures."

[Pg 266]

The Earl folded her in his arms.

"Dorothy, my beloved child! you have conquered, for you are more righteous than your father. May the blessing of the merciful God, who has watched over you all the days of your life, for ever rest upon your head. I have been weak and cowardly. You have proved yourself great and noble, and well worthy of your happy destiny."

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 267]

A PAINFUL RECOGNITION.

Immediate steps were now taken by the Earl to establish Dorothy's claims, and while the suit was pending, he yielded to her earnest request to remain at Heath Farm with her old protector, Lawrence Rushmere, who was still ignorant of the great future anticipated for his adopted daughter.

The old yeoman had grown so fond of her since the desertion of his son, that he could hardly bear her out of his sight. The responsibilities of a lofty station weighed heavily on her mind, and there were moments when she sincerely wished her lot might be cast midway between poverty and riches, and she might avoid the humiliation of the one, and great temptations incidental to the other.

[Pg 268]

There never was a period in her life when pride exerted so little influence over her, or she thought more humbly of herself. She became pensive and silent, and, being now entirely exempt from domestic drudgery, passed much of her time in reading and serious reflection.

Gerard remarked the change that had passed over Dorothy, but attributed it to the extreme conscientiousness of her character, which made her consider herself unfitted by previous habits and education to fill a lofty station. Once, when she had opened her mind to him on the subject, and not without tears, lamented her ignorance of the usages of fashionable society, and wished that she could have remained with him always in the country, the happy and useful wife of a village pastor. He gently chid her for her want of faith.

[Pg 269]

"You possess qualities, Dorothy, that are truly noble, that would do honour to any station. Human nature is the same in every class, and those who have prized you when only a country girl, working in the fields, will not hold you in less estimation when transported to a higher sphere. Only retain the same natural unaffected manners, that charmed my heart in simple Dorothy Chance, and I know enough of the society you so much dread, to assure you that you need not feel the least alarm for the result."

But Dorothy still doubted and feared, and shrunk from the public expressions of interest and curiosity, which could not fail to be exerted in her case.

When Lord Wilton determined to do what was right, he became happy and contented, and never let a day pass without paying her a visit to inform her how the suit was progressing. Lawrence

[Pg 270]

Rushmere marvelled at the Earl's condescension, and was so won over by his kindness, that he no longer regarded him as his hereditary enemy. One day the portrait of the soldier of the Covenant caught the Earl's eye. He started up to examine it, then turned to Rushmere, and spoke with animation.

"I have often heard of that picture, and feel as proud of my descent from that glorious old fellow as you do, who are his lineal representative, and bear his name."

"How do you make that out, my lord?" said the yeoman. "It is the first time I ever heard that the blood of a Rushmere ran in the veins of a Fitzmorris."

[Pg 271]

"You don't seem greatly honoured by the relationship," returned the Earl, laughing. "But whether or no, what I say is strictly true. My grandfather, Sir Lawrence Fitzmorris, was grandson to that famous roundhead, by his eldest daughter Alena, and bore his Christian name. You and I, my worthy old friend, are cousins in the third degree; will you acknowledge me as a kinsman?"

"Aye, that a' wull wi' my heart in my hand," cried Rushmere, grasping the nobleman's outstretched hand, who could have dispensed with at least one half of the energetic pressure that compressed his thin white fingers within the strong grip of the honest tiller of the soil.

"Dear, dear!" he continued, "if a' had only known that afore, I should ha' thought a deal more o' your Lordship."

"I have something to tell you which will surprise you much more, Lawrence. This little girl, Dorothy, whom you adopted as your own, is descended from him too."

[Pg 272]

"Now, my lord, you be surely making fun o' me; for nobody in the world knows who Dolly's mother was, still less her father. I ha' been puzzling my brain about that secret for the last sixteen years, without finding it out. It was the want of knowing who she was, that has ruined both me and my son."

"She is my daughter, Lawrence. The poor woman that you found dead on Hadstone Heath, was Alice Knight, a beautiful girl, whom you may remember was adopted by my mother, Lady Dorothy. She was my wife, and the mother of our Dorothy."

"The Lord a' mercy!" cried Rushmere, starting to his feet. "An' you let the poor lass die for want, an' her child work for her bread, in the house of a stranger. You may call yourself noble, an' all that, Lord Wilton, but I should feel prouder of the relationship of a poor, honest man."

[Pg 273]

"I do not blame you, Rushmere. My conduct, from the view you take of it, must appear atrocious indeed. But I was as ignorant of the facts as you were."

"But how could your lawful wife come to such a state o' destitution? Did a' play you false?"

"I will tell you how it all happened," returned Lord Wilton, "and you will be more ready to forgive me, as the unfortunate worship of the golden calf, which I find is an hereditary sin, brought about this unhappy affair."

Drawing his seat beside the old yeoman, he told him the story the reader has just learned from the preceding chapter, patiently submitting to his blunt cross-questioning on many points, that could not fail to be very distressing to his feelings.

[Pg 274]

"Well, my lord," he said, when he had listened with intense interest to the said history, "I am sartain sure I should ha' done exactly as you did. Such a fortin as that very few men could ha' resisted. It was a sore temptation, there's no doubt. I allers thought that yon poor creature had been summat above her condition. She had bonny hair, an' the smallest foot an' hand in the world. People that work hard, allers show it most in the extremities. Labour calls out the muscles and sinews, makes the limbs large, an' gives breadth more than height to the figure, tans the complexion, an' makes it ruddy an' coarse. To such as I this be real beauty, but you lords of the creation prefer a white skinned, die away, half dead an' alive sort o' a cretur, to a well grown healthy buxom lass like our Dorothy, who ha' grown up just as God made her, whom all the delicate women folk envy, an' all the young men are mad arter. She be just what I call a beauty."

[Pg 275]

Dorothy laughed at her foster-father's ideas of real beauty, and told him that she was not at all flattered by his description, as she was very much afraid the gentle folks would consider it "*barn-yard beauty*."

"Don't you mind what they call it, my Lady Dorothy. I 'spose I must call you so now. You need not be ashamed to show your face anywhere; all I be afeared on is this, that when you go home to live in the grand old Hall, that belonged to him," pointing up to the picture, "you'll forget the cross old man who was father to you, when you had none. An' you might ha' been my own darter too," he added, with a sigh, "but for my greed. An' your children an' Gilbert's might have inherited the home of my ancestors. I was nigh cursing Gilbert 'tother day, but Gilly has more cause to curse me. Alack, alack, what poor miserable blind creatures we be! It is well for us, that God's providence is at work behind it all."

[Pg 276]

"Father, you need never fear my forgetting you," said Dorothy; "I have known this change in my fortunes a long time; and have you found any alteration in my regard?"

"An' did a' wait upon the old man for the last three months, an' knew a' was a titled lady all the time?"

"I'm not a titled lady to you, dear father, but always your own little Dorothy. Where I am—you must go too, and when I leave Heath Farm, you will have to go to Heath Hall, for I cannot live without you; and kind Mrs. Brand has prepared a nice room for you; and we will try and make you forget all the past troubles," and she put her arm round his neck and kissed him.

[Pg 277]

"Rushmere, I shall grow jealous of you," said Lord Wilton, "if my daughter bestows on you more kisses than she gives me. What Dorothy says is perfectly true; she considers you too old to trouble about the farm, that it is high time you should rest from labour. You must allow her to have her own way in this matter. I have no doubt that she will contrive to make you happy."

A week later, and Dorothy's claims were established on a legal basis, and all the country rang with the romantic tale.

Mrs. Lane put on her best bonnet and hurried up to Nancy Watling, with the newspaper in her hand. She had run every step of the way, a good half mile, for fear Miss Watling should hear the news from any one else, and when she burst into the parlour, she was too much out of breath to speak.

[Pg 278]

Miss Watling ran upstairs for her smelling bottle, thinking that the good woman was going to faint. By the time, however, that she reached the parlour, the vendor of small wares had recovered the use of her tongue.

"Well, Miss Watling," she cried, still panting, "the mystery's all out at last. Dorothy Chance is Lord Wilton's *own* daughter! and that poor beggar woman, as you was used to call her, was no other than Alice Knight, rich old Mrs. Knight's daughter, whom the Earl's good mother adopted, and he married unbeknown to her."

"I'll not believe a word of it!" said Nancy, resolutely.

"Why, woman, it's all here in the paper," and Mrs. Lane tapped the important document significantly, "and as true as gospel. Do you suppose the Earl would allow the newspapers to meddle with his private affairs? Don't you hear the bells ringing; and if you come down to the village with me, you'll see all the flags a flying, and them who has no flags, puts out o' their windows quilts and hankers. Oh, it's true, true, and I be right glad on it. I allers did think Dorothy Chance a fine girl."

[Pg 279]

"I wonder how her ladyship bears her new dignity?" said Miss Watling, waspishly.

"As meek as a lamb," returned Mrs. Lane.

"How the old man will fret and fume that Gilbert did not marry her. It serves him right, at any rate."

"How money do make people turn about," continued Mrs. Lane. "It was only this time last year that I heard you praise old Rushmere for turning Dorothy out o' doors. Before another week is over, you will be boasting of her acquaintance."

[Pg 280]

"Good morning, Nancy, I can't stay longer. The butcher has promised to give me a cast in his cart, as far as Barfords. I know Jane Barford will be glad of any good that happens to Dorothy."

And off went the little bustling woman to spread the glad tidings in every house she passed.

Miss Watling's envy of Dorothy was greatly diminished by her exaltation to rank and fortune. She was now too far above her to provoke competition, and she began to praise what she could not pull down.

Mrs. Lane was right, when she anticipated the hearty congratulations of Mrs. Barford; even Letty stopped her churn, and, clapping her hands, said:

[Pg 281]

"Who wud ha' thought that we shud ever have a titled lady for a dairy maid, or that a countess wud nurse my boy, Tommy. It do seem jist like a fairy tale."

"Yes," returned old Mrs. Barford, "and Dorothy may be considered as the queen of the fairies. If Gilbert's in England, I wonder what he will say to all this? As to Dorothy, she had a good miss of him. They do say that he made that other woman a wretched husband."

"I'm thinking," said Letty, sententiously, "that it wor the wretch o' a woman that made him a bad wife. What he could see in that dirty, impudent wench, Martha Wood, to run off wi' un, 'stonishes I more than's marrying yon stuck up Gallimaufry from Lunnon."

[Pg 282]

"Nothing need astonish you, Letty, that is done by a drunken man. But in this matter of Dorothy Chance, Lawrence Rushmere was more to blame than his son, and a fine mess he has made of it. Howsomever, I don't believe that people can marry just whom they like. God mates them, and not man, or we should not see such strange folk come together."

"If that be true, mother," cried Letty, with unusual vivacity, "how can yer go on from day to day, fretting an' nagging, an' blaming Joe for marrying I? If I had to be his wife, he wor forced to take I, whether or no."

This was rather a poser to Mrs. Barford's favourite theory, on which much might be said for and against, and which still remains an unsolved enigma. The old lady was wont to excuse her own imprudent marriage on the score of its being *her fate*. She took up her knitting and began

[Pg 283]

rattling her pins vigorously, as if perfectly unconscious of her daughter-in-law's sensible remark.

There was one, however, to whom the change in Dorothy's social position brought no joy, producing the most bitter disappointment, and giving rise to vindictive and resentful feelings. This was Gilbert Rushmere.

Before leaving Heath Farm with Martha Wood, he had secured a tolerably large sum of money by the sale of the farm horses, which had been accomplished without the knowledge of his father. With this sum, it was his intention of taking his passage to America; but meeting in London some of his gambling associates, they had prevailed upon him to stay, until fleeced in his turn of all his ill-gotten store, he was reduced to the necessity of acting as a decoy duck, in a low tavern, which was the common resort of men even yet more fallen and degraded than himself.

[Pg 284]

He was sitting maudling over a strong potation of gin and water, after a night of riot and debauchery, in an underground kitchen in this den of infamy, striving to drown the recollection of former respectability in the maddening glass. His red bloated face, unshaven chin and matted hair, contrasted painfully with the faded uniform that seemed to claim for its wearer the title of a gentleman.

It is not the murderer alone who bears upon his brow the stamp of Cain. Vice marks all her degraded victims with an unerring sign, which reveals to the spectator the depths of their debasement. This sign is so distinctly traceable in the countenance of a wicked man, that a little child—nay even a dog—alike unconscious of the cause of this physical degradation, sees that something is wrong, and shrinks instinctively from his companionship. If a good man feels it difficult to maintain the straight onward path of prescribed duty, the downward career of the wicked man has no stumbling blocks in the way. Every step accelerates his speed, till he gains, by a final plunge in deeper guilt, the dreadful goal.

[Pg 285]

That miserable man, in his half conscious state, with his unwashed face and soiled garments, and brutalized expression, is a sad illustration of such a frightful career.

Scarcely a year has expired, when, a brave, honest soldier, he was respected by his comrades, the pride of his parents, and the beloved of a virtuous woman, and held an honourable and independent position. He then gave a fair promise of becoming a useful member of society. Look at him now leaning on that dirty table, drivelling over the accursed liquor, for which he has bartered body and soul, and to obtain which he has to herd with ruffians yet more fallen and degraded than himself.

[Pg 286]

His shameless companion deserted him when he was no longer able to gratify her vanity, by the purchase of fine clothes and bogus jewellery. Of his wife and her mother he neither knows nor cares, and never names them without a curse, as the author of his misery.

His glass is out, and he is just going to fling himself upon the dirty floor, to sleep off the headache due to last night's shameless orgies. "Hullo! Rush! You're not going to sleep?" cries one of the gang, entering in his shirt sleeves, with a newspaper in his hand. "In less than an hour you'll have plenty of work to do. If you are in your senses rouse up and read this, to keep your eyes open till the governor wants you."

Rubbing his eyes with a dreadful oath, and wishing his companion in the place to which he is himself fast hastening, Gilbert staggered up, and sat down once more by the greasy table.

[Pg 287]

"It's hard that you won't leave me alone, Boxer. This life's killing me. My head aches confoundedly. I want to go sleep, 'to forget my misery,' as that jolly old dog, Solomon, has it, 'and remember my poverty no more.'"

"This paper will wake you up. It's the history of your old sweetheart, Dolly, that you are always boring me about. Not that I believe a word of all that now. Not a very likely tale that such a girl as that would have anything to say to such a chap as you. A nice fellow, an't you, for a lady of rank to break her heart about."

"Don't bother me!" yawned Gilbert. "If there's anything worth hearing, can't you tell me without my having the trouble to read it."

[Pg 288]

"There—see for yourself," cries the other, flinging the paper at his head. "My eyes! but you lost a fine chance, if ever it was in your power to win it."

Gilbert mechanically picked up the paper, and went to a dresser under the only window in the room to find out what his companion meant.

The columns were filled with the termination of the famous suit that had pronounced Dorothy Chance the legitimate daughter of Lord Wilton, and secured to her the accumulated wealth left by her grandmother, Mrs. Knight.

Whether it was the liquor that had maddened him, the sense of his own degradation, or the full consciousness of all that he had lost, by his cruel desertion of Dorothy, the news contained in that paper rendered him furious. He raved and swore—cursing his own folly and his father's avarice, that had hindered him from being the fortunate possessor of all this wealth. For Dorothy herself he no longer cared. He had sunk too low in the mire of iniquity to love a pure and virtuous woman; but the idea of another possessing her, filled him with rage and envy, and he swore with a terrible oath that Dorothy Chance should never be the wife of Gerard Fitzmorris; that he would

[Pg 289]

have his revenge or die in the attempt.

His vicious comrades laughed at him, and made fun of his awful imprecations, but the gloomy determination in his eyes proved that he at least was not in joke.

What a mercy it is that people are generally unconscious of the evils plotting against them, that the sorrows of the coming hour are hid beneath the folded wings of the future.

While her quondam lover was plotting all sorts of mischief against her, to disturb her peace, Dorothy had taken her first journey to London, in company with her father. Her presence was necessary to sign important papers, and to prepare a suitable outfit for her marriage, which was to take place the first of May.

[Pg 290]

A noble suite of apartments had been prepared at Heath Hall for the reception of the bride and bridegroom on their return to Hadstone, after their bridal tour, which, owing to Gerard's strict notions of the sacred obligations of his profession, and the little time that a faithful pastor can afford to devote to his own gratification, was to be of short duration,—embracing a brief visit to the Highlands of Scotland, and a glance at the English lakes on their homeward route.

To a young girl brought up in the seclusion of a very retired country life, who can catch but a faint echo from the great world to which she is an entire stranger, the metropolis, seen at a distance, through the dazzling medium of the imagination, is believed to be a wonderful place; a city full of enchantments, where beauty and wealth meet you at every turn, and cares and sorrows are forgotten in an endless round of dissipation and pleasure. The reality of those diversions and enjoyments soon makes them distasteful to a sensitive and reflective mind, who can discern the sharp thorns thickly studding the stem of the rose, and who will not sacrifice peace of mind and integrity to secure the fleeting flowers of popular applause.

[Pg 291]

Dorothy, whose tastes were all simple and natural, felt lonely and disappointed in the crowded streets of the great city. Their amusements and pursuits were so different to those to which she had been accustomed, that it required time and reflection to reconcile her to the change.

She cared very little for expensive jewels and magnificent attire, and did not feel at home in the splendid halls and saloons of the wealthy and high-born. When arrayed for the first time in a costume befitting her rank, to attend a great ball given by the beautiful Duchess of—, and led before the mirror to admire the charming image it reflected, the simple girl shocked her lady's maid—a very great lady indeed in her own estimation—by turning from the glass and bursting into tears.

[Pg 292]

Her romantic story had excited the greatest interest in the public mind. Crowds collected round the Earl's town residence to catch a glimpse of his beautiful daughter when she took a drive in the carriage, and men and women vied with each other in extolling the charms of her person and the unaffected grace of her deportment. Songs were made and sung in her praise, and wherever she appeared she was forced to submit to the flatteries and adulations of a crowd of admirers.

[Pg 293]

This was all very painful to Dorothy; it oppressed her, restrained her natural freedom, and rendered her a silent passive observer in the society in which she might have shone. She was not insensible to the admiration of the new friends, who had so graciously received her into their charmed circle, but she longed to get out of it, and find herself once more in the country.

She wrote daily to her lover an account of all she heard and saw, which helped to beguile the tedium of a separation. In answer to a paragraph in one of his letters, she said:—

"You are afraid, dear Gerard, that I may be induced to forget you, surrounded by so many admirers; that all this gaiety and ball-going may give me a taste for frivolous amusements, and spoil my heart. It cannot damage what it never touches—I hardly know I have a heart; it lies so still under this weight of jewels and brocade. It is only in the silence of my own chamber, when my thoughts flow back to you, that it awakes to life and happiness.

[Pg 294]

"Everything strikes me as hollow and false, in the life I am at present compelled to lead. People live for the world and its opinions, and not for each other, still less for God. They dare not be simple and natural, and love the truth for its own sake—the blessed truth that would set them free from all these conventional forms and ceremonies, that shackle the soul and deaden all its heavenward aspirations. You will laugh at me, Gerard, when I declare to you that I have experienced more real enjoyment in working among the new-mown hay, and inhaling its delicious perfume, when the skylark was warbling in the blue heaven above me, than I have ever known in these crowded palaces, following the dull routine of what my noble young friends term pleasure. You need not fear such gorgeous insipidities will ever wean me from the love of nature, or make me indifferent to the quiet happiness of a country life, the higher enjoyment of being useful and striving to benefit others."

[Pg 295]

On several occasions, when riding out with her father, Dorothy had been startled by observing a face in the crowd that bore a strong resemblance to Gilbert Rushmere, but haggard and degraded, regarding her with a fixed scowling stare of recognition, from which she shrunk with feelings of terror and disgust. Why did this person follow her whenever she appeared in public, glaring upon her with those wild bloodshot eyes, with unequivocal glances of hatred and ferocity.

It was impossible that it could be Gilbert, and yet the fear that the presence of this person never failed to inspire, convinced her, much as she repressed the ungenerous idea, that it was he, and no other. Once, when dismounting at her milliner's in Bond Street, she was so near to him, that

[Pg 296]

they were almost face to face. He put his sole remaining hand hastily into the breast pocket of his coat, as if to deliver something to her, but was pushed back, and told to get out of the lady's way by the footman, and, with a glare of rage and disappointment, had shrunk back among the crowd.

This frightful apparition haunted her for several days, and disturbed her mind so much that she kept close in doors, pleading indisposition to avoid her usual drive.

[Pg 297]

CHAPTER XII.

IN CONCLUSION.

Her marriage, which took place a few days after this painful rencounter, banished all these vague fears and surmises, and made her the happy bride of the man she loved.

It was conducted in a very quiet manner, and, after partaking of the splendid *déjeuner* prepared for the occasion, and receiving the congratulations of the noble guests who honoured it with their presence, she started with her husband in a private carriage for the north.

After a delightful tour of several weeks, she rejoined her father in London, received her bridal visits, and, full of hope and happiness, proceeded with him to take possession of the princely home that was to be her future residence.

[Pg 298]

Great were the preparations made by the good folks of Hadstone, to welcome their beloved pastor and his beautiful bride. The gardens and meadows had been rifled of their June blossoms to strew the path from the village to the park gates, where a triumphal arch of ever-greens crossed the road, from which gay silken banners floated forth upon the breeze, emblazoned with mottos of joyful welcome.

The road was lined with crowds of people in their holiday attire, to hail the approach of the bridal party, and when the *cortège* came in sight, the air rang with deafening shouts and acclamations.

An elegant open carriage, drawn by four noble grey horses, contained the bridal party. The Earl and Lawrence Rushmere, whom they had taken up at Heath Farm, occupied the front seat. The old man had been provided with a dress suitable for the occasion, and his fine patriarchal face was lighted up with gratified pride and pleasure.

[Pg 299]

Lady Dorothy, dressed in a simple but elegant morning costume, was seated beside her husband in the body of the equipage, and received the congratulations of her rustic friends with smiles of undisguised pleasure. A charming incarnation she was of youth and beauty. Mr. and Mrs. Martin followed in a private carriage with the children.

If Gerard Fitzmorris was not a proud and happy man, his face belied him.

A public dinner was to be served in the park to the poor of the parish, and parents and children were dressed in their best attire, their smiling faces beaming with gladness.

[Pg 300]

The carriage drew up beneath the triumphal arch, and the Earl rose to thank the people for the hearty welcome they had given to him and his daughter.

He had scarcely raised his hat, and uttered the first sentence, when a tall haggard looking man, bare-headed and covered with dust, rushed from behind the arch to the door of the carriage, and fired a pistol with his left hand at the Lady Dorothy, who, uttering a faint cry, sank insensible into the arms of her husband.

All was now terror and confusion.

The Earl sprang from his seat to secure the assassin, amidst the groans and execrations of the excited multitude.

With a fiendish laugh the ruffian discharged the contents of another weapon into his own mouth, and fell a hideous corpse beneath the feet of the horses. He was instantly dragged out of sight by several men in the crowd, and the mangled remains conveyed to a neighbouring cottage.

[Pg 301]

The dreadful deed had been the work of a moment, and, pale and trembling with the sudden shock, the Earl grasped convulsively the door of the carriage. The sight of his daughter, her white dress stained with her blood, seemed to recall him to consciousness. "Is she dead?" he gasped.

"No, my lord," said Dr. Davy, who had been examining the nature of the injury she had received, and who now dismounted to assist the nobleman into his carriage. "The wound is not a dangerous one. It was aimed at the lady's heart, but at the moment the ruffian fired, she providentially put up her arm to raise her veil, which has received the ball of the assassin. The sooner we can convey her home the better."

[Pg 302]

Gerard's handkerchief had formed a temporary bandage to stop the effusion of blood, and as he held his fair young wife in his arms his face was as pale and rigid as her own. "How quickly," he thought, "does sorrow tread in the footsteps of joy. How little of real happiness can be expected in a world on which rests the curse of sin, the shadows of the grave."

Dorothy did not recover from her fainting fit until after they reached the Hall, and she had been

conveyed to bed. Then followed the painful operation of extracting the ball from her right arm, where it was lodged about four inches above the elbow, and dressing and bandaging the wound, which Dr. Davy assured the anxious father and husband, would only prove a temporary inconvenience of a few weeks at the farthest.

[Pg 303]

Dorothy bore the operation without a murmur, placing her left hand in that of her husband, and leaning her head upon his breast. When it was over she was gently laid back upon her pillow, and given a composing draught to induce sleep.

"Gerard," she whispered, "did you see that unhappy man?"

"No, my love."

"It was Gilbert Rushmere. Has he escaped?"

"From the punishment due to his crime? Yes."

"Thank God! I would not have him suffer death on my account. Oh, Gerard, if you had seen his eyes—the look he gave, when he fired. It was not Gilbert Rushmere but some demon in his shape."

"Hush, my precious wife. You must not talk and distress yourself. Your wound, though not dangerous, may be rendered so, by want of rest and excitement." But Dorothy was too much agitated to sleep.

[Pg 304]

"Did his poor father see him?"

"I think not. The whole thing was so sudden and unexpected, that Rushmere was not conscious of it until after it was all over."

"Try and keep him from knowing who the assassin was. Tell him that it was the act of a madman in the crowd."

"Dorothy, we must not do evil that good may come of it, or attempt to cover crime by uttering an untruth. Leave the sinner to his God, and speak of him no more."

"And the people, Gerard. You must not disappoint them of their dinner. Tell them from me, that I shall soon be well. That I wish them all to be happy. Ah, me!" and she closed her eyes and sighed heavily. "This is a dismal ending to a day that dawned so pleasantly. That unhappy man. May God have mercy upon him, and bring him to repentance." She spoke no more, and to the infinite relief of her husband and Mrs. Martin, who had constituted herself as nurse, soon dropped into a profound sleep.

[Pg 305]

This sad affair threw a great damp upon the joy of the people. Their gay shouts were converted into sorrowful ejaculations. Though the roasted ox was eaten—the barrels of strong ale drunk—and the children did ample justice to Mrs. Brand's excellent plum-pudding, they dispersed sadly and sorrowfully, when the meal was ended.

Lady Dorothy awoke in a high fever, and for several days was considered in imminent danger. This was not caused by the wound, the ball having penetrated only an inch beneath the skin, but from the severe shock her nervous system had sustained from witnessing a scene so terrible.

[Pg 306]

She still fancied herself in the carriage, surrounded by the gaping crowd, and encountered the frenzied gaze of the maniac, as he aimed at her the deadly weapon. Unconscious of his last desperate act, she would cling to her husband, and cry out in a tone of agonized earnestness.

"He is mad! Don't kill him. Let him escape. I loved him once. I cannot see him die."

As a natural antidote to this state of mental excitement, Gerard thought it best, during a brief interval of composure, to reveal to her the facts of the case, which calmed at once her agitation, by causing her to shed tears. He suffered her to weep for some time without disturbing her with any remark.

He had more than once experienced that the truth, however painful, is more endurable, and fraught with less danger to the human frame, than a state of suspense; that the natural elasticity of the mind, when the worst is known, and nothing remains to hope or fear, reconciles us to a blow that we cannot avert, and which becomes irrevocable as fate.

[Pg 307]

After lying quiet for some time, Dorothy opened her large black eyes, and, looking earnestly in her husband's face, said in a low voice, "Gerard, is there any harm in praying for the dead?"

"I should think not, darling. Nature herself prompts such prayers. Cold must that heart be who can witness the death of a parent or friend, or even of an enemy, without breathing an inward prayer for the salvation of his soul. This impulse is almost instinctive in the human heart, and few, I believe, could be found, except the hardened sinner, who have not uttered such prayers, when bending over the loved and lost. At the same time, sweet wife, I must add, that these prayers, however pious and natural, cannot do any good to the dead, or change the sentence of a just God. But they are of service to the living, in filling the soul with a gentle charity, and bringing it into solemn communion with Him who has extracted the sting from death, and risen victorious from the grave."

[Pg 308]

"Ah," sighed Dorothy, "how thankful we ought to be that the future is mercifully hidden from us."

Who could endure all the trials of life, if they could see them in advance? Our moments of gladness are often more nearly allied to sorrow than those of grief. The terrible reverse is so hard to bear." Gerard fondly kissed the pale, earnest speaker, and, kneeling beside her bed, uttered a fervent prayer of thanksgiving that it had pleased God to restore his dear young wife to reason.

[Pg 309]

In a few weeks she was able to sit up, and receive the visits of sympathizing friends.

Little now remains for us to record of the eventful history of this truly noble woman.

The fortune she inherited from her grandmother was entirely devoted to charitable purposes. She caused to be erected at Storby an hospital for the sick, and a house of refuge for infirm and shipwrecked mariners.

She built a comfortable almshouse for aged and destitute widows, and a school and asylum for orphan children, whom she made her especial care. Her chief delight was in doing good, and contributing to the happiness of others, in which charitable occupation she enjoyed the hearty co-operation of a man, well worthy of being the husband and bosom friend of such an excellent wife.

[Pg 310]

Lady Dorothy became the mother of four noble promising boys, and one lovely girl named after her mother, Alice. The Earl, and her foster-father, who shared her home, lived to see her sons grow up to men, and to mingle their tears with hers, over the grave of her only daughter, who died in her innocent childhood.

The portrait of the soldier of the Covenant had been removed from Heath Farm, and placed among the pictures of the Earl's ancestors; and old Rushmere would rub his hands while contemplating it, and declare "that old Sir Lawrence was now in his proper place."

Dorothy had named her second son Lawrence Rushmere, after her foster-father, and the boy was the especial pet and darling of the venerable patriarch.

"Edward, and Gerard, and Thomas might be fine lads," he said, "but they were none of them, so clever and handsome as his own Larry."

[Pg 311]

The Earl erected a beautiful monument over the grave of his unfortunate countess, and resisted all Dorothy's earnest entreaties to cut down the melancholy yew that kept the sunbeams from visiting her mother's grave.

"The spot is holy ground, my Dorothy. The mournful tree, a fit emblem for love like ours, which was cradled in sorrow, and whose constancy survives the grave. There, too, I hope to sleep in peace, by the side of the beloved."

THE END.

Transcriber's Note: A number of paragraph ending periods were missing and have been corrected. The word cooly is now coolly.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WORLD BEFORE THEM: A NOVEL.
VOLUME 3 (OF 3) ***

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