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A FEW PRESS OPINIONS

ON

"AARON THE JEW."

BY

B. L. FARJEON.

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Globe.

"Aaron is a most engaging figure; nothing loftier, purer, sweeter, can be imagined than the beautiful tie which unites him to his gentle, true-hearted Rachel."

Speaker.

"In many respects a really powerful story, strong and sympathetic. The book is infinitely superior in tone and motive to much of the current fiction."

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"A very tender and touching sketch, showing what a beautiful and noble life is possible to a Jew who would really live in the true spirit of his simple faith and the best traditions of his people. Charming pictures of Jewish household life.... Exceedingly pleasant to read."

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"Written with earnestness, sincerity, and lively sympathy with all that is good, generous, and tender."

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"Powerful studies of lofty human character. It is full of genuine life, of real men and women, and of sustained interest.... A delightful story. 'Aaron the Jew' is a strong and original piece of work, and will well repay perusal."

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Glasgow Herald.

"'Aaron the Jew' is a benevolent and beautiful character. The story is an interesting one."

Western Morning News.

"Mr. Farjeon has never written a more natural and touching story than this of 'Aaron the Jew.' All his characters are of an attractive and noble-minded type."

Westminster Gazette.

"Very simply and touchingly written; rises to the level of real pathos."

Jewish Chronicle.

"The book is interesting, and is a worthy addition to the Jewish stories which are so much in fashion just now."

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"'Aaron the Jew' is a contribution to light fiction, all the more welcome because its very slightness may cause it to be read by people who still know nothing of Jews and Judaism, and so tend to remove senseless prejudices."

Record.

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World.

"Mr. Farjeon's new novel, 'Aaron the Jew,' is his best work since 'Grif' made him known to the reading world as a writer of fiction gifted with exceptional power and originality. The story is finely conceived and worked out with great care and lucidity."

Liverpool Daily Post.

"The book is, indeed, in every way an excellent production of Mr. Farjeon's pen, and will no doubt attain the popularity it unquestionably deserves."

AARON THE JEW

A Novel

By

B. L. FARJEON

AUTHOR OF
"*Great Porter Square,*" "*Grif,*" "*Blade o' Grass,*" "*The Last Tenant,*" *etc., etc.*

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BOOK THE FIRST.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

CHAPTER I.

THE POOR DOCTOR.

On a bright, snowy night in December, 1871, Dr. Spenlove, having been employed all the afternoon and evening in paying farewell visits to his patients, walked briskly towards his home through the narrowest and most squalid thoroughfares in Portsmouth. The animation of his movements may be set down to the severity of the weather, and not to any inward cheerfulness of spirits, for as he passed familiar landmarks, he looked at them with a certain regret, which men devoid of sentiment would have pronounced an indication of a weak nature. In this opinion, however, they would have been wrong, for Dr. Spenlove's intended departure early the following morning from a field which had strong claims upon his sympathies was dictated by a law of inexorable necessity. He was a practitioner of considerable skill, and he had conscientiously striven to achieve a reputation in some measure commensurate with his abilities. From a worldly point of view his efforts had been attended with mortifying failure; he had not only been unsuccessful in earning a bare livelihood, but he had completely exhausted the limited resources with which he had started upon his career; he had, moreover, endured severe privation, and an opening presenting itself in the wider field of London, he had accepted it with gladness and reluctance. With gladness, because he was an ambitious man, and had desires apart from his profession; with reluctance, because it pained him to bid farewell to patients in whom he took a genuine interest, and whom he would have liked to continue to befriend. He had, indeed, assisted many of them to the full extent of his power, and in some instances had gone beyond this limit, depriving himself of the necessaries of life to supply them with medicines and nourishing food, and robbing his nights of rest to minister to their woes. He bore about him distinguishing marks of the beautiful self-sacrifice. On this last night of his residence among them, his purse was empty, and inclement as was the weather, he wore, on his road home, but one thin coat, which was but a feeble protection from the freezing air, which pierced to his skin, though every button was put to its proper use. A hacking cough, which caused him to pause occasionally, denoted that he was running a dangerous risk in being so insufficiently clad; but he seemed to make light of it, and smiled when the paroxysm was over. In no profession can be found displayed a more noble humanity and philanthropy than in that which Dr. Spenlove practised, and, needy as he was, and narrow as had been his means from the start, his young career already afforded a striking example of sweet and unselfish attributes. In the Divine placing of human hosts, the poor doctor and the poor priest shall be found marching in the van side by side.

During the whole of the day snow had been falling, and during the whole of the day Dr. Spenlove had had but one meal. He did not complain; he had been accustomed to live from hand to mouth, and well knew what it was to go to bed hungry; and there was before him the prospect of brighter times.

But cheering as was this prospect, his walk home through the falling snow was saddened by the scenes he had witnessed in the course of the day; and one especially dwelt in his mind.

"Poor creature!" he mused. "What will become of her and her baby? O pitiless world! Does it not contain a single human being who will hold out a helping hand?"

Before one of the poorest houses in one of the poorest streets he paused, and, admitting himself with a private latchkey, unlocked a door on the ground floor, and entered a room which faced the street. There was a wire blind to the window, on which was inscribed,--

CONSULTATIONS FROM 9 TILL 11 A.M.

This room, with a communicating bedroom at the back, comprised his professional and private residence.

Dr. Spenlove groped in the dark for the matches, and, lighting a candle, applied a match to a fire laid with scrupulous economy in the matter of coals. As he was thus employed, his landlady knocked at the door and entered.

"Is it you, Mrs. Radcliffe?" he asked, not turning his head.

"Yes, sir. Let me do that, please."

The paper he had lit in the grate was smouldering away without kindling the wood; the landlady knelt down, and with a skilful touch the flame leapt up. Dr. Spenlove, unbuttoning his thin coat, spread out his hands to the warmth.

"Any callers, Mrs. Radcliffe?"

"A gentleman, sir, who seemed very anxious to see you. He did not leave his name or card, but said he would call again this evening."

"Did he mention the hour?"

"Nine, sir."

Dr. Spenlove put his hand to his waistcoat pocket, and quickly withdrew it, with a smile of humour and self-pity. The landlady noticed the action, and dolefully shook her head.

"Very anxious to see me, you say, Mrs. Radcliffe."

"Very anxious indeed, sir. Dear, dear, you're wet through!"

"It is a bitter night," he said, coughing.

"You may well say that, sir. Bad weather for you to be out, with that nasty cough of yours."

"There are many people worse off than I am, without either fire or food."

"We all have our trials, sir. It's a hard world."

"Indeed, indeed!" he said, thinking of the female patient whom he had last visited.

"Where's your overcoat, sir? I'll take it down to the kitchen; it'll dry sooner there." She looked around in vain for it.

"Never mind my overcoat, Mrs. Radcliffe."

"But you had it on when you went out, sir?"

"Did I? Don't trouble about it. It will dry quickly enough where it is."

He was now busily employed making a parcel of books and instruments, which he had taken from different parts of the room, and which were the only articles of value belonging to himself it contained. The landlady stood for a moment or two watching his movements, and then she hurried down to her kitchen, and presently returned with a cup of hot tea. As she passed through the passage, with the cup in one hand and a candle in the other, she glanced at the empty umbrella stand.

"His umbrella, too, as well as his overcoat," she muttered. "The man's heart's too big for his body!"

She re-entered the room.

"I've brought you a cup of tea, sir, if you don't mind taking it."

"Not at all, Mrs. Radcliffe. It is very kind of you."

He drank the tea, which warmed him through and through.

"We're all sorry at your leaving us, sir," said the landlady. "There's plenty that'll miss you."

"I am sorry, too," he replied; "but when needs must, you know. I can do no good to myself or others by remaining. If the gentleman calls again, ask him to wait, if his business is of importance. You had better tell him I am leaving Portsmouth to-morrow morning."

With his parcel under his arm he left the house, and trudging through the snow again, halted at a pawnbroker's shop, lingering awhile before he entered, as sensitive men do before putting the finishing touch to a humiliating act. Then, shrugging his shoulders, and muttering, "I ought to be used to it by this time," he plunged into the shop, where he obtained upon his few last treasures as much as would pay his third-class fare to London and the two weeks' rent he owed his landlady. Thus safe-guarded for a few hours at least, he left the shop, but instead of immediately retracing his steps to his lodgings he lingered once more irresolutely, with the air of a man who was at war with himself upon a momentous question. The sixteen shillings due to his landlady was in his pocket, and undoubtedly it was but simple honesty that it should be handed over to her without hesitation. But the hapless female patient who had occupied his thoughts during the last hour was at this moment in the throes of a desperate human crisis, and dark as was the present to her suffering soul, the terrors which the future held in store for her were still more agonising. She had a young baby at her breast; she had no food in her cupboard, not a loaf of bread, not a cup of milk; she had not a friend in the world to whom she could appeal for help. She, too, was in debt to her landlord, a hard man who was waiting for another sun to rise to thrust her and her infant into the white and pitiless streets. It would have been done to-day but for the intervention of Dr. Spenlove, who had pawned his overcoat and umbrella to buy of the poor creature's landlord a respite of twenty-four hours. The sixteen shillings due to Mrs. Radcliffe would buy her another respite for a longer term, but when this was expired there was still the hopeless future to face. Dr. Spenlove thrust aside this latter consideration, and thought only of the ineffable relief it was in his power to bring to a heart racked with anguish and despair. He lost sight of the fact that the wretched woman would still be without food, and that she was too weak to work for it. Even when she was strong, and able to ply her needle throughout the whole of the day and the greater part of the night, her earnings had never exceeded six shillings a week; she had confessed as much to the good doctor, but for whose timely aid the workhouse would have been her only refuge. As he stood debating with himself the sentiment of pity was strong within him, but he could not banish the voice of justice which whispered that the money was not his to dispose of. All the people with whom he was acquainted were poor, and his landlady was as poor as the rest; he knew that she often depended upon the payment of his rent to pay her own. It might be that just now she could afford to wait awhile for what was due to her; if so, he would dispose of the sixteen shillings as his benevolent instincts impelled him to do; he must, however, ascertain how the land lay before he acted. It may appear strange to many fortunate persons that issues so grave and vital should hang upon a sum of money which to them would not be worth a thought; but it would be a good lesson for them to learn that opportunities are not scarce for bringing Heaven's brightest sunshine to overcharged hearts by the judicious bestowal of a few small coins out of the wealth which yields them all the material comforts of life.

Having made up his mind upon the important matter, Dr. Spenlove turned homewards, and as he walked he recalled the incidents in connection with the unhappy woman in which he had played a part. She was a stranger in the neighbourhood, and had lived her lonely life in a garret for five months. No person with whom she came in contact knew anything of her or of her antecedents, and it was by chance that he became acquainted with her. Attending to his poor patients in the street in which she resided, he passed her one afternoon, and was attracted as much by her modest and ladylike appearance as by the evidence of extreme weakness, which could hardly escape the observation of a man so kindly-hearted as himself. He perceived at once that she was of a superior class to those among whom she moved, and he was impressed by a peculiar expression on her face when his eyes rested on her. It was the expression of a hunted woman, of one who was in hiding and dreaded being recognised. He made inquiries about her, but no one could give him any information concerning her, and in the press of onerous cares and duties she passed out of his mind. Some weeks later he met her again, and his first impressions were renewed and strengthened; and pity stirred his heart as he observed from her garments that she was on the downward path of poverty. It was clear that she was frightened by his observance of her, for she hurried quickly on; but physical weakness frustrated her desire to avoid him; she staggered and would have fallen had he not ran forward and caught her. Weak as she was she struggled to release herself; he kept firm hold of her, however, animated by compassion and fortified by honest intention.

"You have nothing to fear from me," he said. "Allow me to assist you. I am Dr. Spenlove."

It was the first time he had addressed her, but his name was familiar to her as that of a gentleman to whom the whole neighbourhood was under a debt of gratitude for numberless acts of goodness. She glanced timidly at his face, and a vague hope stirred her heart; she knew that the time was approaching when she would need such a friend. But the hope did not live long; it was crushed by a sudden fear.

"Do you know me, sir?"

"No," replied Dr. Spenlove, in a cheerful tone. "You are a stranger to me, as I have no doubt I am to you."

"You are not quite a stranger, sir," she said, timidly. "I have heard of your kindness to many suffering people."

"Tush, tush!" he exclaimed. "A man deserves no credit for doing his duty. You feel stronger now, do you not? If you have no doctor you must allow me to come and see you. Do not hesitate; you need such advice as I can give you; and," he added gently, "I will send in my account when you are rich. Not till then, upon my honour; and meanwhile I promise to ask no questions."

"I am deeply grateful to you, sir."

And, indeed, when they parted the world was a little brighter to the poor soul.

From that day he attended her regularly, and she was strengthened and comforted by his considerate conduct towards her. She was known as Mrs. Turner; but it was strange, if she were wife or widow, that she should wear no wedding-ring. As their intimacy ripened his first impression that she was a lady was confirmed, and although he was naturally curious about her history, he kept his promise by not asking her any questions which he instinctively felt it would be painful to her to answer. Even when he discovered that she was about to become a mother he made no inquiries concerning the father of her unborn child. On the day he bade her farewell, her baby, a girl, was two weeks old, and a dark and terrible future lay before the hapless woman. His heart bled for her, but he was powerless to help her further. Weak and despairing, she sat in her chair with her child at her wasted breast; her dark and deep-sunken eyes seemed to be contemplating this future in hopeless terror.

"I am grieved to leave you so," he said, gazing sadly at her; "but it is out of my power to do what I would wish. Unhappily, I am almost as poor as yourself. You will try to get strong, will you not?"

"I don't know," she murmured.

"Remember," he said, taking her hand, "you have a duty to perform. What will you do when you are strong?"

"I don't know."

"Nay, nay," he gently urged, "you must not speak so despondently. Believe me, I do not wish to force your confidence, but I have gathered from chance words you have let drop that you lived in London. I am going there to-morrow. Can I call upon any person who would be likely to assist you?"

"There is no one."

"But surely you must have some friends or relations----"

"I have none. When you leave me I shall be without a friend in the world."

"God help you!" he sighed.

"Will He?"

The question was asked in the voice of one who had abandoned hope, who had lost faith in human goodness and eternal justice, and who was tasting the bitterness of death.

Dr. Spenlove remained with her an hour, striving to cheer her, to instil hope into her heart, but his words had no effect upon her; and, indeed, he felt at times that the platitudes to which he was giving utterance were little better than mockery. Was not this woman face to face with the practical issues of life and death in their most awful aspect, and was it not a stern fact that there was but one practical remedy for them? She asked for bread, and he was offering her a stone. It was then he went from her room and learned the full truth from her landlord, who was only waiting till he was gone to turn her into the streets. We know by what means he bought a day's respite for her. Finally he left her, and bore away with him the darkest picture of human misery of which he had ever had experience.

CHAPTER II.

DR. SPENLOVE'S VISITOR.

His landlady, Mrs. Radcliffe, met him on the doorstep, and informed him that the gentleman who had called to see him in the afternoon had called again, and was in his room.

"A word, Mrs. Radcliffe," he said, hurriedly. "I am going to ask a great favour of you. I owe you two weeks' rent."

"Yes, sir."

His heart sank within him; he divined immediately from her tone that she was in need of the money.

"Would it inconvenience you to wait a little while for it?"

"I must, sir, if you haven't got it," she replied, "but I am dreadfully hard pressed, and I reckoned on it. I'm behindhand myself, sir, and my landlord's been threatening me----"

"Say no more, Mrs. Radcliffe. Justice must be first served. I have the money; take it--for Heaven's sake take it quickly! I must not rob the poor to help the poor."

He muttered the last words to himself as he thrust the sixteen shillings into her hand.

"I am so sorry, sir," said the distressed woman.

He interrupted her with, "There, there, I am ashamed that I asked you. I am sure no one has a kinder heart than you, and I am greatly obliged to you for all the attention you have shown me while I have been in your house. The gentleman is in my room, you say?"

It was a proof of Mrs. Radcliffe's kindness of heart that there was a bright fire blazing in the room, made with her own coals, and that the lamp had been replenished with her own oil. Dr. Spenlove was grateful to her, and he inwardly acknowledged that he could not have otherwise disposed of the few shillings which he had no right to call his own. His visitor rose as he entered, a well-dressed man some forty years of age, sturdily built, with touches of grey already in his hair and beard, and with signs in his face and on his forehead indicative of a strong will.

"Dr. Spenlove?" he asked, as they stood facing each other.

"That is my name."

"Mine is Gordon. I have come to see you on a matter of great importance."

Dr. Spenlove motioned to the chair from which his visitor had risen, and he resumed his seat; but although he had said that he had come upon a matter of great importance, he seemed to be either in no hurry to open it, or to be uncertain in which way to do so, for he sat for some moments in silence, smoothing his bearded chin and studying Dr. Spenlove's face with a stern and studious intentness.

"Can you spare me half an hour of your time?" he said at length.

"Longer, if you wish," said Dr. Spenlove.

"It may be longer, if you offer no opposition to the service I wish you to render me; and perhaps it is as well to say that I am willing and can afford to pay for the service."

Dr. Spenlove bent his head.

"It is seldom," continued Mr. Gordon, "that I make mistakes, and the reason is not far to seek. I make inquiries, I clear the ground, I resolve upon a course of action, and I pursue it to its end without deviation. I will be quite frank with you, Dr. Spenlove; I am a hard, inflexible man. Thrown upon the world when I was a lad, I pushed my way to fortune. I am self-made; I can speak fair English. I have received little education, none at all in a classical way; but I possess common sense, and I make it apply to my affairs. That is better than education if a man is resolved to get along in life--as I was resolved to do. When I was a young man I said, 'I will grow rich, or I will know the reason why.' I have grown rich. I do not say it as a boast--it is only fools who boast--but I am worth to-day a solid twenty thousand pounds a year. I make this statement merely as a proof that I am in a position to carry out a plan in which I desire your assistance and co-operation."

"My dear sir," said Dr. Spenlove, who could not but perceive that his visitor was very much in earnest, "the qualities you mention are admirable in their way, but I fear you have come to the wrong man. I am a doctor, and if you do not need my professional advice----"

"Stop a moment," interrupted Mr. Gordon, "I have come to the right man, and I do not need professional advice. I am as sound as a bell, and I have never had occasion to pay a doctor's fee. I know what I am about in the mission which brings me here. I have made inquiries concerning you, and have heard something of your career and its results; I have heard of your kindnesses and of the esteem in which you are held. You have influence with your patients; any counsel you might give them, apart from your prescriptions, would be received with respect and attention;

and I believe I am not wrong when I say that you are to some extent a man of the world."

"To some slight extent only," corrected Dr. Spenlove, with a faint smile.

"Sufficient," proceeded Mr. Gordon, "for my purpose. You are not blind to the perils which lie before weak and helpless women--before, we will say, a woman who has no friends, who is living where she is not known, who is in a position of grave danger, who is entirely without means, who is young and good-looking, and who, at the best, is unable by the work of her hands to support herself."

Dr. Spenlove looked sharply at his visitor. "You have such a woman in your mind, Mr. Gordon."

"I have such a woman in my mind, Dr. Spenlove."

"A patient of mine?"

"A patient of yours."

There was but one who answered to this description, and whose future was so dark and hopeless. For the first time during the interview he began to be interested in his visitor. He motioned him to proceed.

"We are speaking in confidence, Dr. Spenlove?"

"In perfect confidence, Mr. Gordon."

"Whether my errand here is successful or not, I ask that nothing that passes between us shall ever be divulged to a third person."

"I promise it."

"I will mention the name of the woman to whom I have referred, or, it will be more correct to say, the name by which she is known to you. Mrs. Turner."

"You mean her no harm, sir?"

"None. I am prepared to befriend her, to save her, if my conditions are accepted."

Dr. Spenlove drew a deep breath of relief. He would go to his new field of labours with a light heart if this unhappy woman were saved.

"You have come at a critical moment," he said, "and you have accurately described the position in which she is placed. But how can my mediation, or the mediation of any man, be necessary in such a case? She will hail you as her saviour and the saviour of her babe. Hasten to her immediately, dear sir; or perhaps you do not know where she lives, and wish me to take you to her? I am ready. Do not let us lose a moment, for every moment deepens her misery."

He did not observe the frown which passed into Mr. Gordon's face at his mention of the child; he was so eager that his hat was already on his head and his hand on the handle of the door.

Mr. Gordon did not rise from his chair.

"You are in too great a hurry, Dr. Spenlove. Be seated, and listen to what I have to say. You ask how your mediation can avail. I answer, in the event of her refusal to accept the conditions upon which I am ready to marry her."

"To marry her!" exclaimed Dr. Spenlove.

"To marry her," repeated Mr. Gordon. "She is not a married woman, and her real name need not be divulged. When you hear the story I am about to relate, when you hear the conditions, the only conditions, upon which I will consent to lift her from the degraded depths into which she has fallen, you will understand why I desire your assistance. You will be able to make clear to her the effect of her consent or refusal upon her destiny and the destiny of her child; you will be able to use arguments which are in my mind, but to which I shall not give utterance. And remember, through all, that her child is a child of shame, and that I hold out to her the only prospect of that child being brought up in a reputable way and of herself being raised to a position of respectability."

He paused a moment or two before he opened fresh matter.

"I was a poor lad, Dr. Spenlove, without parents, without a home; and when I was fourteen years of age I was working as an errand-boy in London, and keeping myself upon a wage of four shillings a week. I lost this situation through the bankruptcy of my employer, and I was not successful in obtaining another. One day, I saw on the walls a bill of a vessel going to Australia, and I applied at the agent's office with a vague idea that I might obtain a passage by working aboard ship in some capacity or other. I was a strong boy--starvation agrees with some lads--and a willing boy, and it happened that one of my stamp was wanted in the cook's galley. I was engaged at a shilling a month, and I landed in Melbourne with four shillings in my pocket.

"How I lived till I became a man is neither here nor there; but when gold was discovered I lived well, for I got enough to buy a share in a cattle station, which now belongs entirely to me. In 1860, being then on the high road to fortune, I made the acquaintance of a man whom I will call Mr. Charles, and of his only child, a girl of fourteen, whom I will call Mary. I was taken with Mr. Charles, and I was taken in by him as well, for he disappeared from the colony a couple of years afterwards, in my debt to the tune of a thousand pounds. He had the grace to write to me from London, saying he would pay me some day; and there the matter rested for seven years more, which brings me to two years ago.

"At that time I had occasion to visit England on business; and in London I hunted up my debtor, and we renewed our acquaintance. Mary was then a young woman of twenty-one; and had it not been for her, it is more than likely I might have made things unpleasant for her father, who was leading the disreputable life of a gambler on racecourses, and in clubs of a low character.

"Dr. Spenlove, you must have gathered from the insight I have given you into my character that I am not a man of sentiment, and you will probably consider it all the more strange that I should have entertained feelings towards Mary which caused me to consider whether she would not make me a creditable wife. Of these feelings I prefer not to speak in a warmer strain, but shall leave you to place your own construction upon them. While I was debating with myself as to the course I should pursue, the matter was decided for me by the death of Mr. Charles. He died in disgrace and poverty, and Mary was left friendless and homeless.

"I stepped in to her rescue, and I made a proposal of marriage to her. At the same time, I told her that I thought it advisable, for her sake and mine, that a little time should elapse before this proposal was carried into effect. I suggested that our marriage should take place in two years; meanwhile, I would return to Australia, to build a suitable house and to prepare a home for her, and she would remain in England to fit herself for her new sphere of duties. She accepted me, and I arranged with a lady of refinement to receive her. To this lady both she and I were utter strangers, and it was settled between Mary and myself that she should enter her temporary home under an assumed name. It was my proposal that this pardonable deceit should be practised; no person was wronged by it, and it would assist towards Mary's complete severance from old associations. Our future was in our own hands, and concerned nobody but ourselves.

"I returned to Australia, and made my preparations. We corresponded once a month, and some few months ago I informed her of the date of my intended arrival in England. To that letter I received no reply; and when I landed and called at the lady's house, I learned that she had fled. I set to work to discover the truth, and I have discovered it; I set to work to track her, and I have succeeded. Her story is a common story of betrayal and desertion, and I am not inclined to trouble you with it. She has not the remotest hope of assistance from the man who betrayed her; she has not the remotest hope of assistance from a person in the world with the exception of myself.

"Dr. Spenlove, notwithstanding what has occurred I am here in Portsmouth this night with the intention of carrying out the engagement into which I entered with her; I am here, prepared to marry her, on express conditions. The adoption of assumed names, the obscurity she has courted, the absolute silence which is certain to be observed by her, by me, by you, by the man who betrayed her, render me safe. It is known that I have come to England to be married, and she will be accepted as I present her when I return with her as my wife. I will have no discussion as to my motives for taking what the world would consider an unwise step; but you will understand that my feelings for the woman who has played me false must be of a deep and sincere nature, or I should not dream of taking it.

"It now only remains for me to state the conditions under which I am prepared to save her from even a more shameful degradation than that into which she has already fallen. I speak plainly. You know as well as I the fate that is in store for her if my offer is rejected."

CHAPTER III.

DR. SPENLOVE UNDERTAKES A DELICATE MISSION.

Mr. Gordon had spoken throughout in a cold, passionless tone, and with no accent of emotion in his voice. If anything could have been destructive of the idea that he loved the woman he wished to marry, it was his measured delivery of the story he had related; and yet there could be no question that there was some nobility in the nature of the sacrifice he was prepared to make for her sake. The contrast between the man and the woman struck Dr. Spenlove very forcibly.

The man was hard and cold, the woman was sensitive and sympathetic. Had their circumstances been equal, and had Dr. Spenlove been an interested adviser, he would have had no hesitation in saying to her: "Do not marry this man: there is no point of union between you; you can never kindle in his heart the fire which burns within your own; wedded to him, a dull routine of years will be your portion." But he felt that he dared not encourage himself to pursue this line of argument. Although the most pregnant part of Mr. Gordon's errand had yet to be disclosed, it seemed to him that he would very likely presently be the arbiter of her destiny. "You will be able," Mr. Gordon had said, "to make clear to her the effect of her consent or refusal upon her destiny and the destiny of her child." Whatever the conditions, it would be his duty to urge her to accept the offer that would be made to her; otherwise, he might be condemning her to a course of life he shuddered to contemplate. The responsibility would be too solemn for mere sentimental consideration. These were the thoughts that flashed through his mind in the momentary pause before Mr. Gordon spoke again.

"I believe," his visitor then said, "that I am in possession of the facts relating to Mrs. Turner"--he reverted to the name by which she was generally known--"but you will corroborate them perhaps. She is in want."

"She is in the lowest depths of poverty."

"Unless she pays the arrears of rent she will be turned into the streets to-morrow."

"That is the landlord's determination."

"She would have been turned out to-day but for your intervention."

"You are well informed, I see," observed Dr. Spenlove, rather nettled.

"I have conversed with the landlord and with others concerning her. She lives among the poor, who have troubles enough of their own to grapple with, and are unable, even if they were inclined, to render her the assistance of which she stands in need. She seems to have kept herself aloof from them, for which I commend her. Now, Dr. Spenlove, I will have no spectre of shame and degradation to haunt her life and mine. Her past must be buried, and the grave must never be opened. To that I am resolved, and no power on earth can turn me from it."

"But her child?" faltered Dr. Spenlove.

"She will have no child. She must part with her, and the parting must be final and irrevocable. The steps I shall take to this end shall be so effectual that if by chance in the future they should happen to meet there shall be no possibility of recognition. I propose to have the child placed with a family who will adopt her as a child of their own--there will be little difficulty in finding such a family--to the head of which a sum of one hundred pounds will be paid yearly for maintenance. I name no limit as to time; so long as the child lives, so long will the payment be made through my lawyers. Should the child die before she reaches the age of twenty-one, the sum of five hundred pounds will be paid to the people who undertake the charge. They will know nothing of me or of the mother; our names will not be divulged to them, and they will not be able to trace us. Should they evince a disposition to be troublesome in this respect, the child will be taken from them by my lawyers, and another home provided for her. A hundred pounds a year is a liberal sum, and there will not be the least difficulty in carrying out the proposed arrangement. In proof that I desire the child to have every chance of leading a happy life, I will engage to give her a marriage portion of five hundred pounds. Judge for yourself whether a woman in Mrs. Turner's circumstances would be acting wisely in rejecting my proposition."

"You have spoken in a most generous spirit," said Dr. Spenlove slowly, "so far as money goes; but you seem not to have taken into consideration a mother's feelings."

"I have not taken them into consideration: they are not part of my plan. I have looked at the matter only from two points of view--its worldly aspect, and my desire to carry out my personal wishes. I decline to regard it or to argue upon it from the point of view of a mother's feelings. I ask you to judge of it as a man of the world."

"Of which," said Dr. Spenlove, "as I have hinted to you, I am a poor example. Do you expect me to provide for the babe such a home as that you have described?"

"Not at all. It is my business to carry out my plan if she accepts the conditions."

"What, then, do you wish me to do?"

"To lay my proposition before her as nearly as possible in my words, to impress upon her that it is her duty to agree to it, for her own sake and for the sake of the child."

"Why not do so yourself?"

"I have not seen her; I will not see her while she holds in her arms her burden of shame. She shall come to me free and unencumbered, or she shall not come at all. I could not speak to her as I have spoken to you; I should not be able to command myself. She would plead to me, and I should answer her in bitterness and anger. Such a scene would set me so strongly against her

that I should immediately relinquish my purpose. You can reason with her; you can show her the path in which her duty clearly lies. I do not deny that she is called upon to make a sacrifice; but it is a sacrifice which will lead to good, it is a sacrifice which every right-minded man would urge her to make. Indifferent man of the world as you proclaim yourself to be, you cannot be blind to the almost sure fate in store for her in the circumstances in which she is placed. Your experiences must have made you acquainted with the stories of women who have fallen as she has fallen, and you will know how many of them were raised from the depths, and how many of them fell into deeper shame. Dr. Spenlove, I have entirely finished what I came here to say."

"Before I undertake to do what you require of me," said Dr. Spenlove, who by this time understood the man he had to deal with, "I must ask you a question or two."

"If they relate to the present business," responded Mr. Gordon, "I will answer them."

"Failing me, will you employ some other person to act as your envoy to Mrs. Turner?"

"I shall employ no other, for the reason that there is no other whose counsel would be likely to influence her. And for another reason--I have disclosed to you what I will disclose to no other person."

"Would you leave her as she is?"

"I would leave her as she is. Early in the morning I should take my departure, and she would have to face the future unaided by me."

"If she will not listen to me, if she will not make the sacrifice, you will surely give her out of your abundance some little assistance to help her along?"

"Out of my abundance," replied Mr. Gordon, sternly, "I will give her nothing--not the smallest coin. Make your mind easy upon one point, Dr. Spenlove. So far as a practical man like myself is likely to go, I will do what I can to make her happy if she affords me the opportunity. She will live in a respectable atmosphere, she will be surrounded by respectable people, she will have all the comforts that money can purchase, and I shall never utter to her a word of reproach. Her past will be as dead to me as if it had never been."

Dr. Spenlove rose. "It is your desire that I shall go to her to-night?"

"It is. The matter must be settled without delay."

"If she asks for time to reflect----"

"I must have an answer to-night, yea or nay."

There was no more to be said. The man who had been wronged and deceived, and who had made an offer so strange, and generous, and cruel, was fixed and implacable.

"I may be absent some time," said Dr. Spenlove. "Where shall I see you upon my return?"

"Here, if you will allow me to stay."

"You are welcome. My landlady will make you a bed on the sofa."

"Thank you; I need no bed. I can employ myself while you are away."

Dr. Spenlove stepped to the door, and turned on the threshold.

"One other question, Mr. Gordon. If I succeed, when will you require her to give up her child?"

"To-morrow evening. I will have a carriage ready at the door. On the following day Mrs. Turner and I will leave Portsmouth, and there is no probability, after that, that you and I will ever meet again."

Dr. Spenlove nodded, and left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT.

The snow was falling more heavily, and a strong wind blew the flakes into his face as he made his way to Mrs. Turner's garret. He walked as quickly as he could, but his progress was impeded by the force of the wind and by its driving the snow into his eyes. Despite these obstacles he preserved his mental balance, and was observant of all that was passing around him; and it was a proof of his kindly and unselfish nature that, in the light of the vital errand upon which he was engaged, he was oblivious of the sense of physical discomfort. Conflicting questions agitated his mind. No longer under the influence of the cold, cruel logic which distinguished Mr. Gordon's utterances, he once more asked himself whether he would be acting rightly in urging Mrs. Turner to renounce her maternal duties and obligations, and to part for ever with the child of her blood. The human and the Divine law were in conflict. On one side degradation and direst poverty from which there seemed no prospect of escape, and driving the mother perhaps to a course of life condemned alike by God and man; on the other side a life of material comfort and respectability for herself and her child. A fortuitous accident--a chance for which he had prayed earlier in the night--had made him at once the arbiter and the judge; his hand was on the wheel to steer these two helpless beings through the voyage upon which they were embarked, and upon him rested the responsibility of their future. There was no case here of ploughing through unknown waters over hidden rocks; he saw the ocean of life before him, he saw the rocks beneath. Amid those rocks lay the forms of lost abandoned women who in their mortal career would surely have been saved had an offer of rescue come, such as had come to the woman who chiefly occupied his thoughts. They would have been spared the suffering of despairing days, the horrors of a despairing death; they would have been lifted from the gulf of shame and ignominy. New hopes, new joys would have arisen to comfort them. The sacrifice they would have been called upon to make would have been hallowed by the consciousness that they had performed their duty. It was not alone the happiness of the mortal life that had to be considered; if the ministrations of God's ministers on earth were not a mockery and a snare, it was the immortal life that was equally at stake. The soul's reward sprang from the body's suffering.

And still the pitiless snow fell, and the wind howled around him; and through the white whirlwind he beheld the light of heaven and the stars shining upon him.

How should he act? He imagined himself steering the vessel through an ocean of sad waters. On the right lay a haven of rest, on the left lay a dark and desolate shore. Here, salvation; there, destruction. Which way should he turn the wheel? His pity for her had drawn from him during their last interview the exclamation, "God help you!" and she had asked hopelessly, "Will He?" He had turned from her then; he had no answer to make. There is, he said to himself now, no Divine mediation in human affairs; the Divine hand is not stretched forth to give food to the hungry. In so grave an issue as the starvation of a human being, dependence upon Divine aid will not avail. Admitting this, he felt it to be almost a heresy, but at the same time he knew that it was true.

There were but few people in the white streets, and of those few a large proportion tinged his musings with a deeper melancholy. These were ragged shivering children, and women recklessly or despondently gashing the white carpet, so pure and innocent and fair in its sentimental, so hard and bitter and cruel in its material aspect. By a devious process of reasoning he drew a parallel between it and the problem he was engaged in solving. It was poetic, and it freezed the marrow; it had a soul and a body, one a sweet and smiling spirit, the other a harsh and frowning reality. The heart of a poet without boots would have sunk within him as he trod the snow-clad streets.

Dr. Spenlove's meditations were arrested by a sudden tumult. A number of people approached him, gesticulating and talking eagerly and excitedly, the cause of their excitement being a couple of policemen who bore between them the wet limp body of a motionless woman. He was drawn magnetically towards the crowd, and was immediately recognised.

"Here's Dr. Spenlove," they cried; "he knows her."

Yes, he knew her the moment his eyes fell upon her, the people having made way for him. The body borne by the policeman was that of a young girl scarcely out of her teens, an unfortunate who had walked the streets for two or three years past.

"You had better come with us, doctor," said one of the policemen, to both of whom he was known. "We have just picked her out of the water."

A middle-aged woman pushed herself close to Dr. Spenlove.

"She said she'd do it a month ago," said this woman, "if luck didn't turn."

Good God! If luck didn't turn! What direction in the unfortunate girl's career was the lucky turn to take to prevent her from courting death?

"You will come with us, sir?" said the policeman.

"Yes," answered Dr. Spenlove, mechanically.

The police station was but a hundred yards away, and thither they walked, Dr. Spenlove making a hasty examination of the body as they proceeded.

"Too late, I'm afraid, sir," said the policeman.

"I fear so," said Dr. Spenlove, gravely.

It proved to be the case. The girl was dead.

The signing of papers and other formalities detained Dr. Spenlove at the police station for nearly an hour, and he departed with a heavy weight at his heart. He had been acquainted with the girl whose life's troubles were over since the commencement of his career in Portsmouth. She was then a child of fourteen, living with her parents, who were respectable working people. Growing into dangerous beauty, she had fallen as others had fallen, and had fled from her home, to find herself after a time deserted by her betrayer. Meanwhile the home in which she had been reared was broken up; the mother died, the father left the town. Thrown upon her own resources, she drifted into the ranks of the "unfortunates," and became a familiar figure in low haunts, one of civilisation's painted, bedizened night-birds of the streets. Dr. Spenlove had befriended her, counselled her, warned her, urged her to reform, and her refrain was, "What can I do? I must live." It was not an uncommon case; the good doctor came in contact with many such, and could have prophesied with unerring accuracy the fate in store for them. The handwriting is ever on the wall, and no special gift is needed to decipher it. Drifting, drifting, drifting, for ever drifting and sinking lower and lower till the end comes. It had come soon to this young girl--mercifully, thought Dr. Spenlove, as he plodded slowly on, for surely the snapping of life's chord in the springtime of her life was better than the sure descent into a premature haggard and sinful old age. Recalling these reminiscences, his doubts with respect to his duty in the mission he had undertaken were solved. There was but one safe course for Mrs. Turner to follow.

He hastened his steps. His interview with Mr. Gordon and the tragic incident in which he had been engaged had occupied a considerable time, and it was now close upon midnight. It was late for an ordinary visit, but he was a medical man, and the doors of his patients were open to him at all hours. In the poor neighbourhood in which Mrs. Turner resided, many of the street doors were left unlocked night and day for the convenience of the lodgers, and her house being one of these, Dr. Spenlove had no difficulty in obtaining admission. He shook the snow from his clothes, and, ascending the stairs, knocked at Mrs. Turner's door; no answer coming he knocked again and again, and at length he turned the handle and entered.

The room was quite dark; there was no fire in the grate, no candle alight. He listened for the sound of breathing, but none reached his ears.

"Mrs. Turner!" he cried.

Receiving no response he struck a match, and looked around. The room was empty. Greatly alarmed he went to the landing, and knocked at an adjoining door. A woman's voice called,--

"Who's there?"

"It is I, Dr. Spenlove."

"Wait a moment, sir."

He heard shuffling steps, and presently the tenant appeared, only partially dressed, with a lighted candle in her hand.

"I didn't send for you, doctor," she said.

"No. I want to ask you about Mrs. Turner. She is not in her room."

"I thought it was strange I didn't hear the baby crying, but I don't know where she is."

"Did you not hear her go out?"

"No, sir; I came home at ten soaked through and through, and I was glad to get to bed. It ain't a night a woman would care to keep out in unless she couldn't help herself."

"Indeed it is not. Did you see anything of her before you went to bed?"

"I didn't see her, I heard her. I was just going off when she knocked at my door, and asked if I could give her a little milk for the baby; but I hadn't any to give. Besides, she ain't got a feeding-bottle that I know of. She's been trying to borrow one, but nobody in the house could oblige her. She's having a hard time of it, doctor."

"She is, poor soul!" said Dr. Spenlove, with a sigh.

"It's the way with all of us, sir; no one ought to know that better than you do. There ain't a lodger in the house that's earning more than twelve shillings a week; not much to keep a family on, is it, sir? And we've got a landlord with a heart of stone. If it hadn't been for her baby, and that it might have got him in hot water, he'd have turned her out weeks ago. He's bound to do it to-morrow if her rent ain't paid. He told me so this morning when he screwed the last penny out of me."

"Do you know whether she succeeded in obtaining milk for the child?"

"It's hardly likely, I should say. Charity begins at home, doctor."

"It is natural and just that it should; but it is terrible, terrible! Where can Mrs. Turner have gone to?"

"Heaven knows. One thing I do know, doctor, she's got no friends; she wouldn't make any, kept herself to herself, gave herself airs, some said, though I don't go as far as that. I dare say she has her reasons, only when a woman sets herself up like that it turns people against her. Are you sure she ain't in her room?"

"The room is empty."

"It's enough to be the death of a baby to take it out such a night as this. Listen to the wind."

A furious gust shook the house, and made every window rattle. To Dr. Spenlove's agitated senses it seemed to be alive with ominous voices, proclaiming death and destruction to every weak and helpless creature that dared to brave it. He passed his hand across his forehead in distress.

"I must find her. I suppose you cannot tell me of any place she may have gone to for assistance?"

"I can't, sir. There's a bare chance that as she had no coals and no money to buy 'em with, some one in the house has taken her in for the night. I'll inquire, if you like."

"I shall be obliged to you if you will," said Dr. Spenlove, catching eagerly at the suggestion; "and I pray that you may be right."

"You won't mind waiting in the passage, sir, till I've dressed myself. I sha'n't be a minute."

She was very soon ready and she went about the house making inquiries; and, returning, said that none of the lodgers could give her any information concerning Mrs. Turner.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," said Dr. Spenlove; and, wishing her good-night, he once more faced the storm. The fear by which he was oppressed was that the offer of succour had come too late, and that Mrs. Turner had been driven by despair to the execution of some desperate design to put an end to her misery. Instinctively, and with a sinking heart, he took the direction of the sea, hurrying eagerly after every person he saw ahead of him, in the hope that it might be the woman of whom he was in search. The snow was many inches thick on the roads, and was falling fast; the wind tore through the now almost deserted streets, moaning, sobbing, shrieking, with an appalling human suggestion in its tones created by Dr. Spenlove's fears. Now and then he met a policeman, and stopped to exchange a few words with him, the intention of which was to ascertain if the man had seen any person answering to the description of Mrs. Turner. He did not mention her by name, for he had an idea--supposing his search to be happily successful--that Mr. Gordon would withdraw his offer if any publicity were attracted to the woman he was ready to marry. The policemen could not assist him; they had seen no woman with a baby in her arms tramping the streets on this wild night.

"Anything special, sir?" they asked.

"No," he replied, "nothing special;" and so went on his way.

CHAPTER V.

DEATH BETTER THAN LIFE.

When Dr. Spenlove left Mrs. Turner she sat for some time in a state of dull lethargy. No tear came into her eyes, no sigh escaped from her bosom. During the past few months she had exhausted the entire range of remorseful and despairing emotion. The only comfort she had received through all those dreary months sprang from the helpful sympathy of Dr. Spenlove; apart from, that she had never been buoyed up by a ray of light, had never been cheered by the hope of a brighter day. Her one prevailing thought was that she would be better dead than alive. She did not court death; she waited for it, and silently prayed that it would come soon. It was not from the strength of inward moral support that she had the courage to live on; it was simply that she had schooled herself into the belief that before or when her child was born death would release her from the horrors of life. Young as she was she so fostered this hope that it became a conviction, and she looked forward to the end with dull resignation. "If I live till my baby is born,"

she thought, "I pray that it may die with me."

Here was the case of a woman without the moral support which springs from faith in any kind of religion. In some few mortals such faith is intuitive, but in most instances it requires guidance and wise direction in childhood. Often it degenerates into bigotry and intolerance, and assumes the hateful narrow form of condemning to perdition all who do not subscribe to its own particular creed. Pagans are as worthy of esteem as the bigots who arrogate to themselves the monopoly of heavenly rewards.

Mrs. Turner was neither pagan nor bigot; she was a nullity. Her religious convictions had not yet taken shape, and though, if she had been asked "Are you a Christian?" she would have replied, "Oh yes, I am a Christian," she would have been unable to demonstrate in what way she was a Christian, or what she understood by the term. In this respect many thousands of human beings resemble her.

Faith is strength, mightier than the sword, mightier than the pen, mightier than all the world's store of gold and precious stones; and when this strength is displayed in the sweetness of resignation, and in submission to the Divine will which chastens human life with sorrow, its influence upon the passions is sustaining, and purifying, and sublime. If Mrs. Turner had been blessed with faith which displayed itself in this direction, she would have been the happier for it, and hard as were her trials, she would to the last have looked forward with hope instead of despair.

The story related by Mr. Gordon to Dr. Spenlove was true in every particular. There was no distortion or exaggeration; he had done for Mrs. Turner and her father all that he said he had done. He had not mentioned the word "love" in connection with the woman he had asked to be his wife. She, on her part, had no such love for him as that which should bind a man and a woman in a life-long tie; she held him in respect and esteem--that was all. But she had accepted him, and had contemplated the future with satisfaction until, until----

Until a man crossed her path who wooed her in different fashion, and who lavished upon her flatteries and endearments which made her false to the promise she had given. For this man she had deserted the home which Mr. Gordon had provided for her, and had deserted it in such a fashion that she could never return to it, could never again be received in it, and this without a word of explanation to the man she had deceived. She was in her turn deceived, and she awoke from her dream to find herself a lost and abandoned woman. In horror she fled from him, and cast her lot among strangers, knowing full well that she would meet with unbearable contumely among those to whom she was known. Hot words had passed between her and her betrayer, and in her anger she had written letters to him which in the eyes of the law would have released him from any obligation it might otherwise have imposed upon him. He was well pleased with this, and he smiled as he put those letters in a place of safety--to be brought forward only in case she annoyed him. She did nothing of the kind; her scorn for him was so profound that she was content to release him unconditionally. So she passed out of his life as he passed out of hers. Neither of these beings, the betrayed or the betrayer, reckoned with the future; neither of them gave a thought to the probability that the skeins of Fate, which to-day separated them as surely as if they had lived at opposite poles of the earth, might at some future time bring them together again, and that the pages of the book which they believed was closed for ever might be reopened for weal or woe.

The child's moans aroused the mother from her lethargy. She had no milk to give the babe; nature's founts were dry, and she went from door to door in the house in which she lived to beg for food. She returned as she went, empty-handed, and the child continued to moan.

Dr. Spenlove, her only friend, had bidden her farewell. She had not a penny in her pocket; there was not a crust of bread in the cupboard, not an ounce of coal, not a stick of wood to kindle a fire. She was thinly clad, and she did not possess a single article upon which she could have obtained the smallest advance. She had taken the room furnished, but even if what it contained had been her property a broker would have given but a few shillings for everything in it.

The little hand instinctively wandered to the mother's wasted breast, and plucked at it imploringly, ravenously. The woman looked around in the last throes of an anguish too deep for expression, except in the appalling words to which she gave despairing utterance.

"Come," she cried, "we will end it!"

Out into the cold streets she crept, unobserved. She shivered, and a pitiful smile crossed her lips.

"Hush, hush!" she murmured to her babe. "It will soon be over. Better dead--better dead--for you and for me!"

She crept towards the sea, and hugged the wall when she heard approaching footsteps. She need not have feared; the night was too inclement for any but selfish consideration. The soft snow fell, and enwrapped her and her child in its pitiless shroud. She paused by a lamp-post, and cast an upward look at the heavens, in which she could see the glimmering of the stars. Then she went on, and fretfully pressed her babe close to her breast, to stifle the feeble sobs.

"Be still, be still!" she murmured. "There is no hope in life for either of us. Better dead--better dead!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRIEND IN NEED.

Desperately resolved as she was to carry her fatal design into execution she had not reckoned with nature. Weakened by the life of privation she had led for so many months, and also by the birth of her child, her physical forces had reached the limit of human endurance. She faltered and staggered, the ground slipped from beneath her weary feet. Vain was the struggle, her vital power was spent. From her overcharged heart a voiceless and terrible prayer went up to heaven. "Give me strength, O God, give me but a little strength! I have not far to go!" She fought the air with her disengaged hand, and tossed her head this way and that; but her ruthless prayer was not answered, and though she struggled fiercely she managed to crawl only a few more steps. She had yet hundreds of yards to go to reach the sea when some chord within her seemed to snap; her farther progress was instantly arrested, and she found herself incapable of moving backward or forward. Swaying to and fro, the earth, the sky the whirling snow, and the dim light of the stars swam in her sight and faded from before her. In that supreme moment she saw a spiritual vision of her dishonoured life. Deprived early of a mother's counsel and companionship, she had passed her days with a spendthrift father, whose love for her was so tainted with selfishness that it was not only valueless, but mischievous. When she grew to woman's estate she was worse than alone; she had no guide, no teacher, to point out the rocks and shoals of maidenhood, to inculcate in her the principles of virtue which would act as a safeguard against the specious wiles of men whose eyes were charmed by her beauty, and whose only aim was to lure her to ruin. Then her father died, and a friend came forward who offered her a home and an honourable position in the world. Friendless and penniless, she accepted him, and gave him her promise, and accepted his money. Love had not touched her heart; she thought it had when a wilier man wooed her in another and more alluring fashion, and by this man she had been beguiled and betrayed. Then she knew what she had lost, but it was too late; her good name was gone, and she fled to a strange part of the country and lived among strangers, a heartbroken, despairing woman. All the salient features in her career flashed before her. She saw the man who had trusted her, she saw the man in whom she put her trust, she saw herself, an abandoned creature, with a child of shame in her arms. These ghostly figures stood clearly limned in that one last moment of swiftly fading light, as in the moment of sunrise on a frosty morning every distant object stands sharply outlined against the sky; then darkness fell upon her, and with an inarticulate, despairing cry, she sank to the ground in a deathlike swoon. The wind sobbed and shrieked and wailed around her and her child; the falling snow, with treacherous tenderness, fell softly upon them; herself insensible, she had no power to shake it off; her babe was conscious, but its feeble movements were of small avail against the white pall which was descending upon it and its outcast mother. Thicker and thicker it grew, and in the wild outcry of this bitter night Fate seemed to have pronounced its inexorable sentence of death against these unfortunate beings.

Ignorant of the fact that chance or a spiritual messenger was guiding him aright, Dr. Spenlove plodded through the streets. He had no clue, and received none from the half-dozen persons or so he encountered as he walked towards the sea. He was scarcely fit for the task he had undertaken, but so intent was he upon his merciful mission that he bestowed no thought upon himself. The nipping air aggravating the cough from which he was suffering, he kept his mouth closed as a protection, and peered anxiously before him for some signs of the woman he was pursuing. A man walked briskly and cheerily towards him, puffing at a large and fragrant cigar, and stamping his feet sturdily into the snow. This man wore a demonstratively furred overcoat; his hands were gloved in fur; his boots were thick and substantial; and in the independent assertion that he was at peace with the world, and on exceedingly good terms with himself, he hummed the words, in Italian, of the Jewel Song in "Faust" every time he removed the cigar from his lips. Although it was but a humming reminiscence of the famous and beautiful number, his faint rendering of it was absolutely faultless, and proved him to be a man of refined musicianly taste, quite out of keeping with his demonstratively furred overcoat. Music, however, was not his profession; the instincts of his race and a youthful ambition had welded the divine art into his soul, and the instincts of his race had made him--a pawnbroker. Singular conjunction of qualities--the music of the celestial spheres and fourpence in the pound a month! A vulgar occupation, that of a pawnbroker, which high-toned gentlemen and mortals of aristocratic birth regard with scorn and contempt. But the last vulgar and debasing music-hall ditty which was carolled with delight by the majority of these gilded beings of a higher social grade never found lodgment in the soul of Mr. Moss, which, despite that he devoted his business hours to the lending of insignificant

sums of money upon any small articles which were submitted to his judgment across the dark counter of his pawnbroking establishment, was attuned to a far loftier height than theirs in the divine realms of song. Puff, puff, puff at his cigar, the curling wreaths from which were whirled into threads of fantastic confusion by the gusts of wind, or hung in faint grey curls of beauty during a lull. The starry gleam was transferred from the lips to the fur-covered hand:--

"E' strano poter il viso suo veder;
Ah! mi posso guardar mi pospo rimirar.
Di, sei tu? Margherita!
Di, sei tu? Dimmi su;
Dimmi su, di su, di su, di su presto!"

From hand to lips the starry gleam, and the soul of Mr. Moss followed the air as he puffed his weed....

"E la figlia d'un re!...
Proseguiam l'adornamento.
Vo provare ancor se mi stan
Lo smaniglia ed il monil!"

The pawnbroker broke into ecstasy. From lips to hand again the starry light, and his voice grew rapturous:--

"Ciel! E come una man
Che sul baaccio mi posa!
Ah! Io rido in poter
Me stessa qui veder!"

The last trill brought him close to Dr. Spenlove.

"Friend, friend!" cried the doctor. "A word with you, for charity's sake!"

Mr. Moss did not disregard the appeal. Slipping off his right glove, and thereby displaying two fingers decorated with massive rings studded with diamonds, he fished a couple of coppers from a capacious pocket, and thrust them into Dr. Spenlove's outstretched palm. He thought it was a homeless beggar who had besought charity. Dr. Spenlove caught his hand, and said,--

"No, no, it is not for that. Will you kindly tell me----

"Why," interrupted Mr. Moss, "it is Dr. Spenlove!"

"Mr. Moss," said Dr. Spenlove, with a sigh of relief, "I am glad it is you, I am glad it is you."

"Not gladder than I am," responded Mr. Moss, jovially. "Even in weather like this I shouldn't care to be anybody else but myself."

This feeble attempt at humour was lost upon Dr. Spenlove.

"You have come from the direction I am taking, and you may have seen a person I am looking for--a woman with a baby in her arms, a poor woman, Mr. Moss, whom I am most anxious to find."

"I've come from the Hard, but I took no account of the people I passed. A man has enough to do to look after himself, with the snow making icicles in his hair, and the wind trying to bite his nose off his face. The first law of nature, you know, doctor, is----"

"Humanity," interrupted Dr. Spenlove.

"No, no, doctor," corrected Mr. Moss; "number one's the first law--number one, number one."

"You did not meet the woman, then?"

"Not to notice her. You've a bad cough, doctor; you'll have to take some of your own medicine." He laughed. "Standing here is enough to freeze one."

"I am sorry I troubled you," said Dr. Spenlove, hurt by the tone in which Mr. Moss spoke. "Good-night."

He was moving away, when Mr. Moss detained him.

"But look here, doctor, you're not fit to be tramping the streets in this storm; you ought to be snuggled up between the blankets. Come home with me, and Mrs. Moss shall make you a hot grog."

Dr. Spenlove shook his head, and passed on. Mr. Moss gazed at the retreating figure, his

thoughts commingling.

"A charitable man, the good doctor, a large-hearted gentleman....

'Tardi si fa ahdio!
Ah! ti scongiuro invan.'

And poor as a church mouse. What woman is he running after? Mrs. Moss would give her a piece of her mind for taking out a baby on such a night.

'Notte d'amor, tutta splendor,
Begli astra d'oro.
O celeste voluttà!
Udir si, t'amo, t'adoro!'

Too bad to let him go alone, such a good fellow as he is; but Mrs. Moss will be waiting up for me.... She won't mind when I tell her.... I've a good mind to--yes, I will."

And after the doctor went Mr. Moss, and caught up to him.

"Doctor, can I be of any assistance to you?"

"I shall be glad of your help," said Dr. Spenlove, eagerly. "I'm rather worn out; I have had a hard day."

"It's a trying life, the' life of a doctor," said Mr. Moss, sympathetically, as they walked slowly on, side by side. "We were talking of it at home only a month ago, when we were discussing what we should put Michael to, our eldest boy, doctor."

"You have a large family," observed Dr. Spenlove.

"Not too large," said Mr. Moss, cheerfully. "Only eleven. My mother had twenty-five, and I've a sister with eighteen. Our youngest--what a rogue he is, doctor!--is eight months; our eldest, Michael, is seventeen next birthday. School days over, he buckles to for work. We had a family council to decide what he should be. We discussed all the professions, and reduced them to two--doctor, stockbroker. Michael had a leaning to be a doctor--that's why we kept it in for discussion--but we succeeded in arguing him out of it. Your time's not your own, you see. Called up at all hours of the night, and in all weathers; go to a dinner-party, and dragged away before it's half over, obliged to leave the best behind you; can't enjoy a game of cards or billiards. You've got a little bet on, perhaps; or you're playing for points and have got a winning hand, when it's 'Doctor, you must come at once; so-and-so's dying.' What's the consequence? You make a miscue, or you revoke, and you lose your money. If you're married, you're worse off than if you're single; you haven't any comfort of your life. 'No, no, Michael,' says I, 'no doctoring. Stockbroking--that's what you'll go for.' And that's what he *is* going for. Most of our people, doctor, are lucky in their children. They don't forget to honour their father and their mother, that their days may be long in the land, and so on. There's big fish on the Stock Exchange, and they're worth trying for. What's the use of sprats? It takes a hundred to fill a dish. Catch one salmon, and your dish is filled. A grand fish, doctor, a grand fish! What to do with your sons? Why, put them where they can make money; don't make scavengers or coal-heavers of them. *We* know what we're about. There's no brain in the world to compare with ours, and that's no boast, let me tell you. Take your strikes, now. A strike of bricklayers for a rise of twopence a day in their wages. How many of our race among the strikers? Not one. Did you ever see a Jewish bricklayer carrying a hod up a hundred-foot ladder, and risking his neck for bread, cheese, and beer? No, and you never will. We did our share of that kind of work in old Egypt; we made all the bricks we wanted to, and now we're taking a rest. A strike of bootmakers. How many of our race among the cobblers? One in a thousand, and he's an addlepate. We deal in boots wholesale; but we don't make them ourselves. Not likely. We send consignments of them to the colonies, and open a dozen shops in every large city, with fine plate-glass windows. We build houses with *our* money and *your* bricks and mortar. When we're after birds we don't care for sparrows: we aim at eagles, and we bring them down; we bring them down." He beat his gloved hands together, and chuckled. "What's your opinion, doctor?"

"You are right, quite right," said Dr. Spenlove, upon whose ears his companion's words had fallen like the buzzing of insects.

"Should say I was," said Mr. Moss. "I ought to have gone on the Stock Exchange myself; but when I was a young man I fancied I had a voice; so I went in for music, studied Italian and all the famous operas till I knew them by heart almost, and found out in the end that my voice wasn't good enough. It was a great disappointment, because I had dreamt of making a fortune as a tenor. Signor Mossini--that was to be my name. My money being all spent, I had to take what was offered to me, a situation with a pawnbroker. That is how I became one, and I've no reason to regret it. Eh? Why are you running away?"

For Dr. Spenlove suddenly left his companion, and hurried forward.

During the time that Mr. Moss was unbosoming himself they had not met a soul, and Dr. Spenlove had seen nothing to sustain his hope of finding Mrs. Turner. But now his observant eyes detected a movement in the snow-laden road which thrilled him with apprehension, and caused him to hasten to the spot. It was as if some living creature were striving feebly to release itself from the fatal white shroud. Mr. Moss hurried after him, and they reached the spot at the same moment. In a fever of anxiety Dr. Spenlove knelt and pushed the snow aside, and then there came into view a baby's hand and arm.

"Good God!" he murmured, and gently lifted the babe from the cold bed.

"Is it alive? is it alive?" cried Mr. Moss, all his nerves tingling with excitement. "Give it to me--quick! there's some one else there."

He saw portions of female clothing in the snow which Dr. Spenlove was pushing frantically away. He snatched up the babe, and, opening his fur coat, clasped the little one to his breast, and enveloped it in its warm folds. Meanwhile Dr. Spenlove was working at fever-heat. To release Mrs. Turner from her perilous position, to raise her to her feet, to put his mouth to her mouth, his ear to her heart, to assure himself there was a faint pulsation in her body--all this was the work of a few moments.

"Does she breathe, doctor?" asked Mr. Moss.

"She does," replied Dr. Spenlove; and added, in deep distress, "but she may die in my arms."

"Not if we can save her. Here, help me off with this thick coat. Easy, easy; I have only one arm free. Now let us get her into it. That's capitally done. Put the baby inside as well; it will hold them both comfortably. Button it over them. There, that will keep them nice and warm. Do you know her? Does she live far from here? Is she the woman you are looking for?"

"Yes, and her lodging is a mile away. How can we get her home?"

"We'll manage it. Ah, we're in luck. Here's a cab coming towards us. Hold on to them while I speak to the driver."

He was off and back again with the cab--with the driver of which he had made a rapid bargain--in a wonderfully short space of time. The mother and her babe were lifted tenderly in, the address was given to the driver, the two kind-hearted men took their seats, the windows were pulled up, and the cab crawled slowly on towards Mrs. Turner's lodging. Dr. Spenlove's skilful hands were busy over the woman, restoring animation to her frozen limbs, and Mr. Moss was doing the same to the child.

"How are you getting along, doctor? I am progressing famously, famously. The child is warming up, and is beginning to breathe quite nicely."

He was handling the babe as tenderly as if it were a child of his own.

"She will recover, I trust," said Dr. Spenlove; "but we were only just in time. It is fortunate that I met you, Mr. Moss; you have been the means of saving two helpless, unfortunate beings."

"Nonsense, nonsense," answered Mr. Moss. "I have only done what any man would do. It is you who have saved them, doctor, not I. I am proud to know you, and I shall be glad to hear of your getting along in the world. You haven't done very well up to now, I fear. Go for the big fish and the big birds, doctor."

"If that were the universal law of life," asked Dr. Spenlove, in a tone of exquisite compassion, with a motion of his hands towards Mrs. Turner and her child, "what would become of these?"

"Ah, yes, yes," responded Mr. Moss, gravely; "but I mean in a general way, you know. To be sure, there are millions more little fish and birds than there are big ones, but it's a selfish world, doctor."

"You are not an exemplification of it," said Dr. Spenlove, his eyes brightening. "The milk of human kindness will never be frozen, even on such bitter nights as this, while men like you are in it."

"You make me ashamed of myself," cried Mr. Moss, violently, but instantly sobered down. "And now, as I see we are close to the poor woman's house, perhaps you will tell me what more I can do."

Dr. Spenlove took from his pocket the money with which he had intended to pay his fare to London, and held it out to Mr. Moss. "Pay the cabman for me, and assist me to carry the woman up to her room."

Mr. Moss thrust the money back. "I will pay him myself; it is my cab, not yours. I don't allow any one to get the better of me if I can help it."

When the cab stopped he jumped out and settled with the driver, and then he and Dr. Spenlove carried Mrs. Turner and her babe to the top of the house. The room was dark and cold,

and Mr. Moss shivered. He struck a match, and held it while Dr. Spenlove laid the mother and child upon their wretched bed.

"Kindly stop here a moment," said the doctor.

He went into the passage, and called to the lodger on the same floor of whom he had made inquiries earlier in the night. She soon appeared, and after they had exchanged a few words, accompanied him, but partially dressed, to Mrs. Turner's room. She brought a lighted candle with her, and upon Mr. Moss taking it from her, devoted herself, with Dr. Spenlove, to her fellow-lodger and the babe.

"Dear, dear, dear!" she said, piteously. "Poor soul, poor soul!"

Mr. Moss was not idle. All the finer qualities of his nature were stirred to action by the adventures of the night. He knelt before the grate; it was empty; not a cinder had been left; some grey ashes on the hearth--that was all. He looked into the broken coal scuttle; it had been scraped bare. Rising to his feet he stepped to the cupboard; a cracked cup and saucer were there, a chipped plate or two, a mouthless jug, but not a vestige of food. Without a word he left the room, and sped downstairs.

He was absent fifteen or twenty minutes, and when he returned it was in the company of a man who carried a hundredweight of coals upon his shoulders. Mr. Moss himself was loaded: under his armpits two bundles of wood and a loaf of bread; in one hand tea and butter; in his other hand a can of milk.

"God bless you, sir!" said the woman, who was assisting Dr. Spenlove.

Mr. Moss knelt again before the grate, and made a fire. Kettle in hand he searched for water.

"You will find some in my room, sir," said the woman.

Mrs. Turner and her babe were now in bed, the child still craving for food, the mother still unconscious, but breathing heavily. The fire lit, and the kettle on, Mr. Moss put on his fur overcoat, whispered a good-night to Dr. Spenlove, received a grateful pressure of the hand in reply, slipped out of the house, and took his way home, humming--

"O del ciel angeli immortal,
Deh mi guidate con voi lassù!
Dio giusto, a te m'abbandono,
Buon Dio, m'accorda il tuo perdono!"

He looked at his hands, which were black from contact with the coals.

"What will Mrs. Moss say?" he murmured.

CHAPTER VII.

DR. SPENLOVE ADVISES.

An hour after Mr. Moss's departure Mrs. Turner opened her eyes. It was a moment for which Dr. Spenlove had anxiously waited. He had satisfied himself that both of his patients were in a fair way of recovery, and thus far his heart was relieved. The woman who had assisted him had also taken her departure after having given the babe some warm milk. Her hunger appeased, the little one was sleeping calmly and peacefully by her mother's side.

The room was now warm and cheerful. A bright fire was blazing, the kettle was simmering, and a pot of hot tea was standing on the hearth.

Mrs. Turner gazed around in bewilderment. The one candle in the room but dimly lighted it up, and the flickering flames of the fire threw fantastic shadows on walls and ceiling; but so bright was the blaze that there was nothing distressful in these shadowy phantasmagoria. At a little distance from the bed stood Dr. Spenlove, his pale face turned to the waking woman. She looked at him long and steadily, and did not answer him when he smiled encouragingly at her and spoke a few gentle words. She passed her hand over the form of her sleeping child, and then across her forehead, in the effort to recall what had passed. But her mind was confused; bewildering images of the stages of her desperate resolve presented themselves--blinding snow,

shrieking wind, the sea which she had not reached, the phantoms she had conjured up when her senses were deserting her in the white streets.

"Am I alive?" she muttered.

"Happily, dear Mrs. Turner," said Dr. Spenlove. "You are in your own room, and you will soon be well."

"Who brought me here?"

"I, and a good friend I was fortunate enough to meet when I was seeking you."

"Why did you seek me?"

"To save you."

"To save me! You knew, then----"

She paused.

"I knew nothing except that you were in trouble."

"Where did you find me?"

"In the snow, you and your child. A few minutes longer, and it would have been too late. But an angel directed my steps."

"No angel directed you: a devil led you on. Why did you not leave me to die? It was what I went out for. I confess it!" she cried, recklessly. "It was my purpose not to live; it was my purpose not to allow my child to live! I was justified. Is not a quick death better than a slow, lingering torture which must end in death? Why did you save me? Why did you not leave me to die?"

"It would have been a crime."

"It would have been a mercy. You have brought me back to misery. I do not thank you, doctor."

"You may live to thank me. Drink this tea; it will do you good."

She shook her head rebelliously.

"What is the use? You have done me an ill turn. Had it not been for you I should have been at peace. There would have been no more hunger, no more privation. There would have been an end to my shame and degradation."

"You would have taken it with you to the Judgment Seat," said Dr. Spenlove, with solemn tenderness. "There would have been worse than hunger and privation. What answer could you have made to the Eternal when you presented yourself before the Throne with the crime of murder on your soul?"

"Murder!" she gasped.

"Murder," he gently repeated. "If you went out to-night with an intention so appalling, it was not only your own life you would have taken, it was the life of the innocent babe now slumbering by your side. Can you have forgotten that?"

"No," she answered, in a tone of faint defiance, "I have not forgotten it, I do not forget it. God would have forgiven me."

"He would not have forgiven you."

"He would. What has she to live for? What have I to live for--a lost and abandoned woman, a mother whose association would bring degradation upon her child? How should I meet her reproaches when she grew to be a woman herself? I am not ungrateful for what you have done for me"--she glanced at the fire and the tea he held in his hand--"but it cannot continue. To-morrow will come. There is always a to-morrow to strike terror to the hearts of such as I. Do you know what I have suffered? Do you see the future that lies before us? What hope is there in this world for me and my child?"

"There is hope. You brought her into the world."

"God help me, I did!" she moaned.

"By what right, having given her life, would you rob her of the happiness which may be in store for her?"

"Happiness!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "You speak to me of happiness!"

"I do, in truth and sincerity, if you are willing to make a sacrifice, if you are willing to perform a duty."

"What would I not be willing to do," she cried, despairingly; "what would I not cheerfully do, to make her life innocent and happy--not like mine--oh, not like mine! But you are mocking me with empty words."

"Indeed I am not," said Dr. Spenlove, earnestly. "Since I left you some hours ago, not expecting to see you again, something has occurred of which I came to speak to you. I found your room deserted, and feared--what we will not mention again. I searched, and discovered you in time to save you; and with all my heart I thank God for it! Now, drink this tea. I have much to say to you, and you need strength to consider it. If you can eat a little bread and butter--ah, you can! Let me fill your cup again. That is right. Now I recognise the lady it was my pleasure to be able to assist, not to the extent I would have wished, because of my own circumstances."

His reference to her as a lady, no less than the respectful consideration of his manner towards her, brought a flush to her cheeks as she ate. And, indeed, she ate ravenously. Defiant and rebellious as may be our moods, nature's demands are imperative, and no mortal is strong enough to resist them.

When she had finished he sat by her side, and was silent awhile, debating with himself how he should approach the task which Mr. Gordon had imposed upon him.

She saved him the trouble of commencing. "Are you acquainted with the story of my life?" she asked.

"It has been imparted to me," he replied, "by one to whom I was a stranger till within the last few hours."

"Do I know him?"

"You know him well."

For a moment she thought of the man who had brought her to this gulf of shame, but she dismissed the thought. It was impossible. He was too heartless and base to send a messenger to her on an errand of friendship, and Dr. Spenlove would have undertaken no errand of an opposite nature.

"Will you tell me his name?"

"Mr. Gordon."

She trembled, and her face grew white. She had wronged this man; the law might say that she had robbed him. Oh! why had her fatal design been frustrated? why was not this torturing existence ended?

"You need be under no apprehension," continued Dr. Spenlove; "he comes as a friend."

She tossed her head in scorn of herself as one unworthy of friendship.

"He has but lately arrived in England from the Colonies, and he came with the hope of taking you back with him as his wife. It is from him I learned the sad particulars of your life. Believe me when I say that he is desirous to befriend you."

"In what way? Does he offer me money? I have cost him enough already. My father tricked him, and I have shamefully deceived him. To receive more from him would fill me with shame; but for the sake of my child I will submit to any sacrifice, to any humiliation--I will do anything, anything! It would well become me to show pride when charity is offered to me!"

"Do not forget those words--'for the sake of your child you will submit to any sacrifice.' It is your duty, for her sake, to accept any honourable proposition, and Mr. Gordon offers nothing that is not honourable." (He sighed as he said this, for he thought of the sacredness of a mother's love for her first-born.) "He will not give you money apart from himself. United to him, all he has is yours. He wishes to marry you."

She stared at him in amazement.

"Are you mad!" she cried, "or do you think that I am?"

"I am speaking the sober truth. Mr. Gordon has followed you here because he wishes to marry you."

"Knowing me for what I am!" she said, still incredulous. "Knowing that I am in the lowest depths of degradation; knowing this"--she touched her child with a gentle hand--"he wishes to marry me!"

"He knows all. There is not an incident in your career with which he does not seem to be acquainted, and in the errand with which he has charged me he is sincerely in earnest."

"Dr. Spenlove," she said, slowly, "what is your opinion of a man who comes forward to pluck from shame and poverty a woman who has behaved as I have to Mr. Gordon?"

"His actions speak for him," replied Dr. Spenlove.

"He must have a noble nature," she said. "I never regarded him in that light. I took him to be a hard, conscientious, fair-dealing man, who thought I would make him a good wife, but I never believed that he loved me. I did him the injustice of supposing him incapable of love. Ah, how I misjudged this man! I am not worthy of him, I am not worthy of him!"

"Set your mind not upon the past, but upon the future. Think of yourself and of your child in the years to come, and remember the fear and horror by which you have been oppressed in your contemplation of them. I have something further to disclose to you. Mr. Gordon imposes a condition from which he will not swerve, and to which I beg you to listen with calmness. When you have heard all, do not answer hastily. Reflect upon the consequences which hang on your decision, and bear in mind that you have to make that decision before I leave you. I am to bear your answer to him to-night; he is waiting in my rooms to receive it."

Then, softening down all that was harsh in the proposal and magnifying all its better points, Dr. Spenlove related to her what had passed between Mr. Gordon and himself. She listened in silence, and he could not judge from her demeanour whether he was to succeed or to fail. Frequently she turned her face from his tenderly-searching gaze, as though more effectually to conceal her thoughts from him. When he finished speaking she showed that she had taken to heart his counsel not to decide hastily, for she did not speak for several minutes. Then she said plaintively,--

"There is no appeal, doctor?"

"None," he answered, in a decisive tone.

"He sought you out and made you his messenger, because of his impression that you had influence with me, and would advise me for my good?"

"As I have told you, in his own words, as nearly as I have been able to recall them."

"He was right. There is no man in the world I honour more than I honour you. I would accept what you say against my own convictions, against my own feelings. Advise me, doctor. My mind is distracted; I cannot be guided by it. You know what I am, you know what I have been, you foresee the future that lies before me. Advise me."

The moment he had dreaded had arrived. The issue was with him. He felt that this woman's fate was in his hands.

"My advice is," he said, in a low tone, "that you accept Mr. Gordon's offer."

"And cast aside a mother's duty?"

"What did you cast aside," he asked, sadly, "when you went with your child on such a night as this towards the sea?"

She shuddered. She would not look at her child; with stern resolution she kept her eyes from wandering to the spot upon which the infant lay; she even moved away from the little body so that she should not come in contact with it.

A long silence ensued, which Dr. Spenlove dared not break.

"I cannot blame him," she then said, her voice, now and again, broken by a sob, "for making conditions. It is his respectability that is at stake, and he is noble and generous for taking such a risk upon himself. There is a law for the man and a law for the woman. Oh, I know what I am saying, doctor; the lesson has been driven into my soul, and I have learnt it with tears of blood. One of these laws is white, the other black, and justice says it is right. It is our misfortune that we bear the children, and that their little fingers clutch our heart-strings. It would be mockery for me to say that I love my child with a love equal to that I should have felt if she had come into the world without the mark of shame with which I have branded her. With my love for her is mingled a loathing of myself, a terror of the living evidence of my fall. But I love her, doctor, I love her--and never yet so much as now when I am asked to part with her! What I did a while ago was done in a frenzy of despair. I had no food, you see, and she was crying for it; and the horror and the anguish of that hour may overpower me again if I am left as I am. I will accept Mr. Gordon's offer, and I will be as good a wife to him as it is in my power to be; but I, also, have a condition to make. Mr. Gordon is much older than I, and it may be that I shall outlive him. The condition I make is--and whatever the consequences I am determined to abide by it--that in the event of my husband's death, and of there being no children of our union, I shall be free to seek the child I am called upon to desert. In everything else I will perform my part of the contract faithfully. Take my decision to Mr. Gordon, and if it is possible for you to return here to-night with his answer, I implore you to do so. I cannot close my eyes, I cannot rest, until I hear the worst. God alone knows on which side lies the right, on which the wrong!"

"I will return with his answer," said Dr. Spenlove, "to-night."

"There is still something more," she said, in an imploring tone, "and it must be a secret

sacredly kept between you and me. It may happen that you will become acquainted with the name of the guardian of my child. I have a small memorial which I desire he shall retain until she is of age, say until she is twenty-one, or until, in the event of my husband's death, I am free to seek her in years to come. If you do not discover who the guardian is, I ask you to keep this memorial for me until I reclaim it; which may be, never! Will you do this for me?"

"I will."

"Thank you for all your goodness to me. But I have nothing to put the memorial in. Could you add to your many kindnesses by giving me a small box which I can lock and secure? Dear Dr. Spenlove, it is a mother who will presently be torn from her child who implores you!"

He bethought him of a small iron box he had at home, which contained some private papers of his own. He could spare this box without inconvenience to himself, and he promised to bring it to her; and so, with sincere words of consolation, he left her.

In the course of an hour he returned. Mr. Gordon had consented to the condition she imposed.

"Should I be thankful or not?" she asked, wistfully.

"You should be thankful," he replied. "Your child, rest assured, will have a comfortable and happy home. Here is the box and the key. It is a patent lock; no other key can open it. I will show you how to use it. Yes, that is the way." He paused a moment, his hand in his pocket. "You will be ready to meet Mr. Gordon at two to-morrow?"

"And my child?" she asked, with tears in her voice. "When will she be taken from me?"

"At twelve." His hand was still fumbling in his pocket, and he suddenly shook his head, as if indignant with himself. "You may want to purchase one or two little things in the morning. Here are a few shillings. Pray accept them."

He laid on the table the money with which he had intended to pay his fare to London.

"Heaven reward you," said the grateful woman, "and make your life bright and prosperous."

Her tears bedewed his hand as she kissed it humbly, and Dr. Spenlove walked wearily home, once more penniless, but not entirely unhappy.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT WAS PUT IN THE IRON BOX.

The mother's vigil with her child on this last night was fraught with conflicting emotions of agony and rebellion. Upon Dr. Spenlove's departure she rose and dressed herself completely, all her thoughts and feelings being so engrossed by the impending separation that she took no heed of her damp clothes. She entertained no doubt that the renunciation was imperative and in the interest of her babe; nor did she doubt that the man who had dictated it was acting in simple justice to himself and in a spirit of mercy towards her; but she was in no mood to regard with gratitude one who in the most dread crisis in her life had saved her from destruction. The cause of this injustice lay in the fact that until this moment the true maternal instinct had not been awakened within her breast. As she had faithfully expressed it to Dr. Spenlove, the birth of her babe had filled her with terror and with a loathing of herself. Had there been no consequences of her error apparent to the world she would have struggled on and might have been able to preserve her good name; her dishonour would not have been made clear to censorious eyes; but the living evidence of her shame was by her side, and, left to her own resources, she had conceived the idea that death was her only refuge. Her acceptance of the better course that had been opened for her loosened the floodgates of tenderness for the child who was soon to be torn from her arms. Love and remorse shone in her eyes as she knelt by the bedside and fondled the little hands and kissed the innocent lips.

"Will you not wake, darling," she murmured, "and let me see your dear eyes? Wake, darling, wake! Do you not know what is going to happen? They are going to take you from me. Perhaps we shall never meet again; and if we do, you have not even a name by which I can call you. But perhaps that will not matter. Surely you will know your mother, surely I shall know my child, and we shall fly to each other's arms. I want to tell you all this--I want you to hear it. Wake, sweet, wake!"

The child slept on. Presently she murmured, "It is hard, it is hard! How can God permit such cruelty?"

Half an hour passed in this way, and then she became more composed. Her mind, which had been unbalanced by her misfortunes, recovered its equilibrium, and she could reason with comparative calmness upon the future. In sorrow and pain she mentally mapped out the years to come. She saw her future, as she believed, a joyless life, a life of cold duty. She would not entertain the possibility of a brighter side, the possibility of her becoming reconciled to her fate, of her growing to love her husband, of her having other children who would be as dear to her as this one was. In the state of her feelings it seemed to her monstrous to entertain such ideas, a wrong perpetrated upon the babe she was deserting. In dogged rebellion she hugged misery to her breast, and dwelt upon it as part of the punishment she had brought upon herself. There was no hope of happiness for her in the future, there was no ray of light to illumine her path. For ever would she be thinking of the child for whom now, for the first time since its birth, she felt a mother's love, and who was henceforth to find a home among strangers.

In this hopeless fashion did she muse for some time, and then a star appeared in her dark sky. She might, as she had suggested to Dr. Spenlove, survive her husband; it was more than possible, it was probable, and, though there was in the contemplation a touch of treason towards the man who had come to her rescue, she derived satisfaction from it. In the event of his death she must adopt some steps to prove that the child was hers, and that she, and she alone, had the sole right to her. No stranger should keep her darling from her, should rob her of her reward for the sufferings she had undergone. It was for this reason that she had asked Dr. Spenlove for the iron box.

It was a compact, well-made box, and very heavy for its size. Any person receiving it as a precious deposit, under the conditions she imposed, might, when it was in his possession, reasonably believe that it contained mementoes of price, valuable jewels, perhaps, which she wished her child to wear when she grew to womanhood. She had no such treasure. Unlocking the box she took from her pocket a packet of letters, which she read with a bitterness which displayed itself strongly in her face, which made her quiver with passionate indignation.

"The villain!" she muttered. "If he stood before me now, I would strike him dead at my feet."

There was no lingering accent of tenderness in her voice. The love she had for him but yesterday was dead, and for the father of her child she had now only feelings of hatred and scorn. Clearly she was a woman of strong passions, a woman who could love and hate with ardour.

The letters were four in number, and had been written, at intervals of two or three weeks, by the man who had betrayed and deserted her. The language was such as would have deceived any girl who had given him her heart. The false fervour, the protestations of undying love, the passionate appeals to put full trust in his honour, were sufficient to stamp the writer as a heartless villain, and, if he aped respectability, to ruin him in the eyes of the world. Cunning he must have been to a certain extent, but it was evident that, in thus incriminating himself and supplying proofs of his perfidy, he had forgotten his usual caution. Perhaps he had been for a short time under a delusion that in his pursuit of the girl he was acting honourably and sincerely, or perhaps (which is more likely), finding that she held back, he was so eager to win her that he addressed her in the only way by which he could compass his desire. The last of the four letters contained a solemn promise of marriage if she would leave her home, and place herself under his protection. It even went so far as to state that he had the license ready, and that it was only her presence that was needed to ratify their union. There was a reference in this letter to the engagement between her and Mr. Gordon, and the writer declared that it would bring misery upon her. "Release yourself from this man," he continued, "at once and for ever. It would be a living death. Rely upon my love. All my life shall be devoted to the task of making you happy, and you shall never have occasion for one moment's regret that you have consented to be guided by me." She read these words with a smile of bitter contempt on her lips, and a burning desire in her heart for revenge.

"If there is justice in heaven," she muttered, "a day will come!"

Then she brought forward a photograph of the betrayer, which, with the letters, she deposited in the box. This done, she locked the box, and tying the key to a bit of string, hung it round her neck, and allowed it to fall, hidden, in her bosom.

Seating herself by the bedside, she gazed upon the babe from whom she was soon to be torn. Her eyes were filled with tears, and her sad thoughts, shaped in words, ran somewhat in this fashion:

"In a few hours she will be taken from me; in a few short hours we shall be separated, and then, and then--ah, how can I know it and live!--an ocean of waters will divide us. She will not miss me; she does not know me. She will receive another woman's endearments; she will never bestow a thought upon me, her wretched mother, and I--I shall be for ever thinking of her! She is all my own now; presently I shall have no claim upon her. Would it not be better to end it as I had intended--to end it now, this moment!" She rose to her feet, and stood with her lips tightly pressed and her hands convulsively clenched; and then she cried in horror, "No, no! I dare not--I dare not! It would be murder, and he said that God would not forgive me. Oh, my darling, my

darling, it is merciful that you are a baby, and do not know what is passing in my mind! If you do not love me now, you may in the future, when I shall be free, and then you shall feel how different is a mother's love from the love of a strange woman. But how shall I recognise you if you are a woman before we meet again--how shall I prove to you, to the world, that you are truly mine? Your eyes will be black, as mine are, and your hair, I hope, will be as dark, but there are thousands like that. I am grateful that you resemble me, and not your base father, whom I pray God to strike and punish. Oh, that it were ever in my power to repay him for his treachery, to say to him, 'As you dragged me down, so do I drag you down! As you ruined my life, so do I ruin yours!' But I cannot hope for that. The woman weeps, the man laughs. Never mind, child, never mind. If in future years we are reunited, it will be happiness enough. Dark hair, black eyes, small hands and feet. Oh, darling, darling!" She covered the little hands and feet with kisses. "And yes, yes"--with feverish eagerness she gazed at the child's neck--"these two tiny moles, like those on my neck. I shall know you, I shall know you, I shall be able to prove that you are my daughter!"

With a lighter heart she resumed her seat, and set to work mending the infant's scanty clothing, which she fondled and kissed as though it had sense and feeling. A church clock in the distance tolled five. She had been listening for the hour, hoping it was earlier.

"Five o'clock!" she muttered. "I thought it was not later than three. I am being robbed. Oh, if time would only stand still! Five o'clock! In seven hours she will be taken from me. Seven hours--seven short hours! I will not close my eyes."

But after awhile her lids drooped, and she was not conscious of it. The abnormal fatigues of the day and night, the relaxing of the overstrung nerves, the warmth of the room, produced their effect; her head sank upon the bed, and she fell into a dreamful sleep.

It was merciful that her dreaming fancies were not drawn from the past. The psychological cause of her slumbers being beguiled by bright visions may be found in the circumstance that, despite the conflicting passions by which she had been agitated, the worldly ease which was secured to her and her child by Mr. Gordon's offer had removed a heavy weight from her heart. In her visions she saw her baby grow into a happy girlhood; she had glimpses of holiday times, when they were together in the fields or by the seaside, or walking in the glow of lovely sunsets, gathering flowers in the hush of the woods, or winding their way through the golden corn. In these fair dreams her baby passed from girlhood to womanhood, and happy smiles wreathed the lips of the woe-worn woman as she lay in her poor garments on the humble bed by the side of her child.

"Do you love me, darling?" asked the sleeping mother.

"Dearly, dearly," answered the dream-child. "With my whole heart, mother."

"Call me mother again. It is like the music of the angels."

"Mother, mother!"

"You will love me always, darling?"

"Always, mother; for ever and ever and ever."

"Say that you will never love me less, that you will never forget me."

"I will never love you less; I will never forget you."

"Darling child, how beautiful you are! There is not in the world a lovelier woman. It is for me to protect and guard you. I can do so: I have had experience. Come, let us rest."

They sat upon a mossy bank, and the mother folded her arms around her child, who lay slumbering on her breast.

There had been a few blissful days in this woman's life, during which she had believed in man's faithfulness and God's goodness, but the dreaming hours she was now enjoying were fraught with a heavenly gladness. Nature and dreams are the fairies of the poor and the afflicted.

She awoke as the church clock chimed eight. Again had she to face the stern realities of life. The sad moment of separation was fast approaching.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. MOSS PLAYS HIS PART.

At five o'clock on the afternoon of that day Dr. Spenlove returned to his apartments. Having given away the money with which he had intended to pay his fare to London, he had bethought him of a gentleman living in Southsea of whom he thought he could borrow a sovereign or two for a few weeks. He had walked the distance, and had met with disappointment; the gentleman was absent on business, and might be absent several days.

"Upon my word," said the good doctor, as he drearily retraced his steps, "it is almost as bad as being shipwrecked; worse, because there are no railways on desert islands. What on earth am I to do? Get to London I must, by hook or by crook, and there is absolutely nothing I can turn into money."

Then he bethought himself of Mr. Moss, and in his extremity determined to make an appeal in that quarter. Had it not been for what had occurred last night, he would not have dreamed of going to this gentleman, of whose goodness of heart he had had no previous experience, and upon whose kindness he had not the slightest claim. Arriving at Mr. Moss's establishment, another disappointment attended him. Mr. Moss was not at home, and they could not say when he would return. So Dr. Spenlove, greatly depressed, walked slowly on, his mind distressed with troubles and perplexities.

He had seen nothing more of Mr. Gordon, who had left him in the early morning with a simple acknowledgment in words of the service he had rendered; nor had he seen anything further of Mrs. Turner. On his road home he called at her lodgings, and heard from her fellow-lodger that she had left the house.

"We don't know where she's gone to, sir," the woman said; "but the rent has been paid up, and a sovereign was slipped under my door. If it wasn't that she was so hard up I should have thought it came from her."

"I have no doubt it did," Dr. Spenlove answered. "She has friends who are well-to-do, and I know that one of these friends, discovering her position, was anxious to assist her."

"I am glad to hear it," said the woman; "and it was more than kind of her to remember me. I always had an idea that she was above us."

As he was entering his room his landlady ran up from the kitchen.

"Oh, doctor, there's a parcel and two letters for you in your room, and Mr. Moss has been here to see you. He said he would come again."

"Very well, Mrs. Radcliffe," said Dr. Spenlove; and, cheered by the news of the promised visit, he passed into his apartment. On the table were the letters and the parcel. The latter, carefully wrapped in thick brown paper, was the iron box he had given to Mrs. Turner. One of the letters was in her handwriting, and it informed him that her child had been taken away and that she was on the point of leaving Portsmouth.

"I am not permitted," the letter ran, "to inform you where I am going, and I am under the obligation of not writing to you personally after I leave this place. This letter is sent without the knowledge of the gentleman for whom you acted, and I do not consider myself bound to tell him that I have written it. What I have promised to do I will do faithfully, but nothing further. You, who of all men in the world perhaps know me best, will understand what I am suffering as I pen these lines. I send with my letter the box you were kind enough to give me last night. It contains the memorial of which I spoke to you. Dear Dr. Spenlove, I rely upon you to carry out my wishes with respect to it. If you are acquainted with the guardian of my child, convey it to him, and beg him to retain it until my darling is of age, or until I am free to seek her. It is not in your nature to refuse the petition of a heartbroken mother; it is not in your nature to violate a promise. For all the kindnesses you have shown me receive my grateful and humble thanks. That you will be happy and successful, and that God will prosper you in all your undertakings, will be my constant prayer. Farewell."

Laying this letter aside he opened the second, which was in a handwriting strange to him:--

"DEAR SIR,--

"All my arrangements are made, and the business upon which we spoke together is satisfactorily concluded. You will find enclosed a practical expression of my thanks. I do not give you my address for two reasons. First, I desire no acknowledgment of the enclosure; second, I desire that there shall be no correspondence between us upon any subject. Feeling perfectly satisfied that the confidence I reposed in you will be respected,

"I am,

"Your obedient servant,

The enclosure consisted of five Bank of England notes for £20 each.

Dr. Spenlove was very much astonished and very much relieved. At this juncture the money was a fortune to him; there was a likelihood of its proving the turning-point in his career; and, although it had not been earned in the exercise of his profession, he had no scruple in accepting it. The generosity of the donor was, moreover, in some sense an assurance that he was sincere in all the professions he had made.

"Mr. Moss, sir," said Mrs. Radcliffe, opening the door, and that gentleman entered the room.

As usual, he was humming an operatic air; but he ceased as he closed the door, which, after a momentary pause, he reopened, to convince himself that the landlady was not listening in the passage.

"Can't be too careful, doctor," he observed, with a wink, "when you have something you want to keep to yourself. You have been running after me, and I have been running after you. Did you wish to see me particularly?"

"To tell you the truth," replied Dr. Spenlove, "I had a special reason for calling upon you; but," he added, with a smile, "as it no longer exists, I need not trouble you."

"No trouble, no trouble at all. I am at your service, doctor. Anything I could have done, or can do now, to oblige, you may safely reckon upon. Within limits, you know, within limits."

"Of course; but the necessity is obviated. I intended to ask you to lend me a small sum of money without security, Mr. Moss."

"I guessed as much. You should have had it, doctor, and no inquiries made, though it isn't the way I usually conduct my business; but there are men you can trust and are inclined to trust, and there are men you wouldn't trust without binding them down hard and fast. Now, if you still need the money, don't be afraid to ask."

"I should not be afraid, but I am in funds. I am not the less indebted to you, Mr. Moss."

"All right; I am glad you don't want a loan. Now for another affair--*my* affair, I suppose I must call it till I have shifted it to other shoulders, which will soon be done."

He paused a moment.

"Dr. Spenlove, that was a strange adventure last night."

"It was; a strange and sad adventure. You behaved very kindly, and I should like to repay what you expended on behalf of the poor lady."

"No, no, doctor; let it rest where it is. I don't acknowledge your right to repay what you don't owe, and perhaps I am none the worse off for what I did. Throw your bread on the waters, you know. My present visit has reference to the lady--as you call her one, I will do the same--we picked out of the snow last night. Did you ever notice that things go in runs?"

"I don't quite follow you."

"A run of rainy weather, a run of fine weather, a run of good fortune, a run of ill fortune."

"Yes, I have observed it."

"You meet a person to-day you have never seen or heard of before. The odds are that you will meet that person to-morrow, and probably the next day as well. You begin to have bad cards, you go on having bad cards; you begin to make money, you go on making money."

"You infer that there are seasons of circumstances, as of weather. No doubt you are right."

"I know I am right. Making the acquaintance of your friend, Mrs. Turner, last night, in a very extraordinary manner, I am not at all surprised that I have business in hand in which she is concerned. You look astonished; but it is true. You gave her a good character, doctor."

"Which she deserves. It happens in life to the best of us that we find ourselves unexpectedly in trouble. Misfortune is a visitor that does not knock at the door; it enters unannounced."

"We have unlocked the door ourselves, perhaps," suggested Mr. Moss, sagely.

"Quite likely, but we have done so in a moment of trustfulness, deceived by specious professions. The weak and confiding become the victims."

"It is the way of the world, doctor. Hawks and pigeons, you know."

"There are some who are neither," said Dr. Spenlove, who was not disposed to hurry his visitor.

His mind was easy as to his departure from Portsmouth, and he divined from the course the conversation was taking that Mr. Moss had news of a special nature to communicate. He deemed it wisest to allow him to break it in his own way.

"They are the best off," responded Mr. Moss; "brains well balanced--an even scale, doctor--then you can steer straight and to your own advantage. Women are the weakest, as you say; too much heart, too much sentiment. All very well in its proper place, but it weighs one side of the scale down. Mrs. Moss isn't much better than other women in that respect. She has her whims and crotchets, and doesn't always take the business view."

"Implying that you do, Mr. Moss?"

"Of course I do; should be ashamed of myself if I didn't. What do I live for? Business. What do I live by? Business. What do I enjoy most? Business, and plenty of it!"

He rubbed his hands together joyously.

"I should have no objection to paint on my shop door, 'Mr. Moss, Business Man.' People would know it would be no use trying to get the best of me. They don't get it as it is."

"You are unjust to yourself. Was it business last night that made you pay the cabman, and sent you out to buy coals and food for an unfortunate creature you had never seen before?"

"That was a little luxury," said Mr. Moss, with a sly chuckle, "which we business men indulge in occasionally to sharpen up our faculties. It is an investment, and it pays; it puts us on good terms with ourselves. If you think I have a bit of sentiment in me you are mistaken."

"I paint your portrait for myself," protested Dr. Spenlove, "and I shall not allow you to disfigure it. Granted that you keep as a rule to the main road--Business Road, we will call it, if you like----"

"Very good, doctor, very good."

"You walk along, driving bargains, and making money honestly----"

"Thank you, doctor," interposed Mr. Moss, rather gravely. "There are people who don't do us so much justice."

"When unexpectedly," continued Dr. Spenlove, with tender gaiety, "you chance upon a little narrow path to the right or the left of you, and, your eye lighting on it, you observe a stretch of woodland, a touch of bright colour, a picture of human suffering, that appeals to your poetical instinct, to your musical tastes, or to your humanity. Down you plunge towards it, to the confusion, for the time being, of Business Road and its business attractions."

"Sir," said Mr. Moss, bending his head with a dignity which did not sit ill on him, "if all men were of your mind the narrow prejudices of creed would stand a bad chance of making themselves felt. But we are wandering from the main road of the purpose which brought me here. I have not said a word to Mrs. Moss of the adventure of last night; I don't quite know why, because a better creature doesn't breathe; but I gathered from you in some way that you would prefer we should keep it to ourselves. Mrs. Moss never complains of my being out late; she rather encourages me, and that will give you an idea of the good wife she is. 'Enjoyed yourself, Moss?' she asked when I got home. 'Very much,' I answered, and that was all. Now, doctor, a business man wouldn't be worth his salt if he wasn't a thinking man as well. After I was dressed this morning I thought a good deal of the lady and her child, and I came to the conclusion that you took more than an ordinary interest in them."

"You were right," said Dr. Spenlove.

"Following your lead, which is a good thing to do if you've confidence in your partner, I found myself taking more than an ordinary interest in them; but as it wasn't a game of whist we were playing, I had no clue to the cards you held. You will see presently what I am leading up to. While I was thinking and going over some stock which I am compelled by law to put up to auction, I received a message that a gentleman wished to see me on very particular private business. It was then about half-past nine, and the gentleman remained with me about an hour. When he went away he made an appointment with me to meet him at a certain place at twelve o'clock. I met him there; he had a carriage waiting. I got in, and where do you think he drove me?"

"I would rather you answered the question yourself," said Dr. Spenlove, his interest in the conversation receiving an exciting stimulus.

"The carriage, doctor, stopped at the house to which we conveyed your lady friend and her child last night. I opened my eyes, I can tell you. Now, not to beat about the bush, I will make you acquainted with the precise nature of the business the gentleman had with me."

"Pardon me a moment," said Dr. Spenlove. "Was Mr. Gordon the gentleman?"

"You have named him," said Mr. Moss, and perceiving that Dr. Spenlove was about to speak again, he contented himself with answering the question. But the doctor did not proceed; his first intention had been to inquire whether the business was confidential, and if so to decline to listen to the disclosure which his visitor desired to make. A little consideration, however, inclined him to the opinion that this might be carrying delicacy too far. He was in the confidence of both Mr. Gordon and Mrs. Turner, and it might be prejudicial to the mother and her child if he closed his ears to the issue of the strange adventure. He waved his hand, thereby inviting Mr. Moss to continue.

"Just so, doctor," said Mr. Moss, in the tone of a man who had disposed of an objection. "It is a singular business, but I have been mixed up with all kinds of queer transactions in my time, and I always give a man the length of his rope. What induced Mr. Gordon to apply to me is his concern, not mine. Perhaps he had heard a good report of me, and I am much obliged to those who gave it; perhaps he thought I was a tradesman who would take anything in pledge, from a flat iron to a flesh and blood baby. Any way, if I choose to regard his visit as a compliment, it is because I am not thin-skinned. Mr. Gordon informed me that he wished to find a home and to provide for a young baby whose mother could not look after it, being imperatively called away to a distant part of the world. Had it not been that the terms he proposed were extraordinarily liberal, and that he gave me the names of an eminent firm of lawyers in London who had undertaken the financial part of the business, and had it not been, also, that as he spoke to me I thought of a friend whom it might be in my power to serve, I should have shut him up at once by saying that I was not a baby farmer, and by requesting him to take his leave. Interrupting myself, and as it was you who first mentioned the name of Mr. Gordon, I think I am entitled to ask if you are acquainted with him?"

"You are entitled to ask the question. I am acquainted with him."

"Since when, doctor?"

"Since last night only."

"Before we met?"

"Yes, before we met."

"May I inquire if you were then acting for Mr. Gordon?"

"To some extent. Had it not been for him I should not have gone in search of Mrs. Turner."

"In which case," said Mr. Moss, in a grave tone, "she and her child would have been found dead in the snow. That is coming to first causes, doctor. I have not been setting a trap for you in putting these questions; I have been testing Mr. Gordon's veracity. When I asked him whether I was the only person in Portsmouth whom he had consulted, he frankly answered I was not. Upon this I insisted upon his telling me who this other person was. After some hesitation he said, 'Dr. Spenlove.' Any scruples I may have had were instantly dispelled, for I knew that it was impossible you could be mixed up in a business which had not a good end."

"I thank you."

"Hearing your name I thought at once of the lady and her child whom we were instrumental in saving. Am I right in my impression that you are in possession of the conditions and terms Mr. Gordon imposes?"

"I am."

"Then I need not go into them. I take it, Dr. Spenlove, that you do not consider the business disreputable."

"It is not disreputable. Mr. Gordon is a peculiar man, and his story in connection with the lady in question is a singular one. He is not the father of the child, and the action he has taken is not prompted by a desire to rid himself of a responsibility. On the contrary, out of regard for the lady he has voluntarily incurred a very heavy responsibility, which I have little doubt--none, indeed--that he will honourably discharge."

"I will continue. Having heard what Mr. Gordon had to say--thinking all the time of the friend who might be induced to adopt the child, and that I might be able to serve him--I put the gentleman to the test. Admitting that his terms were liberal, I said that a sum of money ought to be paid down at once, in proof of his good faith. 'How much?' he asked. 'Fifty pounds,' I answered. He instantly produced the sum, in bank-notes. Then it occurred to me that it would make things still safer if I had an assurance from the eminent firm of London lawyers that the business was honourable and met with their approval; and if I also had a notification from them that they were prepared to pay the money regularly. 'Send them a telegram,' suggested Mr. Gordon, 'and make it full and complete. I will write a shorter one, which you can send at the same time. Let the answers be addressed here, and open them both yourself when they arrive, which should be before twelve o'clock.' The telegrams written, I took them to the office; and before twelve came the replies, which were perfectly satisfactory. Everything appeared to be so straightforward that I undertook the business. A singular feature in it is that Mr. Gordon does not

wish to know with whom the child is placed. 'My lawyers will make inquiries,' he said, 'and they will be content if the people are respectable.' Dr. Spenlove, I thought it right that you should be informed of what I have done; you have expressed your approval, and I am satisfied. Don't you run away with the idea that I have acted philanthropically. Nothing of the kind, sir; I have been paid for my trouble. And now, if you would like to ask any questions, fire away."

"Were no conditions of secrecy imposed upon you?"

"Yes; but I said that I was bound to confide in one person. He may have thought I meant Mrs. Moss, but it was you I had in my mind. I promised that it should go no further, and I do not intend that it shall. Mrs. Moss will be none the worse for not being let into the secret."

"Where is the child now?"

"In the temporary care of a respectable woman, who is providing suitable clothing for it, Mr. Gordon having given me money for the purpose."

"He has not spared his purse. When do you propose taking the child to her new home?"

"To-night."

"They are good people?"

"The best in the world. I would trust my own children with them. She cannot help being happy with them."

"Do they live in Portsmouth?"

"No; in Gosport. I think this is as much as I have the right to disclose."

"I agree with you. Mr. Moss, you can render me an obligation, and you can do a kindness to the poor child's mother. She has implored me to endeavour to place this small iron box in the care of the guardians of her child, to be retained by them for twenty-one years, or until the mother claims it, which she will be free to do in the event of her husband dying during her lifetime. I do not know what it contains, and I understand that it is to be given up to no other person than the child or her mother. Will you do this for me or for her?"

"For both of you, doctor," replied Mr. Moss, lifting the box from the table. "It shall be given into their care, as the mother desires. And now I must be off; I have a busy night before me. Do you go to London to-morrow?"

"A train leaves in a couple of hours; I shall travel by that."

"Well, good-night, and good luck to you. If you want to write to me, you know my address."

They parted with cordiality, and each took his separate way, Dr. Spenlove to the City of Unrest, and Mr. Moss to the peaceful town of Gosport, humming as he went, among other snatches from his favourite opera,--

"Dio dell' or del mondo signor,
Sei possente risplendente,
Sei possente resplendente,
Culto hai tu maggior guaggiù.
Non v'ha un uom che non t'incensi
Stan prostati innanzi a te;
Ed i popolied i re;
I bei scudi tu dispensi,
Del la terra il Dio sei tu."

BOOK THE SECOND.

RACHEL.

CHAPTER X.

THE VISION IN THE CHURCHYARD.

Some twelve months before the occurrence of the events recorded in the preceding chapters, a Jew, bearing the name of Aaron Cohen, had come to reside in the ancient town of Gosport. He was accompanied by his wife, Rachel. They had no family, and their home was a home of love.

They were comparatively young, Aaron being twenty-eight and Rachel twenty-three, and they had been married five years. Hitherto they had lived in London, and the cause of their taking up their residence in Gosport was that Aaron had conceived the idea that he could establish himself there in a good way of business. One child had blessed their union, whom they called Benjamin. There was great rejoicing at his birth, and it would have been difficult to calculate how many macaroons and almond and butter cakes, and cups of chocolate and glasses of anise-seed, were sacrificed upon the altar of hospitality in the happy father's house for several days after the birth of his firstborn. "Aaron Cohen does it in style," said the neighbours; and as both he and Rachel were held in genuine respect by all who knew them, the encomium was not mere empty praise. Seldom even in the locality in which the Cohens then resided--the East End of London, where charity and hospitality are proverbial--had such feasting been seen at the celebration of a circumcision. "If he lived in Bayswater," said the company, "he couldn't have treated us better." And when the father lifted up his voice and said, "Blessed art Thou, the Eternal, our God, King of the universe, who hath sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to introduce our sons into the covenant of our father Abraham," there was more than usual sincerity in the response, "Even as this child has now entered this covenant, so may he be initiated into the covenant of the law, of marriage, and of good works." Perhaps among those assembled there were some who could not have translated into English the Hebrews' prayers they read so glibly; but this reproach did not apply to Aaron, who was an erudite as well as an orthodox Jew, and understood every word he uttered. On this memorable day the feasting, commenced in the morning, was continued during the whole day. "I wish you joy, Cohen, I wish you joy;" this was the formula, a hundred and a hundred times repeated to the proud father, who really believed that a prince had been born among Israel; while the pale-faced mother, pressing her infant tenderly to her breast, and who in her maidenhood had never looked so beautiful as now, received in her bedroom the congratulations of her intimate female friends. The poorest people in the neighbourhood were welcomed; and if the seed of good wishes could have blossomed into flower, a rose-strewn path of life lay before the child. "He shall be the son of my right hand," said Aaron Cohen; and Rachel, as she kissed her child's mouth and tasted its sweet breath, believed that Heaven had descended upon earth, and that no mother had ever been blessed as she was blessed. This precious treasure was the crowning of their love, and they laid schemes for baby's youth and manhood before the child was out of long clothes--schemes destined not to be realised. For sixteen months Benjamin filled the hearts of his parents with ineffable joy, and then the Angel of Death entered their house and bore the young soul away. How they mourned for the dear one who was nevermore on earth to rejoice them with his beautiful ways need not here be related; all parents who have lost their firstborn will realise the bitterness of their grief. But not for long was this grief bitter. In the wise and reverent interpretation of Aaron Cohen, their loss became a source of consolation to them. "Let us not rebel," he said to his wife, "against the inevitable and Divine will. Give praise unto the Lord, who has ordained that we shall have a child in heaven waiting to receive us." Fraught with tenderness and wisdom were his words, and his counsel instilled comfort into Rachel's heart. Benjamin was waiting for them, and would meet them at the gates. Beautiful was the thought, radiant the hope it raised, never, never to fade, nay, to grow brighter even to her dying hour. Their little child, dead and in his grave, brought them nearer to God. Heaven and earth were linked by the spirit of their beloved, who had gone before them: thus was sorrow sweetened and happiness chastened by faith. Sitting on their low stools during the days of mourning, they spoke, when they were alone, of the peace and joy of the eternal life, and thereby were drawn spiritually closer to each other. The lesson they learned in the darkened room was more precious than jewels and gold; it is a lesson which comes to all, high and low alike, and rich indeed are they who learn it aright. For some time thereafter, when the mother opened the drawer in which her most precious possessions were kept, and kissed the little shoes her child had worn, she would murmur amid her tears,--

"My darling is waiting for me, my darling is waiting for me!"

God send to all sorrowing mothers a comfort so sweet!

Aaron Cohen had selected a curious spot in Gosport for his habitation. The windows of the house he had taken overlooked the quaint, peaceful churchyard of the market town. So small and pretty was this resting-place for the dead, that one might almost have imagined it to be a burial ground for children's broken toys. The headless wooden soldiers, the battered dolls, the maimed contents of cheap Noah's arks, the thousand and one treasures of childhood might have been interred there, glad to be at rest after the ruthless mutilations they had undergone. For really, in

the dawning white light of a frosty morning, when every object for miles around sharply outlined itself in the clear air and seemed to have lost its rotund proportions, it was hard to realise that, in this tiny churchyard, men and women, whose breasts once throbbed with the passions and sorrows of life, were crumbling to that dust to which we must all return. No, no; it could be nothing but the last home of plain and painted shepherds, and bald-headed pets, and lambs devoid of fleece, and mayhap--a higher flight which we all hope to take when the time comes for us to claim our birthright of the grave--of a dead bullfinch or canary, carried thither on its back, with its legs sticking heavenwards, and buried with grown-up solemnity, and very often with all the genuineness of grief for a mortal bereavement. Have you not attended such a funeral, and has not your overcharged heart caused you to sob in your dreams as you lay in your cot close to mamma's bed?

But these fantastic fancies will not serve. It was a real human churchyard, and Rachel Cohen knew it to be so as she stood looking out upon it from the window of her bedroom on the first floor. It was from no feeling of unhappiness that her sight became dimmed as she gazed upon the tombstones. Shadows of children rose before her, the pattering of whose little feet was once the sweetest music that ever fell on parents' ears, the touch of whose little hands carried with it an influence as powerful as a heart-stirring prayer; children with golden curls, children with laughing eyes, children with wistful faces; but there was one, ah! there was one that shone as a star amid the shadows, and that rose up, up, till it was lost in the solemn clouds, sending therefrom a Divine message down to the mother's heart, "Mamma, mamma, I am waiting for thee!"

Quiet as was everything around her, Rachel heard the words; in the midst of the darkness a heavenly light was shining on her.

She wiped the tears from her eyes, and stole down to the room in which her husband was sitting.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. WHIMPOLE INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

It was the front room of the house, on the ground floor, which Aaron Cohen had converted into a shop. The small parlour windows had been replaced by larger ones, a counter had been put up, behind which were shelves fitted into the walls. These shelves at present were bare, but Aaron Cohen hoped to see them filled. Under the counter were other shelves, as empty as those on the walls.

When Rachel entered her husband was engaged counting out his money, like the king in his counting house. There was a studious expression on his face, which was instantly replaced by one of deep tenderness as he looked up and saw traces of tears in her eyes. He gathered his money together, banknotes, silver, gold, and coppers, and motioned her into the room at the rear of the shop. This was their living-room; but a large iron safe in a corner denoted that it was not to be devoted entirely to domestic affairs. In another corner was the symbol of his business, which was to be affixed to the front of the premises, over the shop door, the familiar device of three golden balls.

Letting his money fall upon the table, he drew his wife to his side, and passed his arm around her.

"The house," he said, "is almost in order."

"Yes, Aaron; there is very little left to do."

"I am also ready for business. I have the license, and to-morrow those glittering balls will be put up and the name painted over the shop window. They are rather large for so small a shop, but they will attract all the more attention." He gazed at her anxiously. "Do you think you will be contented and happy here?"

"Contented and happy anywhere with you," she replied, in a tone of the deepest affection.

"In this town especially, Rachel?"

"Yes, in this town especially. It is so peaceful."

"But," he said, touching her eyes with his fingers "these?"

"Not because I am unhappy," she said; and her voice was low and sweet. "I was looking out upon the churchyard from our bedroom window."

"Ah!" he said, and he kissed her eyes.

He divined the cause of her tears, and there was much tenderness in his utterance of the monosyllable and in the kisses he gave her. Man and wife for five years, they were still the fondest of lovers.

"My dear," said Aaron presently, "the spirit of prophecy is upon me. We shall lead a comfortable life in this town; we shall prosper in this house. It was a piece of real good fortune my hitting upon it. When I heard by chance that the man who lived here owned the lease and wished to dispose of it, I hesitated before parting with so large a sum as a hundred pounds for the purchase. It was nearly half my capital, but I liked the look of the place, and a little bird whispered that we should be lucky in it, so I made the venture. I am certain we shall not regret it. Here shall be laid the foundation stones of a fortune which shall enable us to set up our carriage. I know what you would say, my life, that we can be happy without a carriage. Yes, yes; but a carriage is not a bad thing to have. People will say, 'See what a clever man that Aaron Cohen is. He commenced with nothing, and he rides in his own carriage already. How grand he looks!' I should like to hear people say that. There is a knock at the street door."

"Who can it be?" asked Rachel. "We know no one in Gosport, and it is night."

"Which is no excuse for our not opening the door," said Aaron Cohen, sweeping the money off the table into a small chamois leather bag, which he tied carefully at the neck, and put into his pocket. "True, we believe we are not known here, but there may, nevertheless, be an old acquaintance in Gosport who has heard of our arrival, and comes to welcome us; or Judah Belasco may have told a friend of his we are here; or it may be an enterprising baker or grocer who wishes to secure our custom. No," he added, as the knock was repeated, "that is not the knock of a tradesman. It is a knock of self-importance, and you may depend upon it that it proceeds from Somebody with a large S. Let us see who it is that announces himself so grandly."

Aaron went to the street door, and Rachel followed him into the passage, carrying a candle. The night was dark, and Rachel stood a little in the rear, so that Aaron could not distinguish the features of his visitor. He was a big man, and that was all that was apparent to the Cohens.

"Mr. Cohen?" queried the visitor

"Yes," said Aaron.

"Mr. Aaron Cohen?"

"That is my name"

"Can I speak with you?"

"Certainly."

And Aaron waited to hear what the stranger had to say.

"I am not accustomed to be kept waiting on the doorstep. I should prefer to speak to you in the house."

Rachel, who was naturally timid, moved closer to her husband, who took the candle from her hand, and held it up in order to see the face of the stranger.

"Step inside," he said.

The stranger followed Aaron and Rachel into the little parlour, and without taking off his hat, looked at Aaron, then at Rachel, and then into every corner of the room; the last object upon which his eyes rested was the device of the three golden balls, and a frown gathered on his features as he gazed. Aaron noted these movements and signs with attention and amusement.

"Do you detect any blemish in them?" he asked.

"I do not understand you," said the stranger.

"In those balls. There was an expression of disapproval on your face as you gazed at them."

"I disapprove of them altogether," said the stranger.

"I am sorry, but we cannot please everybody. I am not responsible for the insignia; you will find the origin in the armorial bearings of the Medici. That is a beautiful hat you have on your head." The stranger stared at him. "Really," continued Aaron, blandly, "a beautiful hat; it must have cost a guinea. A hat is a fine protection against the hot rays of the sun; a protection, also, against the wind and the rain. But in this room, as you may observe, we have neither wind, nor rain, nor sun; and you may also observe that there is a lady present." The stranger, reddening slightly, removed his hat, and placed it on the table. "My wife," then said Aaron.

The stranger inclined his head, with the air of a man acknowledging an introduction to one of a lower station. The manner of this acknowledgment was not lost upon Aaron.

"My wife," he repeated courteously, "Mrs. Cohen."

"I see," said the stranger, glancing again at Rachel with condescension. "With your permission I will take a seat."

It was distinctly at variance with the hospitable instincts of Aaron Cohen that he did not immediately respond to this request.

"You have the advantage of us," he said. "I have had the pleasure of introducing my wife to you. Afford me the pleasure of introducing you to my wife."

With an ungracious air the stranger handed Aaron a visiting card, upon which was inscribed the name of Mr. Edward Whimpole, and in a corner the word "Churchwarden." Mr. Whimpole's movements were slow, and intended to be dignified, but Aaron exhibited no impatience.

"My dear, Mr. Edward Whimpole, churchwarden."

Rachel bowed gracefully, and Aaron, with an easy motion of his hand, invited Mr. Whimpole to a chair, in which he seated himself. Then Aaron placed a chair for his wife, and took one himself, and prepared to listen to what Mr. Whimpole had to say.

Mr. Whimpole was a large-framed man with a great deal of flesh on his face; his eyes were light, and he had no eyebrows worth speaking of. The best feature in his face was his mouth, and the most insignificant his nose, which was really not a fair nose for a man of his bulk. It was an added injury inflicted upon him by nature that it was very thin at the end, as though it had been planed on both sides. But then, as Aaron had occasion to remark, we don't make our own noses. A distinct contrast presented itself in the two noses which, if the figure of speech may be allowed, now faced each other.

Mr. Whimpole had not disclosed the purpose of his visit, but he had already made it clear that he was not graciously disposed towards the Jew. Aaron was quite aware of this, but the only effect it had upon him was to render him exceedingly affable. Perhaps he scented a bargain, and was aware that mental irritation would interfere with the calm exercise of his judgment in a matter of buying and selling.

"May I inquire," he said, pointing to the word "churchwarden" on the card, "whether this is your business or profession?"

"I am a corn-chandler," said Mr. Whimpole.

"Churchwarden, my dear," said Aaron, addressing his wife in a pleasant tone, "*and* corn-chandler."

For the life of him Mr. Whimpole could not have explained to the satisfaction of persons not directly interested, why he was angry at the reception he was meeting. That Aaron Cohen was not the kind of man he had expected to meet would not have been accepted as a sufficient reason.

"I am not mistaken," said Mr. Whimpole, with a flush of resentment, "in believing you to be a Jew?"

"You are not mistaken," replied Aaron, with exceeding urbanity. "I am a Jew. If I were not proud of the fact, it would be folly to attempt to disguise it, for at least one feature in my face would betray me."

"It would," said Mr. Whimpole, dealing a blow which had the effect of causing Aaron to lean back in his chair, and laugh gently to himself for fully thirty seconds.

"When you have quite finished," said Mr. Whimpole, coldly, "we will proceed."

"Excuse me," said Aaron, drawing a deep breath of enjoyment. "I beg you will not consider me wanting in politeness, but I have the instincts of my race, and I never waste the smallest trifle, not even a joke." A little tuft of hair which ran down the centre of Mr. Whimpole's head--the right and left banks of which were devoid of verdure--quivered in sympathy with the proprietor's astonishment. That a man should make a joke out of that which was generally considered to be a reproach and a humiliation was, indeed, matter for amazement; nay, in this instance for indignation, for in Aaron Cohen's laughter he, Mr. Whimpole himself, was made to occupy a ridiculous place. "We are loth," continued Aaron, "to waste even the thinnest joke. We are at once, my dear sir, both thrifty and liberal."

"We!" exclaimed Mr. Whimpole, in hot repudiation.

"We Jews I mean. No person in the world could possibly mistake you for one of the chosen."

"I should hope not. The idea is too absurd."

"Make your mind easy, sir; you would not pass muster in a synagogue without exciting remark. Yes, we are both thrifty and liberal, wasting nothing, and in the free spending of our money seeing that we get good value for it. That is not a reproach, nor is it a reproach that we thoroughly enjoy an agreeable thing when we get it for nothing. There are so many things in life to vex us that the opportunity of a good laugh should never be neglected. Proceed, my dear sir, proceed; you were saying that you believed you were not mistaken in taking me for a Jew."

"Is it your intention," asked Mr. Whimpole, coming now straight to the point, "to reside in Gosport?"

"If I am permitted," replied Aaron, meekly. "We have not always been allowed to select our place of residence. I am thankful that we live in an enlightened age and in a free country."

"I hear, Mr. Cohen, that you have purchased the lease of this house."

"It is true, sir. The purchase money has been paid, and the lease is mine."

"It has twenty-seven years to run."

"Twenty-seven years and three months. Who can tell where we shall be, and how we shall be situated, at the end of that time?"

Mr. Whimpole waved the contemplation aside.

"You gave a hundred pounds for the lease."

"The precise sum; your information is correct."

"I had some intention, Mr. Cohen, of buying it myself."

"Indeed! Why did you not do so?"

"There were reasons. Not pecuniary, I beg to say. I delayed too long, and you stepped in before me."

"A case of the early bird catching the worm," Aaron observed, with a smile.

"If it gratifies you to put it that way. I have, therefore, no option but to purchase the lease of you."

"Mr. Whimpole," said Aaron, after a slight pause, "I am agreeable to sell you the lease."

"I thought as much." And Mr. Whimpole disposed himself comfortably in his chair.

Rachel's eyes dilated in surprise. Their settlement in Gosport had not been made in haste, and all arrangements for commencing the business were made. She could not understand her husband's willingness to give up the house.

"I do not expect you to take what you gave for it," said Mr. Whimpole. "I am prepared to give you a profit; and," he added, jocosely, "you will not be backward in accepting it."

"Not at all backward. You speak like a man of sense."

"How much do you ask for your bargain? How much, Mr. Cohen? Don't open your mouth too wide."

"If you will permit me," said Aaron, and he proceeded to pencil down a calculation. "It is not an undesirable house, Mr. Whimpole."

"No, no; I don't say it is."

"It is compact and convenient."

"Fairly so, fairly so."

"I will accept," said Aaron, having finished his calculation, "five hundred pounds."

"You cannot be in earnest!" gasped Mr. Whimpole, his breath fairly taken away.

"I am quite in earnest. Are you aware what it is you would buy of me?"

"Of course I am aware; the lease of this house."

"Not that alone. You would buy my hopes for the next twenty-seven years; for I declare to you there is not to my knowledge in all England a spot in which I so desire to pass my days as in this peaceful town; and there is not in all Gosport a house in which I believe I shall be so happy as in this. You see, you propose to purchase of me something more than a parchment lease."

"But the--the things you mention are of no value to me."

"I do not say they are. I am speaking from my point of view, as men generally do. It is a failing we all have, Mr. Whimpole. There is no reason why we should bandy words. I am not anxious to sell the lease. Wait till it is in the market."

"A most unhealthy situation," observed Mr. Whimpole.

"It concerns ourselves, and we are contented."

"I cannot imagine a more unpleasant, not to say obnoxious, view."

"The view of the churchyard? The spot has already acquired an inestimable value in my eyes. God rest the souls of those who lie in it! The contemplation of the peaceful ground will serve to remind me of the vanity of life, and will be a constant warning to me to be fair and straightforward in my dealings. The warning may be needed, for in the business I intend to carry on, there are--I do not deny it--many dangerous temptations."

"Tush, tush!" exclaimed Mr. Whimpole, petulantly. "Straightforward dealings, indeed! The vanity of life, indeed!"

Aaron Cohen smiled.

Only once before in his life had Mr. Whimpole felt so thoroughly uncomfortable as at the present moment, and that was when he was a little boy and fell into a bed of nettles from which he was unable to extricate himself until he was covered with stings. It was just the same now; he was smarting all over from contact with Aaron Cohen, who was like a porcupine with sharp-pointed quills. But he would not tamely submit to such treatment; he would show Aaron that he could sting in return; he knew well enough where to plant his poisoned arrow.

It is due to Mr. Whimpole to state that he was not aware that the manner in which he was conducting himself during this interview was not commendable. Being a narrow-minded man, he could not take a wide and generous view of abstract matters, which, by a perversion of reasoning, he generally regarded from a purely personal standpoint. Such men as he, in their jealous regard for their own feelings, are apt to overlook the feelings of others, and, indeed, to behave occasionally as if they did not possess any. This was Mr. Whimpole's predicament, and, having met a ready-witted man, he was made to suffer for his misconduct. He sent forth his sting in this wise:

"You speak, Mr. Cohen, of being fair and straightforward in your dealings; but, for the matter of that, we all know what we may expect from a----"

And having got thus far in his ungenerously-prompted speech, he felt himself unable, in the presence of Rachel, and with her reproachful eyes raised to his face, to conclude the sentence. Aaron Cohen finished it for him.

"For the matter of that," he said, gently, "you all know what you may expect from a Jew. That is what you were going to say. And with this thought in your mind you came to trade with me. Well, sir, it may be that we both have something to learn."

"Mr. Cohen," said Mr. Whimpole, slightly abashed, "I am sorry if I have said anything to hurt your feelings."

"The offence, sir, is atoned for by the expression of your sorrow."

This was taking high ground, and Mr. Whimpole's choler was ready to rise again; but he mastered it, and said, in a conciliatory tone,--

"I will disguise nothing from you; I was born in this house."

"The circumstance will make it all the more valuable to us. My dear,"--impressing it upon Rachel with pleasant emphasis--"Mr. Whimpole was born in this house. A fortunate omen. Good luck will come to us, as it has come to him. It is a low-rented house, and those who have been born in it must have been poor men's children. When they rise in the world as Mr. Whimpole has done, it is better than a horseshoe over the door. In which room were you born, Mr. Whimpole?"

"In the room on the back of the first floor," replied Mr. Whimpole, making a wild guess.

"Our bedroom. There should be a record on the walls; there should, indeed, be a record, such as is placed outside those houses in London which have been inhabited by famous people. Failing that, it is in the power of every man, assuredly every rich man, to make for himself a record that shall be unperishable--far better, my dear sir, than the mere fixing of a plate on a cold stone wall."

Mr. Whimpole gazed at Aaron Cohen to discover if there was any trace of mockery in his face; but Aaron was perfectly grave and serious.

"A man's humility," said Mr. Whimpole, raising his eyes to the ceiling, "his sense of humbleness, would prevent him from making this record for himself. It has to be left to others to do it when they have found him out."

"Aha! my dear sir," said Aaron, softly, "when they have found him out. True, true; but how few of us are! How few of us receive our just reward! How few of us when we are in our graves receive or deserve the tribute, 'Here lies a perfect man!' But the record I speak of will never be lost by a rich man's humility, by his humbleness; for it can be written unostentatiously in the hearts of the poor by the aid of silver and gold."

"I understand you, Mr. Cohen,"--inwardly confounding Aaron's flow of ideas--"by means of charity."

"Yes, sir, by means of charity, whereby the name of a man becomes sweet in the mouth. A good name is better than precious oil, and the day of one's death better than the day of his birth. There is an old legend that a man's actions in life are marked in the air above him, in the places in which they are performed. There, in invisible space, are inscribed the records of his good and bad deeds, of his virtues, of his crimes; and when he dies his soul visits those places, and views the immortal writing, which is visible to all the angels in heaven and which covers him with shame or glory. Gosport doubtless has many such records of your charity."

"I do my best," said Mr. Whimpole, very much confused and mystified; "I hope I do my best. I said I would disguise nothing from you; I will therefore be quite frank, with no intention of wounding you. I am strictly a religious man, Mr. Cohen, and it hurts me that one whose religious belief is opposed to my own should inhabit the house in which I was born. I will give you a hundred and twenty pounds for the lease; that will leave you a profit of twenty pounds. Come, now!"

"I will not accept less for it, sir, than the sum I named."

"Is that your last word?"

"It is my last word."

Mr. Whimpole rose with a face of scarlet, and clapped his hat on his head. "You are a--a----"

"A Jew. Leave it at that. Can you call me anything worse?" asked Aaron, with no show of anger.

"No, I cannot. You are a Jew."

"I regret," said Aaron, calmly, "that I cannot retort by calling you a Christian. May our next meeting be more agreeable! Good-evening, Mr. Whimpole."

"You do not know the gentleman you have insulted," said Mr. Whimpole, as he walked towards the door; "you do not know my position in this town. I am in the expectation of being made a justice of the peace. You will live to repent this."

"I think not," said Aaron, taking the candle to show his visitor out. "I trust you may."

"You may find your residence in Gosport, where I am universally respected, not as agreeable as you would wish it to be."

"We shall see, we shall see," said Aaron, still smiling. "I may also make myself respected here."

"There is a prejudice against your race----"

"Am I not aware of it? Is not every Jew aware of it? Is it not thrown in our teeth by the bigoted and narrow-minded upon every possible occasion? We will live it down, sir. We have already done much; we will yet do more. Your use of the word 'prejudice' is appropriate; for, as I understand its meaning, it represents a judgment formed without proper knowledge. Yes, sir, it is not to be disputed that there exists a prejudice against our race."

"Which, without putting any false meaning upon it, will make this ancient and respectable town"--here Mr. Whimpole found himself at a loss, and he was compelled to wind up with the vulgar figure of speech--"too hot to hold you."

"This ancient town," said Aaron, with a deeper seriousness in his voice, "is known to modern men as Gosport."

"A clever discovery," sneered Mr. Whimpole. "Are you going to put another of your false constructions on it?"

"No, sir. I am about to tell you a plain and beautiful truth. When in olden times a name was given to this place, it was not Gosport: it was God's Port; and what Gods port is there throughout the civilised world in which Jew and Christian alike have not an equal right to live, despite prejudice, despite bigotry, and despite the unreasonable anger of large corn-chandlers and respected churchwardens? I wish you, sir, good-night."

And having by this time reached the street door, Aaron Cohen opened it for Mr. Whimpole, and bowed him politely out.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COURSE OF THE SEASONS.

Upon Aaron's return to the little parlour he saw that Rachel was greatly disturbed.

"My life!" he said, and he folded her in his arms and tenderly embraced her. "Don't allow such a little thing as this to distress you; it will all come right in the end."

"But how you kept your temper," she said; "that is what surprised me."

"It gave me the advantage of him, Rachel. I was really amused."

He pinched her cheeks to bring the colour back to them.

"Some men must be managed one way, some another. And now for our game of bezique. Mr. Whimpole's visit"--he laughed at the recollection--"will make me enjoy it all the more."

There was no resisting his light-heartedness, and he won a smile from her, despite her anxiety.

Rachel was not clever enough to discover that it was only by the cunning of her husband that she won the rub of bezique. He was a keen judge of human nature, and he knew that this small victory would help to soothe her.

The next day was Friday, and the three golden balls were put up, and the name of Aaron Cohen painted over the shop door. A great many people came to look, and departed to circulate the news.

At one o'clock the painting was done, and then Aaron said to his wife, "I shall be out till the evening. Have you found any one to attend to the lights and the fire?"

They were not rich enough to keep a regular servant, and neither of them ever touched fire on the Sabbath.

"I have heard of a woman," said Rachel; "she is coming this afternoon to see me."

"Good," said Aaron, and, kissing Rachel, went away with a light heart.

In the afternoon the woman, Mrs. Hawkins, called, and Rachel explained the nature of the services she required. Mrs. Hawkins was to come to the house every Friday night to put coals on the fire and extinguish the lights, and four times on Saturday to perform the same duties. Rachel proposed eightpence a week, but Mrs. Hawkins stuck out for tenpence, and this being acceded to, she departed, leaving a strong flavour of gin behind her.

When Aaron returned, the two Sabbath candles were alight upon the snow-white tablecloth, and on the table a supper was spread--fried fish, white bread, and fresh butter, and in the fender a steaming coffeepot. Rachel was an excellent cook, and had always been famous for her fried and stewed fish, which her husband declared were dishes fit for kings; and, indeed, no one in the land could have desired tastier or more succulent cooking.

Aaron washed and said his prayers, and then they sat down to their meal in a state of perfect contentment. The head of the modest household broke two small pieces of bread from the loaf, and dipping them in salt, besought the customary blessing on the bread they were about to eat; then praised the fish, praised the butter, praised the coffee, praised his wife, and after a full meal praised the Lord, in a Song of Degrees, for blessings received: "When the Eternal restored the captivity of Zion, we were as those who dream. Our mouths were then filled with laughter, and our tongues with song."

He had-a rich baritone voice, and Rachel listened in pious delight to his intoning of the prayer. The supper things were cleared away, the white tablecloth being allowed to remain because of the lighted candles on it, which it would have been breaking the Sabbath to lift, and then there came a knock at the street door.

"That is the woman I engaged," said Rachel, hurrying into the passage.

There entered, not Mrs. Hawkins, but a very small girl, carrying a very large baby. The baby might have been eighteen months old, and the girl ten years; and of the twain the baby was the plumper.

Without "With your leave" or "By your leave," the small girl pushed past Rachel before the astonished woman could stop her, and presented herself before the no less astonished Aaron Cohen. Her sharp eyes took in the lighted candles, the cheerful fire, and the master of the house in one comprehensive flash. With some persons what is known as making up one's mind is a slow and complicated process, with the small girl it was electrical. She deposited the large baby in Aaron's lap, admonishing the infant "to keep quiet, or she'd ketch it," blew out the candles in two swift puffs, and, kneeling before the grate, proceeded to rake out the coals. So rapid were her movements that the fender was half filled with cinders and blazing coals before Rachel had time to reach the room.

"In Heaven's name," cried Aaron, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It's all right, sir," said the small girl, in the dark; "I've come for aunty."

"Put down the poker instantly!" exclaimed Aaron. "Your aunty, whoever she may be, is not here."

"Tell me somethink I don't know," requested the small girl. "This is Mr. Cohen's, the Jew, ain't it?"

"It is," replied Aaron, with despairing gestures, for the baby was dabbing his face with hands sticky with remnants of sugarstuff.

"Well, wot are yer 'ollering for? I'm only doing wot aunty told me."

"And who *is* your aunty?"

"Mrs. 'Orkins. Pretend not to know 'er--do! Oh yes, jest you try it on. Aunty's up to yer, she is. She sed yer'd try to do 'er out of 'er money, and want 'er to take fippence instid of tenpence."

"Did she? You have come here by her orders, I suppose?"

"Yes, I 'ave; to poke out the fire and blow out the candles, and I've done it."

"You have," said Aaron, ruefully. "And now, little girl, you will do as *I* tell you. Put down that poker. Get up. Feel on the mantelshelf for a box of matches. I beg your pardon, you are too short to reach. Here is the box. Take out a match. Strike it. Light the candles. Thank you. Last, but not least, relieve me of this baby with the sticky hands."

The small girl snatched the baby from his arms and stood before him in an attitude of defiance. For the first time he had a clear view of her.

"Heaven save us!" he cried, falling back in his chair.

Her appearance was a sufficient explanation of his astonishment. To say that she was ragged, and dirty, and forlorn, and as utterly unlike a little girl living in civilised society as any little girl could possibly be, would be but a poor description of her. Her face suggested that she had been lying with her head in a coal scuttle; she wore no hat or bonnet; her hair was matted; her frock reached just below her knees, and might have been picked out of a dust-heap; she had no stockings; on her feet were two odd boots, several sizes too large for her and quite worn out, one tied to her ankle with a piece of grey list, the other similarly secured with a piece of knotted twine. Her eyes glittered with preternatural sharpness; her cheek bones stuck out; her elbows were pointed and red; she was all bone--literally all bone; there was not an ounce of flesh upon her, not any part of her body that could be pinched with a sense of satisfaction. But the baby! What a contrast! Her head was round and chubby, and was covered with a mass of light curls; her hands were full of dimples; her face was puffed out with superabundant flesh; the calves of her legs were a picture. In respect of clothes she was no better off than Mrs. Hawkins's niece.

"Wot are yer staring at?" demanded the girl. "At you, my child," replied Aaron, with compassion in his voice.

"Let's know when yer done," retorted the girl, "and I'll tell yer 'wot I charge for it."

"And at baby," added Aaron.

"That'll be hextra. Don't say I didn't warn yer."

There were conflicting elements in the situation; its humour was undeniable, but it had its pathetic side. Aaron Cohen was swayed now by one emotion, now by another.

"So you are Mrs. Hawkins's niece," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes, I am. Wot 'ave yer got to say agin it?"

"Nothing. Is baby also Mrs. Hawkins's niece, or nephew?"

"If you've no objections," said the girl, with excessive politeness, "she's Mrs. Pond's little gal, and I nusses 'er."

"I have no objection. What is your name?"

"Wot it may be, my lordship," replied the girl, her politeness becoming Arctic, "is one thing--wot it is, is another."

"You are a clever little girl," said Aaron, smiling and rubbing his hands, "a sharp, clever little girl."

"Thank yer for nothink," said the girl. She had reached the North Pole; it was necessary to thaw her.

"Upon the mantelshelf," said Aaron, "just behind that beautiful blue vase, are two penny pieces. Step on a chair--not that cane one, you'll go through it; the wooden one--and see if you can find them."

"I see 'em," said the girl, looking down upon Aaron in more senses than one.

"They are yours. Put them in your pocket."

The girl clutched the pennies, jumped from the chair--whereat the baby crowed, supposing it to be a game provided for her amusement--and having no pocket, held the money tight in her hand. Visions of sweetstuff rose before her. The pennies getting warm, the ice in the North Pole began to melt. But there was a doubt in the girl's mind; the adventure was almost too good to be true.

"Yer don't get 'em back," she said; "stow larks, yer know."

"I don't want them back. And now, perhaps, you will tell me your name."

"Prissy. That's the short 'un."

"The long one is----"

"Priscilla."

"A grand name. You ought to have a silk gown, and satin shoes, and a gold comb." Prissy opened her eyes very wide. The ice was melting quickly, and the buds were coming on the trees. "And baby's name?"

"Wictoria Rejiner. That's grander, ain't it?"

"Much grander. Victoria Regina--a little queen!" Prissy gave baby a kiss, with pride and love in her glittering eyes. "What makes your face so black, Prissy?"

"Coals. Aunty deals in 'em, and ginger-beer, and bundles of wood, and cabbages, and taters, and oranges, and lemons. And she takes in washing."

"You look, Prissy, as if you had very little to eat."

So genial was Aaron Cohen's voice that spring was coming on fast.

"I don't 'ave much," said Prissy, with a longing sigh. "I could eat all day and night if I 'ad the chance."

"My dear," said Aaron to his wife, "there is some coffee left in the pot. Do you like coffee, Prissy?"

"Do I like corfey? Don't I like corfey! Oh no--not me! Jest you try me!"

"I will. Give me Victoria Regina. Poke the fire. That's right; you are the quickest, sharpest little girl in my acquaintance. Pour some water from the kettle into the coffee-pot. Set it on the fire. Rachel, my dear, take Prissy and baby into the kitchen and let them wash themselves, and afterwards they shall have some supper."

The buds were breaking into blossom; it really was a lovely spring.

In a few minutes Rachel and the children re-entered the room from the kitchen, baby with a clean face, and Prissy with a painfully red and shining skin. Following her husband's instructions, Rachel cut half-a-dozen slices of bread, upon which she spread the butter with a liberal hand. Prissy, hugging Victoria Regina, watched the proceedings in silence. By this time the coffee was bubbling in the pot.

"Take it off the fire, Prissy," said Aaron Cohen; and in another minute the little girl, with baby in her lap, was sitting at the table with a cup of smoking hot coffee, well sugared and milked, which she was so eager to drink that she scalded her throat. The bread and butter was perhaps the sweetest that Prissy had ever eaten, and the coffee was nectar. The baby ate more than Prissy; indeed, she ate so much and so quickly that she occasionally choked and had to be violently shaken and patted on the back, but she became tired out at last, and before Prissy had finished her bounteous meal she was fast asleep in her nurse's arms.

Aaron Cohen leaned back in his chair, and gazed with benevolent eyes upon the picture before him; and as he gazed the sweetest of smiles came to his lips, and did not leave them. Rachel, stealing to the back of his chair, put her arms round his neck, and nestled her face to his.

It was a most beautiful summer, and all the trees were in flower.

CHAPTER XIII.

AARON COHEN PREACHES A SERMON ON LARGE NOSES.

The fire was burning brightly, and the old cat which they had brought with them to Gosport was stretched at full length upon the hearthrug. The children were gone, and Prissy had received instructions to come again at ten o'clock to extinguish the candles. It may be said of Prissy, in respect of her first visit to the house, that she came in like a lion and went out like a lamb.

It was a habit on Sabbath eve for Aaron to read to his wife something from the general literature of the times, or from the newspapers, and to accompany his reading with shrewd or sympathetic remarks, to which Rachel always listened in delight. Occasionally he read from a book of Hebrew prayers, and commented upon them, throwing a light upon poem and allegory which made their meaning clear to Rachel's understanding. Invariably, also, he blessed her as Jewish fathers who have not wandered from the paths of orthodoxy bless their children on the Sabbath. Now, as she stood before him, he placed his hand on her head, and said,--

"God make thee like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. May the Eternal bless and preserve thee! May the Eternal cause His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee! May the Eternal lift up His countenance towards thee, and grant thee peace!"

It was something more than a blessing; it was a prayer of heartfelt love. Rachel raised her face to his, and they tenderly kissed each other. Then he took his seat on one side of the fire, and she on the other. A prayer-book and one of Charles Dickens's stories were on the table, but he did not open them; he had matter for thought, and he was in the mood for conversation. He was in a light humour, which exhibited itself in a quiet laugh, which presently deepened in volume.

"I am thinking of the little girl," he explained to Rachel. "It was amazing the way she puffed out the candles and poked out the fire--quick as lightning. It was the most comical thing! And her black face--and Victoria Regina's sticky fingers! Ha, ha, ha!"

His merriment was contagious, and it drew forth Rachel's; the room was filled with pleasant sound.

"I saw Mr. Whimpole to-day," said Aaron, "and I made him a bow, which he did not return. My Jewish nose offends him. How unfortunate! Yes, my life, no one can dispute that the Jew has a big nose. It proclaims itself; it is a mark and a sign. He himself often despises it; he himself often looks at it in the glass with aversion. 'Why, why, have I been compelled to endure this affliction?' he murmurs, and he reflects with envy upon the elegant nose of the Christian. Short-sighted mortal, not to understand that he owes everything to his big nose! A great writer--a learned man, who passed the whole of his life in the study of these matters--proclaims the nose to be the foundation, or abutment, of the brain. What follows? That the larger is the nose of a man, the better off for it is the man. Listen, my dear." He took a book from a little nest of bookshelves, and turned over the pages. "'Whoever,' says this learned writer, 'is acquainted with the Gothic arch will perfectly understand what I mean by this abutment; for upon this the whole power of the arch of the forehead rests, and without it the mouth and cheeks would be oppressed by miserable ruins.' He lays down exact laws, which govern the beautiful (and therefore the large) nose. Its length should equal the length of the forehead, the back should be broad, its outline remarkably definite, the sides well defined, and, near the eye, it must be at least half an inch in breadth. Such a nose, this great authority declares, is of more worth than a kingdom. It imparts solidity and unity to the whole countenance; it is the mountain--bear in mind, my dear, the mountain--that shelters the fair vales beneath. How proud, then, should I be of my nose, which in some respects answers to this description! Not in all, no, not in all. I am not so vain as to believe that my nose is worth more than a kingdom; but when I am told that a large nose is a sign of sensibility, and of good nature and good humour, I cannot help a glow of conceited satisfaction stealing over me. How many great men have you known with small noses? There are, of course, exceptions, but I speak of the general rule. Our co-religionist, Benjamin Disraeli--look at his nose; look at the noses of all our great Jewish musicians and composers--it is because they are of a proper size that they have become famous. Some time since in London I had the opportunity of looking over a

wonderful Bible--six enormous volumes published by Mr. Thomas Macklin nearly a century ago--embellished with grand pictures by the most eminent English artists; and there I saw the figures of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and other ancestors of ours. There is not a small nose on one of the faces of these great patriarchs and prophets. The great painters who drew them had learned from their studies how to delineate the biblical heroes. Moses the law-giver--what an administrator, what a grand general was that hero, my dear! How thoroughly he understood men and human nature! Aaron, the high priest; King Solomon, the man of wisdom; Isaiah, the prophet and poet--they all had tremendous noses. A big nose is a grand decoration, and I would sooner possess it than a bit of red ribbon in my button-hole, or a star on my breast. Indeed, my life, I have it--the nose of my forefathers!" Aaron made this declaration in a tone of comic despair. "And, having it, I will not part with it except with life."

There was so much playful humour in the dissertation that Rachel laughed outright. Her laugh was the sweetest in the world, and it fell like music on Aaron's heart. He smiled, and there was a gleam in his eyes, and presently he spoke again.

"I am not aware whether you have ever observed the attraction a big nose has for children. Take the most popular drama of all ages, 'Punch and Judy.' Where is the artist who would venture to present Punch with any but an enormous nose? Are the children frightened at it? No, they revel in it. Do they sympathise with Judy when she is slain? Not at all; every whack Punch gives her is greeted with shrieks of laughter--because of his enormous nose. Introduce two strangers to a baby, one with a very small nose, the other with a very big nose. Let them both hold out their arms. Instinctively the baby flies to the man with the large nose. It is nature's silent voice that instructs the child. He or she--the sex is not material--instinctively knows which is the better nose of the two, which is the most promising nose, the most suggestive of kisses, and jumps in the air, and cakes, and songs, and all that is dear to a child's heart. The test is infallible. Nothing will convince me that you did not marry me because of my big nose."

"Indeed, dear," said Rachel, still laughing, "I hardly think I would have married you without it."

"Then the fact is established. I am about to make a confession to you, Rachel; I am going to tell you the true reason for my choosing this place to reside in, where I am separated by a long distance from the friends of my youth and manhood, and where you, too, my dear child"--in his moments of tenderness he occasionally addressed her thus--"will, I fear, be for a time without friends to whom you can unbosom yourself."

"I have you, my dear husband," said Rachel, in a tone of deep affection, drawing closer to him, and slipping her little hand into his great hand. A fine, large, nervous hand was Aaron Cohen's; a palmister would have seen great possibilities in it. Rachel's hand, despite her domestic work, was the hand of a lady; she took a proper pride in preserving its delicacy and beauty. "I have you, my dear husband," she said.

"Yes, my' life, but you used to kiss at least a dozen female friends a day."

"I kissed Prissy and the baby to-night."

"When their faces were washed, I hope. Listen to my confession. Pride and hard-heartedness drove me from the neighbourhood in which we were married. A thousand pounds did my dear father--God rest his soul!--bequeath to me. It dwindled and dwindled--my own fault; I could not say No. One came to me with a melancholy tale which led to a little loan; another came, and another, and another. I did not make you acquainted with the extent of my transgressions. My dear, I encouraged the needy ones; I even went out of my way to lend, thinking myself a fine fellow, and flapping my wings in praise of my stupidity. Not half I lent came back to me. Then business began to fall off, and I saw that I was in the wrong groove. I had grown into bad ways; and had I remained much longer in the old neighbourhood I should have been left without a penny. I thought of our future, of the injustice I was inflicting upon you. 'I will go,' said I, 'where I am not known, while I still have a little to earn a living with, among strangers who, when they borrow, will give me value in return, and where I shall not have to say to poor friends, "Come to me no more; I am poorer than yourselves." I have been foolish and weak; I will be wise and strong. I will grow rich and hard-hearted.' Yes, my dear, that is what I intend, and my heart will not be oppressed by the sight of suffering it is out of my power to relieve. Rachel, I am not so clever as I pretend to be; to speak the truth, I am afraid I am rather given to crowing; and when it is not alone my own welfare, but the welfare of one so dear to me as you are, that is concerned, I tremble, I begin to doubt whether I have done right. Give me your opinion of the step I have taken."

She gazed at him with serious, loving, trustful eyes. "It is a wise step, Aaron, I am sure it is. Whatever you do is right, and I am satisfied."

Ten o'clock struck, and a knock at the door announced the faithful Prissy, come to put the fire out. She entered with the baby in her arms, sound asleep. She was flushed and excited, and she held her hand over the right side of her face.

"Victoria ought to be a-bed," said Rachel, taking a peep at baby.

"She can't go," retorted Prissy, "afore 'er mother's ready to take 'er."

"Where is her mother?" asked Aaron.

"At the Jolly Sailor Boy, enjying of 'erself."

"Ah! And where is your aunt?"

"At the Jolly Sailor Boy, too, 'aving a 'arf-quartern. There's been a reg'lar row there about Mrs. Macrory's flannin peddicut."

"What happened to it?"

"It went wrong. Yes, it did. Yer needn't larf. Call me a story, do! I would if I was you!"

"No, no, Prissy," said Aaron, in a soothing tone. "How did the flannel petticoat go wrong?"

"Nobody knowed at fust. Aunty does Mrs. Macrory's washing, and a lot more besides, and the things gits mixed sometimes. Aunty can't 'elp that--'ow can she? So Mrs. Macrory's things was took 'ome without the peddicut. Mrs. Macrory she meets aunty at the Jolly Sailor Boy, and she begins to kick up about it. 'Where's my flannin peddicut?' she ses. ''Ow should I know?' ses aunty. Then wot d'yer think? Mrs. Macrory sees somethink sticking out of aunty's dress be'ind, and she pulls at it. 'Why,' she ses, 'you've got it on!' That's wot the row was about. Aunty didn't know 'ow it come on 'er--she's ready to take 'er oath on that. Ain't it rum?"

"Very rum. Put out the fire, Prissy. It is time for all good people to get to bed."

In the performance of this duty Prissy was compelled to remove her hand from her face, and when she rose from the floor it was seen that her right eye was sadly discoloured, and that she was in pain.

"Oh, Prissy, poor child!" exclaimed Rachel; "you have been hurt!"

"Yes, mum," said Prissy. "Mrs. Macrory's gal--she's twice as big as me; you should see 'er legs!--she ses, 'You're in that job,' she ses, meaning the peddicut; and she lets fly and gives me a one-er on account."

Rachel ran upstairs, and brought down a bottle of gillard water, with which she bathed the bruise, and tied one of her clean white handkerchiefs over it. Prissy stood quite still, her lips quivering; it may have been the gillard water that filled the girl's unbandaged eye with tears.

"That will make you feel easier," said Rachel. "Blow out the candles now, and be here at half-past eight in the morning."

"I'll be sure to be," said Prissy, with a shake in her voice.

In the dark Aaron Cohen heard the sound of a kiss.

"Good-night, sir," said the girl.

"Good-night, Prissy," said Aaron.

The chain of the street door was put up, and the shutters securely fastened, and then Aaron and Rachel, hand in hand, went up the dark stairs to their room.

"My dear," said Aaron, drowsily, a few minutes after he and his wife were in bed, "are you asleep?"

"No, Aaron," murmured Rachel, who was on the border-land of dreams.

"I've been thinking,"--he dozed off for a moment or two--"I've been thinking----"

"Yes, my dear?"

--"That I wouldn't give Prissy's aunt any flannel petticoats to wash."

Almost before the words had passed his lips sleep claimed him for its own.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PROCLAMATION OF WAR.

On Monday morning Aaron commenced business. In the shop window was a display of miscellaneous articles ticketed at low prices, and Aaron took his place behind his counter, ready to dispose of them, ready to argue and bargain, and to advance money on any other articles on which a temporary loan was required. He did not expect a rush of customers, being aware that pawnbroking was a tree of very small beginnings, a seed which needed time before it put forth flourishing branches. The security was sure, the profits accumulative. He was confident of the result. Human necessity, even human frailty, was on his side; all he had to do was to be fair in his dealings.

In the course of the day he had a good many callers; some to make inquiries, some to offer various articles for pledge. Of these latter the majority were children, with whom he declined to negotiate. "Who sent you?" "Mother." "Go home and tell her she must come herself." He would only do business with grown-up people. Setting before himself a straight and honest rule of life, he was not the man to wander from it for the sake of a little profit. Of the other description of callers a fair proportion entered the shop out of idle curiosity. He had pleasant words for all, and gave change for sixpences and shillings with as much courtesy as if each transaction was a gain to him; as, indeed, it was, for no man or woman who entered with an unfavourable opinion of him (influenced by certain rumours to his discredit which had been circulated by Mr. Whimpole) departed without having their minds disturbed by his urbanity and genial manners. "I don't see any harm in him," was the general verdict from personal evidence; "he's as nice a spoken man as I ever set eyes on." Many of his visitors went away laughing at the humorous remarks he had made, which they passed on from one to another. On the evening of this first day he expressed his satisfaction at the business he had done.

"Our venture will turn out well," he said to Rachel. "The flag of fortune is waving over us."

It was eight o'clock, and, although he scarcely expected further custom, he kept the gas burning in the shop window.

"Light is an attraction," he observed. "It is better than an advertisement in the papers."

The evening was fine. He and Rachel were sitting in the parlour, with the intermediate door open. Aaron was smoking a handsome silver-mounted pipe and making up his accounts, while his wife was busy with her needle. Satan could never have put anything in the shape of mischief in the way of these two pairs of industrious hands, for they were never idle, except during the Sabbath and the fasts and holydays, and then it was not idleness, but rest, Divinely ordained. The silver-mounted pipe was one of Aaron's most precious possessions, it being his beloved wife's gift to him on his last birthday. He would not have sold it for ten times its weight in gold. Rachel often held a light to it after it was filled, and Aaron, with an affectionate smile, would kiss her white hand in acknowledgment of the service. There are trifling memorials which are almost human in their influence, and in the tender thoughts they inspire. At peace with the world and with themselves, Aaron and his wife conversed happily as they worked; but malignant influences were at work, of which they were soon to feel the shock.

Aaron had put his account books in the safe, and was turning the key, when the sound of loud voices outside his shop reached their ears. The voices were those of children, male and female, who were exercising their lungs in bass, treble, and falsetto. Only one word did they utter.

"Jew! Jew! Jew!"

Rachel started up in alarm, her hand at her heart. Her face was white, her limbs were trembling.

"Jew! Jew! Jew!"

Aaron put the key of the safe in his pocket, and laid down his pipe. His countenance was not troubled, but his brows were puckered.

"Jew! Jew! Jew!"

"It is wicked! it is wicked!" cried Rachel, wringing her hands. "Oh, how can they be so cruel!"

Aaron's countenance instantly cleared. He had to think, to act, for her as well as for himself. With fond endearments he endeavoured to soothe her; but her agitation was profound, and while these cries of implied opprobrium continued she could not school herself to calmness. Not for herself did she fear; it was against her dear, her honoured husband that this wicked demonstration was made, and she dreaded that he would be subjected to violence. Stories of past oppressions, accounts she had read in the newspapers of Jew-baiting in other countries, flashed into her mind. To her perturbed senses the voices seemed to proceed from men and women; to Aaron's clearer senses they were the voices of children, and he divined the source of the insult. Rachel sobbed upon his breast, and clasped him close to protect him.

"Rachel, my love, my life!" he said, in a tone of tender firmness. "Be calm, I entreat you. There is nothing to fear. Have you lost confidence in your husband? Would you increase my troubles, and make the task before me more difficult than it is? On my word as a man, on my faith as a Jew,

I will make friends of these foolish children, in whose outcries there is no deep-seated venom--I declare it, none. They do not know what they are doing. From my heart I pity them, the young rascals, and I will wage a peaceful war with them--yes, my life, a peaceful war--which will confound them and fill them with wonder. I will make them respect me; I will enrich them with a memory which, when they are men and women, will make them think of the past with shame. I will make all my enemies respect me. If you will help me by your silence and patience, I will turn their bitterness into thistledown, which I can blow away with a breath. Take heart, my beloved, dear life of my life! Trust to me, and in the course of a few days you shall see a wonder. There, let me kiss your tears away. That is my own Rachel, whose little finger is more precious to me than all the world beside. Good, good, my own dear wife! Do you think it is a tragedy that is being enacted by those youngsters? No, no; it is a comedy. You shall see, you shall see!"

She was comforted by his words; she drew strength from his strength; she looked at him in wonder, as he began to laugh even while he was caressing her, and her wonder increased when she saw that his eyes fairly shone with humour.

"Have no fear, my heart," he said; "have not the slightest fear. I am going to meet them--not with javelin and spear, but with something still more powerful, and with good temper for my shield."

"Aaron," she whispered, "are you sure there is no danger?"

"If I were not sure," he answered, merrily, "I would remain snug in this room. I am not a man of war; I am a man of peace, and with peaceful weapons will I scatter the enemy. For your dear sake I would not expose myself to peril, for do I not know that if I were hurt your pain would be greater than mine? It is my joy to know it. You will remain quietly here?"

"I will, my dear husband. But you will not go into the street?"

"I shall go no farther than the street door. I shall not need to go farther."

He stopped to fill his pipe, and to light it; and then, with loving kisses and a smile on his lips, he left her.

When he made his appearance at the shop door there was a sudden hush, and a sudden scuttling away of the twenty or thirty children who had congregated to revile him. He remained stationary at the door, smoking his pipe, and gazing benignantly at them.

Their fears of chastisement dispelled by his peaceful attitude, they stopped, looked over their shoulders, and slowly and warily came back, keeping, however, at a safe distance from him. They found their voices again; again the reviling cries went forth.

"Jew! Jew! Jew!"

"Good children! good children!" said Aaron, in a clear, mellifluous voice. Then he put his pipe to his mouth again, and continued to smoke, smiling and nodding his head as if in approval.

"Jew! Jew! Jew!"

"Good little boys and girls," said Aaron. "Bravo! bravo! You deserve a reward. Every labourer is worthy of his hire."

He drew from his pocket three or four pennies, which, with smiling nods of his head, he threw among them.

Instantly came into play other passions--greed, avarice, the determination not to be defrauded of their due. Falling upon the money, they scrambled and fought for it. Aaron threw among them two or three more pennies, and their ardour increased. They scratched, they kicked, they tumbled over each other; blows were given and returned. Those who had secured pennies scampered away with them, and, with loud and vengeful cries, the penniless scampered after them. In a very little while they had all disappeared. To the victors the spoils, it is said; but in this instance it really appeared as if victory had ranged itself on Aaron's side.

Shaking with internal laughter, he remained on his steps awhile, puffing at his pipe; then he put up the shutters, locked the street door, put out the shop lights, and rejoined his wife.

"My dear," he said, and his voice was so gay that her heart beat with joy, "that is the end of the first act. They will not come back to-night."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT AND WON.

"The personal affections by which we are governed," said Aaron Cohen, seating himself comfortably in his chair, "are, like all orders of beings to which they come, of various degrees and qualities, and the smaller become merged and lost in the larger, as the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians were swallowed up by Aaron's rod. Wisdom is better than an inheritance, and anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Moreover, as is observed by Rabbi Chanina, 'Wise men promote peace in the world.' Such, my dear Rachel, is my aim, and so long as the means within my reach are harmless, so long will I follow the learned rabbi's precept. If the human heart were not full of envy and deceit, what I have done should bring joy to our persecutors; but I will not pledge myself that it has done so in this instance. On the contrary, on the contrary. They have something else to think of than calling me what I am proud to be called--a Jew. How they scratched and fought and ran!" Aaron paused here to laugh. "The opprobrious cries ceased suddenly, did they not, Rachel?"

"They did, and I was very much surprised."

"You will be more surprised when you hear that I rewarded with modern shekels the labours of the young rascals who would make our lives a torment to us."

"You gave them money!" exclaimed Rachel, in amazement. "Is it possible you rewarded them for their bad work?"

"I threw among them seven penny pieces. Yes, yes, I rewarded them. Why not?"

"But why?"

"Ah, why, why? Had I thrown among them seven cannon balls they would scarcely have been more effective. The truth of this will be made manifest to our benefit before many days are gone, or Cohen is not my name. Wife of my soul, I went forth, not with a lion's, but with a fox's skin. Have I not studied the law? Are not the Cohanim priests, and are not priests supposed to be men of intelligence and resource? We read in Proverbs, 'Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I have understanding, I have strength.' Rabbi Meyer says that the study of the law endows a man with sovereignty, dominion, and ratiocination. He is slow to anger, ready to forgive an injury, has a good heart, receives chastisement with resignation, loves virtue, correction, and admonition. This, perhaps, is going a little too far, and is endowing a human being with qualities too transcendent; but it is true to a certain extent, and I have profited by the learned rabbi's words. Ill fitted should I be to engage in the battle of life if I were not able to cope with the young rascals who made the night hideous outside our door, and who, if I am not mistaken; will repeat their performance to-morrow evening at the same hour."

"They will come again!" cried Rachel, clasping her hands in despair.

"They will come again, and again, and yet again, and then--well, then we shall see what we shall see."

"You gave them money to-night," said Rachel, sadly, "and they will return for more."

"And they will return for more," said Aaron, with complacency. "At the present moment I should judge that they are engaged in a fierce contest. When that look comes into your face, my dear, it is an indication that I have said something you do not exactly understand. I threw to them seven apples of discord, which the nimblest and the strongest seized and fled with. But each soldier conceived he had a right to at least one of the apples, and those who were left empty-handed laboured under a sense of wrong. They had been robbed by their comrades. After them they rushed to obtain their portion of the spoils of war. Then ensued a grand scrimmage in which noses have been injured and eyes discoloured. Even as we converse the battle is continued. I am not there, but I see the scene clearly with my mind's eye." He took a sovereign from his pocket, and regarded it contemplatively. "Ah, thou root of much evil and of much good, what have you not to answer for? What blessings is it not in your power to bestow, what evil passions do you not bring into play? Rachel, my love, take heart of courage, and when you hear those boys shouting outside tomorrow night do not be alarmed. Trust in me; everything will come right in the end."

The scene which Aaron had drawn from his imagination was as near as possible to the truth. There had been a battle royal between the boys and girls for possession of the pennies; noses were put out of joint, black eyes were given, words of injurious import exchanged, and much bad blood engendered. The sevenpence for which they fought would have gone but a little way to pay for the repairs to the clothes which were torn and rent during the fray. The end of it was that the robbers, after being kicked and cuffed ignominiously, were not allowed to join in a compact made by the penniless, to the effect that they would assemble outside Aaron Cohen's shop to-morrow night and repeat the tactics which had been so well rewarded, and that all moneys received should be equally divided between the warriors engaged. One Ted Kite was appointed commander, to organise the expedition and to see fair play.

Accordingly, on Tuesday night a score or so of boys and girls presented themselves in front of

the shop, and commenced shouting, "Jew! Jew! Jew!" the fugleman being Ted Kite, who proved himself well fitted for the task.

"There he is, there he is!" said the youngsters eagerly, as Aaron made his appearance on the doorstep; and, inspired by their captain, they continued to fire.

"Good children, good children," said Aaron, with good-humoured smiles, and continuing to smoke his silver-mounted pipe. "Very well done, very well done indeed!"

"Ain't he going to throw us nothink?" they asked each other anxiously, their greedy eyes watching Aaron's movements. They were kept rather long in suspense, but at length Aaron's hand sought his pocket, and half a dozen pennies rattled on the stones. Despite their compact down they pounced, and fought and scratched for them as on the previous night, the fortunate ones scudding away as on the first occasion, followed by their angry comrades. They were caught, and compelled to disgorge; the pennies were changed into farthings, and each soldier received one for his pay; the two or three that were left were spent in sweetstuff.

"What a game!" the children exclaimed, and appointed to meet on the following night to continue the pastime.

On this third night they were kept waiting still longer. Aaron Cohen did not make his appearance so quickly, and several minutes elapsed before the pennies were thrown to them. On the first night he had disbursed seven, on the second night six, on this third only four. There was the usual fighting for them, and the usual scampering away; but when the sum-total was placed in the hands of Ted Kite a great deal of dissatisfaction was expressed. Only fourpence! They doubted the correctness of the sum; they were sure that more had been thrown; one girl said she counted eight, and others supported her statement. Who had stolen the missing pennies? They quarrelled and fought again; they regarded each other with suspicion; doubts were thrown upon the honesty of the captain. Off went his coat instantly; off went the coats of other boys; the girls, having no coats to throw off, tucked up their sleeves; and presently six or seven couples were hitting, scratching, and kicking each other. Much personal damage was done, and more bad blood engendered. The warfare was not by any means of a heroic nature.

Nevertheless they assembled on the fourth night, and were kept waiting still longer before they were paid. Aaron did not show his liberality, however, until he had had a conference with the captain. His keen eyes had singled out Ted Kite, and he beckoned to him. Ted hesitated; he was only a small boy; Aaron Cohen was a big man, and in a personal contest could have disposed of him comfortably.

"Yah, yer coward!" cried the rank and file to their captain. "What are yer frightened at? What did we make yer captain for?"

Thus taunted, Ted Kite ventured to approach the smiling foe.

"Come a little nearer," said Aaron; "I am not going to hurt you. I wish you to do me a favour."

Ted, with a sidelong look over his shoulders at his army, as if appealing to it to rush to his rescue in case he was seized, shuffled forward. Aaron Cohen held out his hand; Ted Kite timidly responded, and was surprised at the friendly grip he received.

"You are the leader," said Aaron, in his most genial voice.

"Yes, Mr. Cohen," replied Ted, growing bold, "I'm the captain."

"Clever lad, clever captain! Here's a penny for you. Don't let them see you take it. It is for you alone. They will do as you tell them, of course."

"I'll let 'em know it if they don't."

"It's right you should. I think it is very kind of you to come here as you do, but I want you to oblige me and not come to-morrow night It is Friday, and the shop will be closed; so you would be wasting your time. That would be foolish, would it not?"

"Yes, it would," said Ted, somewhat bewildered. "Shall we come on Saturday night?"

"Certainly, if you think proper. Then you will not be here to-morrow?"

"We won't, as you'd rather not, Mr. Cohen."

"Thank you, I am really obliged to you. Now go and join your army."

Ted Kite turned away, walked a step or two, and returned.

"But I say, Mr. Cohen----"

"Well, my lad?"

"Do you like it?"

"Do I like it?" echoed Aaron, With a sly chuckle. "Should I speak to you as I am doing if I didn't? I think it is very nice of you; very nice, very nice indeed!"

"Oh!" said Ted, in a crest-fallen tone. As Aaron took pleasure in the persecution, it was not half such good fun as it had been. "He says he likes it," he said to his comrades, when he was among them.

"How much did he give yer?" they inquired, feeling as he did in respect of the fun of their proceedings.

"He didn't give me nothink."

"We sor him hold out his hand to yer," they protested.

"You sor us shake hands, that's what yer saw. Let's get on with the game; we don't want to be kept waiting here all night."

They went on with the game, calling "Jew! Jew! Jew!" half-heartedly. Putting the pecuniary reward out of the question, it was a game that was becoming rather monotonous. They had to call for quite a quarter of an hour before Aaron paid them; and this time he paid them with two pennies only. The children fell on the ground, and scraped the stones for more, but found none; and they retired grumbling, discontented, and suspicious of each other's honesty.

On Friday night, the Sabbath eve, Aaron and Rachel had peace; and on Saturday night the children made their appearance again and gave forth their chorus. Aaron came to the door, and stood there, smoking his pipe, and smiling at them; but he did not throw any pennies to them. They did not know what to make of it. Their voices grew weaker and weaker, they wandered about discontentedly, they declared it was not fair on Mr. Cohen's part. "We'll try him agin on Monday night," they said.

They tried him again on Monday night, and he stood on his steps, commending them, but he gave them no more pennies. There was no heart whatever now in their invectives. They were not philosophers, and did, not know that the course Aaron had pursued had taken the sting out of their tails. "He likes it," they said to one another, as they strolled off moodily, "and he wants us to come here and scream our throats dry without being paid for it. Well, we ain't going to do it. We won't call him Jew any more, if he wants us ever so much. It ain't likely, now, is it? What does he mean by treating us so shabby?" These young rapscallions thought the world was out of joint.

On this Monday night an incident occurred which never came to Aaron's ears. Prissy, hearing of the annoyance to which the Cohens were subjected, made her appearance as the boys were wandering disconsolately away, and without wasting time in asking questions, darted like a tiger-cat upon the biggest of them, and fixed her fingers in his hair. She had left Victoria Regina asleep on the coals in her aunt's shop, and had, so to speak, girded up her loins for the contest, by pinning up her ragged skirts and tucking up her sleeves to the shoulder. "What's that for?" cried the boy, struggling to get free. Prissy vouchsafed no explanation; the only words she uttered were addressed to the other boys. "Fair play. One at a time. I'm only a gal." Chivalry was not dead. They stood round the combatants, and witnessed the fight without interfering. It was a desperate encounter. Many an ugly blow did Prissy receive; but she depended upon her talons, and pulled such quantities of hair out of the big boy's head, and scratched his face so dreadfully, that he was at length driven to tears and entreaties to her to leave off. "Do yer want any more?" screamed Prissy, whose breath was almost gone. The big boy's answer was to run away, whimpering, and the other boys hooted him as he fled. "Would any other boy like to come on?" demanded the panting Prissy. Not one accepted the challenge, and Prissy, glaring at them as they followed their vanquished comrade, went back to Victoria Regina, and shed copious tears of indignant satisfaction over the sleeping babe.

In this way it was that Aaron Cohen fought the battle and gained a bloodless victory. He laughed in his sleeve as he thought of it, and laughed aloud in his cosy little parlour when he related the whole affair to Rachel.

"One shilling and eightpence has it cost me, my love," he said, "and I do not grudge the money. Show 'me the battle that has been won for less."

Rachel was greatly relieved; but her dominant feeling was admiration for her husband's wisdom.

"I do not believe any other man in the world would have thought of it," she said; and though Aaron shook his head in modest deprecation, he was justified in inwardly congratulating himself upon his astute tactics.

The story got about, and the townspeople were much amused by it. "Mr. Cohen's a clever fellow," they said. He grew to be respected by them, and as the weeks passed by and it was seen that he was not only a fair-dealing but a kindly-hearted man, the innuendoes which Mr. Whimpole continued to circulate about him produced a very small effect. Mr. Whimpole was not pleased; where is the man who would have been in his position? Talking one night with Rachel over the animosity the corn-chandler bore towards the Jews, Aaron said,--

"I have no doubt, my dear, that he is quite conscientious, and that he considers his prejudices to be the outcome of a just conviction. Doubtless his parents had the same conviction, and he imbibed it from them. There are thousands of people who agree with him, and there are worse persecutions than that to which we have been subjected. Look at that infamously-governed country, Russia, which, in the maps, ought to be stamped blood-red, with a heavy mourning border around it! The wretches who inflict incredible sufferings upon countless innocent beings call themselves Christians. They are not Christians, they are fiends, and a judgment will fall upon them. Spain, once the greatest of nations, fell into decay when the Jews deserted it. So will it be with other nations that oppress the Jew. Let Germany look to it. It is easy to arouse the evil passions of human beings, but a brand of fire shall fall upon the heads of those who are employed in work so vile."

CHAPTER XVI.

JOY AND SORROW.

Perhaps, however, to Rachel may chiefly be ascribed the general esteem in which the Cohens were held by the townsfolk. Charitable, kind, and gentle by nature, she was instinctively drawn to all poor people who had fallen into misfortune. Here there was no question of Jew and Christian. A human being was in trouble; that was sufficient for this dear woman, whose heart bled at the sight of suffering. Upon her sympathetic ears no tale of distress could fall without bearing fruit. Now it was a basin of nourishing soup, now a mould of jelly, now part of a chicken, cooked by herself, and paid for out of her housekeeping money. She won friends everywhere, and her sweet face was like a ray of sunshine in the homes of the poor. It was not at all uncommon to hear that her timely assistance had been the means of restoring to health those who had been stricken down. She walked through life as an angel of mercy might have done, and spiritual flowers grew about her feet.

Of all the friends who sounded her praises none were more enthusiastic than little Prissy, who came now regularly to the house to do domestic work.

Anxious to increase his trade, Aaron had stocked his shop with such articles of wear and adornment which were most in request. He had not the means to pay ready money for the stock, but through a friend in Portsmouth, Mr. Moss, with whom the readers of this story have already become acquainted, he obtained credit from wholesale dealers who would have been chary to trust him without a sufficient recommendation. Apart from the pleasures which his modest success in business afforded him, there was a happiness in store for him to which he looked forward with a sense of profound gratitude. Rachel was about to become a mother. To this fond couple, who lived only for each other, there could be no greater joy than this. They had lost their firstborn, and God was sending another child to bless their days. They never closed their eyes at night, they never rose in the morning, without offering a prayer of thanks to the Most High for His goodness to them. They saw no cloud gathering to darken their happiness.

It was an ordinary event, for which Aaron could hardly have been prepared.

They had been eleven months in Gosport when one morning Aaron, rising first and going down to his shop, found that burglars had been at work. They had effected an entrance at the back of the house, and had carried away the most valuable articles in the window. The loss, Aaron calculated, would not be less than a hundred pounds.

It was, to him, a serious loss; he had commenced with a very small capital, and his earnings during the year had left only a small margin over his household and trade expenses. His business was growing, it is true, but for the first six months he had barely paid his way; it was to the future he looked to firmly establish himself, and now in one night all his profits were swept away. More than this; if he were called upon to pay his debts he would have but a few pounds left. Rachel, whose health the last week or two had been delicate, her confinement being so near, was in bed by his directions; he had forbidden her to rise till ten o'clock. It was a matter to be thankful for; he could keep the shock of the loss from her; in her condition bad news might have a serious effect upon her.

He set everything in order, spoke no word of what had occurred to his wife, re-arranged the shop window, and took down the shutters. In the course of the day he told Rachel that he intended to close a couple of hours earlier than usual; he had to go to Portsmouth upon business in the evening, and should be absent probably till near midnight.

"You will not mind being alone, my love?" he said.

"Oh no," she answered, with a tender smile; "I have plenty to occupy me."

She had been for some time busy with her needle preparing for her unborn child.

"But you must go to bed at ten," said Aaron. "I shall lock the shop, and take the key of the back door with me, so that I can let myself in."

She promised to do as he bade her, and in the evening he left her to transact his business. He had no fear that she would be intruded upon; it was not likely that the house would be broken into two nights in succession; besides, with the exception of some pledges of small value which he kept in the safe, where they were secure from burglars, there was little now to tempt thieves to repeat their knavish doings. So with fond kisses he bade her goodnight.

They stood facing each other, looking into each other's eyes. Rachel's eyes were of a tender grey, with a light so sweet in them that he never looked into them unmoved. He kissed them now with a strange yearning at his heart.

"I hope baby's eyes will be like yours, dear love," he said; "the soul of sweetness and goodness shines in them."

She smiled happily, and pressed him fondly to her. Ah, if he had known!

His first business was with the police. He went to the station, and telling the inspector of his loss, said that he wished it to be kept private, because of his fear that it might reach his wife's ears. The inspector replied that it would be advisable under any circumstances. Leaving in the officer's hands a list of the articles that had been stolen, he proceeded to Portsmouth to consult his friend Mr. Moss. That good-hearted gentleman was deeply concerned at the news.

"It is a serious thing, Cohen," he said.

"A very serious thing," replied Aaron, gravely; "but I shall overcome it, Only I require time. I promised to pay some bills to-morrow, and as I shall need a little stock to replace what I have lost, it will cramp me to do so now."

He mentioned the names of the tradesmen to whom he had given the promise, and asked Mr. Moss to call upon them in the morning and explain the matter to them.

"They will not lose their money," he said; "it will not take me very long to make everything right."

"I will see them," said Mr. Moss, "and I am sure they will give you time. Aaron Cohen's name is a sufficient guarantee."

"I hope it will always be," replied Aaron. "It is very unfortunate just now, because I have extra expenses coming on me. The nurse, the doctor----"

"I know, I know. How is Mrs. Cohen?"

"Fairly well, I am glad to say. She knows nothing of what has occurred."

"Of course not. How could you tell her while she is like that? When Mrs. Moss is in the same way I am always singing and laughing and saying cheerful things to her. Between you and me, we expect an addition ourselves in about four months."

"Indeed! That will make----"

"Twelve," said Mr. Moss, rubbing his hands briskly together. "Increase and multiply. It's our bounden duty; eh, Cohen?"

"Yes," said Aaron, rather absently. "And now I must go; it will be late before I reach home, and for all Rachel's promises I expect she will keep awake for me. Good-night, and thank you."

"Nothing to thank me for. Good-night, and good luck."

When Aaron returned to Gosport it was midnight. Winter was coming on, and it was cold and dark. Buttoning his coat close up to his neck, he hastened his steps.

He was not despondent. Misfortune had fallen upon him, but he had confidence in himself; and, despite the practical common sense which showed itself in all his actions, there was in his nature an underlying current of spiritual belief in Divine assistance towards the successful accomplishment of just and worthy endeavour. That it is man's duty to do right, to work, to pray, to be considerate to his neighbours, to make his home cheerful, to be as charitable as his means will allow--this was his creed; and it was strengthened by his conviction that God made Himself manifest even upon earth in matters of right and wrong. He did not relegate the expiation of transgression to the future; he did not believe that a man could wipe out the sins of the past year by fasting, and praying, and beating his breast on the Day of Atonement. Wrong-doing was not to be set aside and forgotten until a convenient hour for repentance arrived. That was the conduct of a man who tried to cheat his conscience, who deluded himself with the hope that the Eternal

sometimes slept. Daily, hourly, a man must keep watch over himself and his actions. This had been his rule of life; and it contributed to his happiness, and to the happiness of those around him.

He was within a quarter of a mile of his residence when he was conscious of an unseen disturbance in the air; and presently he saw a distant glare in the sky, and the faint echoes of loud voices stole upon his senses. Agitated as he had been by what had transpired during this long unfortunate day, he could not at first be certain whether these signs were real or imaginary; but he soon discovered that they did not spring from his imagination. The glare in the sky became plainly visible, the loud voices reached his cars. There was a fire in the town, and he was proceeding towards it. Instantly his thoughts, his fears, centred upon Rachel. He ran forward quickly, and found himself struggling through an excited crowd. Flames shot upwards; the air was filled with floating sparks of fire. Great God! It was his own house that was being destroyed by the devouring element. He did not heed that; the destruction of his worldly goods did not affect him.

"My wife!" he screamed. "Where is my wife?"

By main force they held him back, for he was rushing into the flames.

"Let me go!" he screamed. "Where is my wife?"

"It is all right, Mr. Cohen," a number of voices replied. "She is saved!"

"Thank God, oh, thank God!" he cried. "Take me to her. Where is she?"

He cared not for the ruin that had overtaken him; like cool water to a parched throat had come the joyful news.

"Take me to her. In the name of Heaven, tell me where she is!"

She was in a house, at a safe distance from the fire, and thither he was led. Rachel was lying on a couch in her nightdress; sympathising people were about her.

"Rachel, Rachel!" he cried, and fell upon his knees by her side.

She did not answer him; she was insensible.

"Do not agitate yourself," said a voice. It was that of a physician who had been attending to her. "Be thankful that she lives."

"O Lord, I thank Thee!" murmured the stricken man. "My Rachel lives!"

What mattered all the rest? What mattered worldly ruin and destruction? The beloved of his heart was spared to him.

"You are a sensible man, Mr. Cohen," said the physician, "and you must be calm for her sake. In her condition there will be danger if she witnesses your agitation when she recovers."

"I will be calm, sir," said Aaron, humbly. "She is all I have in the world."

He made no inquiries as to the cause of the fire; he did not stir from Rachel's side, but sat with his eyes fixed upon her pallid face. The physician remained with them an hour, and then took his departure, saying he would return early in the morning, and leaving instructions to Aaron what to do.

At sunrise Rachel awoke. Passing one hand over her eyes, she held out the other in a groping, uncertain way. Aaron took it in his, and held it fondly; the pallor left her cheeks.

"It is you, my dear?" she murmured.

"Yes, it is I, my life!" he said, in a low and gentle tone.

"You are well--you are safe?"

"I am well; I am safe," he replied. "And you, Rachel, how do you feel?"

"I have a slight headache. It will soon pass away. Oh, my dear husband, how thankful I am! When did you return?"

"Not till you were taken from the house. Do not talk now. Rest, rest, my beloved!"

The endearing words brought a glad smile to her lips.

"I will sleep presently, Aaron. Is the doctor here?"

"No, but he will come soon. Shall I go for him?"

"I can wait, dear; when he comes I should like to speak to him alone."

"You are hurt!" he said, alarmed. "Tell me!"

"I am not hurt, dear; it is only that my head aches a little. He will give me something to relieve me. Have no fear for me, Aaron; I am in no danger; indeed, indeed, I am not!"

"God be praised!"

She drew his head to her breast, and they lay in silence awhile, fondly embracing.

"Let me tell you, dear, and then I will go to sleep again. I went to bed at ten, as you bade me, and though I had it in my mind to keep awake for you I could not do so. I do not know how long I slept, but I awoke in confusion, and there was a strong glare in my eyes. I hardly remember what followed. I heard voices calling to me--Prissy's voice was the loudest, I think--and then I felt that strong arms were around me, and I was being carried from the house. That is all, my dear, till I heard your voice, here. Where am I?"

He informed her; and then, holding him close to her, she fell asleep again. As the clock struck nine the physician entered the room, and Aaron told him what had passed.

"I can spare half an hour," said the physician. "Go and see after your affairs. I will not leave her till you return."

Kissing Rachel tenderly, and smoothing the hair from her forehead, Aaron left the house, and went to his own. Before he departed he learned from the kind neighbours, who had given Rachel shelter, that they were not in a position to keep her and Aaron with them, and he said that he would make arrangements to remove her in the course of the day, if the doctor thought it would be safe to do so. His own house, he found, was completely destroyed, but he heard of another at no great distance, which was to be let furnished for a few weeks; and this he took at once, and installed Prissy therein, to light fires and get the rooms warm. The arrangement completed, he hastened back to Rachel, between whom and the physician a long consultation had taken place during his absence. At the conclusion of their conversation she had asked him one question,--

"Shall I be so all my life, doctor?"

"I fear so," was his reply.

"My poor husband!" she murmured. "My poor, dear husband! Say nothing to him, doctor, I implore you. Let him hear the truth from my lips."

He consented, not sorry to be spared a painful duty. "She is surprisingly well," he said to Aaron, "and in a few days will be able to get about a little, though you must not expect her to be quite strong till her child is born."

The news was so much better than Aaron expected, that he drew a deep breath of exquisite relief.

"Can she be removed to-day with safety?" he asked.

"I think so. She will be happier with you alone. Give me your new address; I will call and see her there this evening."

At noon she was taken in a cab to her new abode and Aaron carried her in, and laid her on the sofa before a bright fire. In the evening the physician called according to his promise. "She is progressing famously," he said to Aaron. "Get her to bed early, and it may be advisable that she should keep there a few days. But I shall speak more definitely about this later on. Mr. Cohen, you have my best wishes. You are blessed with a noble wife." Tears shone in Aaron's eyes. "Let me impress upon you," continued the doctor, "to be strong as she is strong; but at present, with the birth of her child so near, it is scarcely physical power that sustains her. She is supported by a spiritual strength drawn from her love for you and her unborn babe."

With these words the physician left them together. Prissy was gone, and Aaron and Rachel were alone.

They exchanged but few words. Rachel still occupied the couch before the fire, and as she seemed to be dozing Aaron would not disturb her. Thus an hour passed by, and then Rachel said,--

"The doctor advises me to go to bed early. Will you help me up, dear?"

She stood on her feet before him, and as his eyes rested on her face a strange fear entered his heart.

"Come, my life!" he said.

"A moment, dear husband," she said. "I have something to tell you, something that will grieve you. I do not know how it happened, nor does the good doctor know. He has heard of only one such case before. I am not in pain; I do not suffer. It is much to be grateful for, and I am humbly, humbly grateful. It might have been so much worse!"

"Rachel, my beloved!" said Aaron, placing his hands on her shoulders.

"Keep your arms about me, my honoured husband. Let me feel your dear hands, your dear face. Kiss me, Aaron. May I tell you now?"

"Tell me now, my beloved."

"Look into my eyes, dear. I cannot look into yours. Dear husband, I am blind!"

CHAPTER XVII.

DIVINE CONSOLATION.

The shock of this revelation was so overwhelming that for a few moments Aaron was unable to speak. In the words of the prophet, "His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth." His soul was plunged in darkness, and a feeling of passionate rebellion racked his heart. That upon his sweet and innocent wife should have fallen an infliction so awful seemed to blot all brightness out of the world. Nay, more--it seemed to be so opposed to the principle of justice as to render it a mockery and a snare. The sentiment which animated him was one of horror and indignation, and he yielded to it unresistingly. What had Rachel done to deserve the cruel blow? Her life had been a life of purity and innocence; her religious obligations had been zealously fulfilled; in her home her duties had been faithfully and cheerfully performed; to the poor she had been a ministering angel; she had walked truly in the ways of God. Not with a crown of sorrow, but with a crown of glory should she have been crowned And was it not natural that he should rebel against it? He was her champion, her protector, her defender; she had no one else. Should he stand tamely by and show no sense of the injustice which had been inflicted upon her?

Very, very rarely had Aaron been dominated by so stubborn a mood; very, very rarely had he allowed it to take possession of him; and never in a single instance on his own account. Mere worldly misfortune, however disastrous in its effect, he had invariably met with philosophic calm and fortitude. Many reverses had attended him, and he had borne them bravely, as a man should, as it was a man's duty to do. With a courage which may be said to be heroic had he accepted each successive stroke, and had immediately applied himself to the task of repairing the breach. No fainthearted soldier he, sitting down and weeping by the roadside when he received a wound. To be up and doing, that was his creed. These were but ordinary checks, which a man must be prepared to encounter in his course through life; weak indeed would he prove himself to be who did not at once set to work manfully and energetically to make the best, instead of the worst, of each rebuff. Aaron's keen gift of humour and his talent for justifiable device were of immense assistance to him in these encounters, and in his conversations with Rachel he was in the habit of throwing so droll a light upon the difficulties with which he was contending, that he lifted from her heart and from his own a weight which otherwise would have remained there and impeded his efforts. He treated every personal ailment which visited him, and every little accident he met with, in the same fashion, laughing away Rachel's distress, and bearing his pain without the least symptom of querulousness. "You seem almost to like pain, my dear," she had said. "There is pleasure in pain," he had answered; "think of the relief." Thus did he make the pack upon his shoulders easy to carry, and thus did he contribute to Rachel's enjoyment of life.

Over and above these lesser features in his character reigned the great factors truth and justice. Temptations he had had, as all men have, but he was, happily, so constituted that he had not to fight them down; they were destroyed in their suggestion. It was with him an impossibility to advance his own interests by deceit and subterfuge, to make money by cheating his neighbour. He took no credit to himself that he was never guilty of a meanness; it was simply that it was not in his nature to fall so low, and that he walked instinctively in the right path. He had a soul of pity for misfortune, and had frequently conversed with Rachel upon the doctrine of responsibility, arguing that children born of vicious parents should not be made accountable for their evil acts to the fullest extent. "It is an inheritance," he argued, "and it is not they who are wholly guilty. My parents gave me an inheritance of cheerfulness and good temper, and I am more grateful for it than I should be if they had left me a large bag of gold." Upon questions of right and wrong his good sense and his rectitude led him unerringly to the just side, and when he had a stake in a decision he was called upon to make in such or such an issue he never for a moment hesitated. To have benefited himself at the expense of justice would have been in his eyes a sin which was not to be forgiven. A sin of unconscious omission could be expiated, but a sin of deliberate commission would have weighed for ever on his soul. Could such a man as this, a devout and conscientious Jew, faithful every day of his life in the observances of his religion, with a firm belief in the mercy and goodness of the Eternal God, and with the principles of truth and justice shining ever before him, be guilty of such a sin? It will be presently seen.

So far himself, considered as an entity. Had he been alone in life, with no other life so welded into his own as to be inseparable from it, it is scarcely possible that he could have been guilty of a conscious wrong, for his soul would have risen in revolt against the suggestion. Had he been alone, misfortunes might have fallen upon him unceasingly, poverty might have been his lot through all his days, disease might have racked his bones--he would have borne all with tranquillity and resignation, and would have lifted up his voice in praise of the Most High to his last hour. Of such stuff are martyrs made; from such elements springs the lofty ideal into which, once in a generation, is breathed the breath of life, the self-sacrificing hero who sheds his blood and dies with a glad light on his face in the battle of right against might, in the battle of weak innocence against the ruthless hand of power. But Aaron was not alone; Rachel was by his side, leaning upon his heart, looking to him for joy, for peace, for happiness. And when he suffered, it was through her he suffered; and when he was oppressed with sorrow, it was through her he sorrowed. So keen was his sympathy with her, so intense was his love for her, that if only her finger ached he was in pain. We are but human after all, and no man can go beyond a man's strength. Legends are handed down to us of Divine inspiration falling upon a man who, thus spiritually directed and inspired, becomes a leader, a hero, a prophet; but in that man's heartstrings are not entwined the tender fingers of wife and children. He communes with nature, he hears voices in the forest, the rustling leaves whisper to him, the solemn trees, rearing their stately forms to the dark skies, bear a message to his soul, he sees visions in the dead of night; but he hears not the voice of his beloved, he beholds not the angelic face of his sleeping child in its crib. As blades of grass, which we can rub into nothingness between our fingers, force their upward way to air and sunshine through adamantine stones, as rocks are worn away by the trickling of drops of water, so may a man's sublimest qualities, so may a man's heart and soul, be pierced and reft by human love.

It was this absorbing sentiment that agitated Aaron when Rachel revealed to him that she was blind, it was this that struck him dumb.

Meekly and patiently she stood before him--he had fallen back a step--and waited for him to speak. He did not utter a word.

Presently her sweet voice stole upon his senses.

"Aaron, my beloved, why are you silent? why do you not speak to me?"

He lifted his head and groaned.

"Ah, do not groan, dear husband," she continued. "It is for me you suffer; but I am not suffering--did I not tell you so? It is, indeed, the truth. Look into my face; you will see no pain there. All is well with us; all will be well with us; the future is glad and bright. And remember, dear, I need you more than ever now. Next to God, you are my rock, my salvation. He has cast this affliction upon me out of His goodness and wisdom. Humbly, gratefully, I thank Him. Let us lift up our voices in His praise."

And from her lips flowed, in the ancient tongue, the sublime prayer:

"Hear, O Israel, the Eternal, our God, the Eternal is One. And thou shalt love the Eternal thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall speak of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

An angel's voice could not have been more melodious and sweet, and the beauty of the prayer acquired truly a Divine strength through Rachel's intoning of the pious words. But it was not only her voice that resounded in the room. The moment she commenced to pray rebellion against Fate's decree melted out of Aaron's heart, and pity took its place. He was restored to his better self. Holding her hand, he joined her in the prayer, but not in so loud a voice as usual; she was the teacher now, and he the pupil; he followed her, as it were, and was led by her; and when the prayer was ended her head sank upon his breast, and her arms entwined themselves around his neck.

"You are resigned, my dear?" she whispered.

"I bow my head," he answered. "The Lord's will be done."

"I could not keep it from you any longer. I was blind when I opened my eyes in the house of the good people who gave me shelter; I was blind when you sat by my side there; but I feared to tell you; I wished to speak to the doctor first. It was so strange, so sudden, that I hoped it would not last. I awoke with the cry of fire in my ears, and, as I leapt from bed, the bright glare of the flames seemed to strike sight out of my eyes. I fainted, and remember nothing more, only that when I opened my eyes again I could not see. It was merciful that there was no pain. Oh, my dear husband, I am so sorry for you; so sorry, so sorry!"

"Rachel, dear Rachel, dear life of my life, it is not for me you should grieve--it is for yourself."

"No, dear love, I do not grieve for myself. Should I not rather rejoice? Because I know, I know,"--she put his hand to her lips and kissed it, then held it to her heart--"that you will bear

with me, that I shall not be a trouble to you."

"A trouble to me, Rachel! You are dearer to me than ever, more precious to me than ever. Oh, my dear! I never loved you as I love you now!"

"How sweet, how sweet!" she murmured. "How beautiful is life! No woman was ever blessed as I am blessed! And soon, dear love, we shall have with us another evidence of the Lord's great mercy. Our child, our darling, will be here! Ah, what happiness!"

She hid her face upon his breast.

Was there already in her heart the shadow of an abiding sorrow springing from the knowledge that she would never see the face of her unborn child, that she would never be able to look into the beautiful eyes which in a short time would open upon the world? Aaron had hoped that baby's eyes would be like hers, but she would never know from personal evidence whether they were or not. If such a sorrow was making itself felt she kept it to herself and guarded it jealously, lest Aaron should participate in it. Her face was radiant as they continued to converse, and by her loving words she succeeded in thoroughly banishing from Aaron's soul the rebellious promptings by which he had first been agitated.

Thus did Rachel, to whom the light of the universe was henceforth as night, become the divine consoler in the home.

"I am tired, dear. Will you lead me to our room?"

He took her in his arms and carried her up, as he would have carried a child; and this new office of love, and indeed everything he did for her, drew them spiritually closer to each other.

When she was in bed she asked him to tell her about the fire, and if he would be a great loser by it. He softened the loss, said that he was well insured, that they had a good friend in Mr. Moss, and that it would not be long before he was On his feet again. Content and happiness were expressed on her face as she listened.

"It will be a comfort to you to know," he said, "that no one will lose anything by me; every demand will be met, every penny will be paid. In my mansion"--his study of the law and his devotion to his faith led him occasionally into a biblical phrase--"are three stars. First, the Eternal God; next, you, my beloved; next, our good name."

"That is safe in your keeping, dear," she said.

"And will ever be, so far as human endeavour can aid me. You will be glad to hear, too, that the townspeople sympathise with us in our trouble."

"I am very glad: it was proved by the kindness that was shown to me when I was taken out of the fire. Who that lives to know you does not learn to honour you?"

She held his hand in a tender clasp, and kissed it repeatedly.

"I will tell you something. I am beginning already to acquire a new sense. When you look at me I feel it. You are looking at me now. When your eyes are not on my face I know it. I shall learn a good deal very soon, very soon! I do not intend to be a burden to you."

This was said with tender gaiety.

"You can never be that." He touched her eyes. "Henceforth I am your eyes. It is a poor return; for you, Rachel, are my very life."

"Dear husband! Dear love! Kiss me. I want to fall asleep with those words in my ears. You will not stop up long?"

"I will go down and put out the lights and see that all is safe. Then I will come up at once. Sleep, my life, sleep!"

He passed his fingers caressingly across her forehead, and she fell asleep with a smile on her lips.

He stole softly from the room, and went down and made the house safe; then he returned to the bedroom.

The smile had left Rachel's lips; her face was paler, and there was a worn look on it. A terrible fear entered his heart.

"O God! if she should die! O God! if I should lose her!"

He took his silk taleth from its bag, and wrapping it around him, put on his hat, and stood and prayed, with his face to the east:--

"How precious is Thy mercy, O God! The children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy

wing. They are satisfied with the richness of Thy house, and Thou causest them to drink of the stream of Thy delight. For with Thee is the fountain of life; by Thy light only do we see light. O continue Thy mercy unto them who know Thee, and Thy righteousness to the upright of heart!"

One line in the prayer he repeated again and again--

"For with Thee is the fountain of life; by Thy light only do we see light."

And so he prayed till midnight, and the one supplication into which all else was merged was sent forth with touching pathos from his very heart of hearts--

"O Lord of the universe, Giver of all good, humbly I beseech Thee to spare my beloved! Take her not from me! Let her live, let her live, to bless my days! Let not darkness overwhelm me. It is Thy hand that directs the fountain of life."

His prayers ended, he sat by the bedside watching his wife's face, and listening to her breathing.

And Rachel slept on, and dreamt of the child whose face she was never to see on earth.

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE TEMPTATION AND THE FALL.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNTO THEM A CHILD IS BORN.

Three weeks of great anxiety followed. Despite the courage with which Rachel had borne the sudden visitation of blindness, her physical strength did not hold out, and, by the doctor's orders, she kept her bed.

During these weeks Aaron had enough to do to put his affairs in order, and he had the additional trouble that matters turned out worse than he had anticipated. For security's sake, and to set the borrowers at ease, he transferred all the pledges that had been saved to another pawnbroker; those which were destroyed he considered himself bound in honour and common honesty to make good. He made no demur to the claims that were brought against him, but settled them promptly, and settled, also, all his trade debts. What with all this harassing business and his domestic sorrows, he was occupied day and night; but he was careful that Rachel should not suspect how bad things were with him.

The doctor came daily, and Rachel's time was very near. At every visit Aaron watched his face for hopeful news of Rachel's condition; but the doctor volunteered no information, and only gave instructions to do this or that. This reticence was torture to Aaron, and one day he begged the doctor to conceal nothing from him.

"There is nothing to conceal," said the doctor. "Her state is critical; but what else could be expected? Consider what she has passed through."

"I think of nothing else, of nothing else!" said Aaron, his fingers working convulsively, for a question was trembling on his lips which he felt he must ask, but to which he could scarcely give utterance.

At length he found courage.

"Doctor, will she live?"

The doctor bit his lip as he gazed upon Aaron's misery.

"Whatever lies in my power shall be done, but human skill and science have their limitations. We are all in God's hands."

And with these words, and a look of compassion, he departed.

Aaron stood motionless awhile. We are all in God's hands! How often has that been said, and how terrible is its import! Human science and skill have done all it is in their power to do, the rest is with God. Aaron reasoned the true meaning away.

"Yes, we are all in God's hands," he murmured; "old and young, rich and poor, the strong and the feeble alike. It is so with one and all. I thank God he did not tell me to prepare for the worst!"

He drew comfort, not from what was said, but from what was not said. He continued to commune with himself.

"How can she be otherwise than weak? And doctors sometimes think it their duty not to look on the brightest side. My Rachel will be spared to me. God will not take her away."

He went up to her. A nurse he had engaged was in the room; she could come for only a week, her services at the end of that time being required elsewhere.

She put her fingers to her lips as he entered.

"Is she asleep?" he asked, in a whisper.

She nodded in reply; but when he approached the bed, Rachel held out her hand to him.

"Nurse thought you were asleep, dear," he said, bending down to her.

"I may have been," she answered. "I fall off into a doze a dozen times an hour, it seems, but I always know when you are near me."

She put her hand to her head.

"Are you in pain, my life?"

"Oh no. I am rather weak, but I shall get strong soon. Whenever I doze I see our dear one, the blessing God is sending us. Aaron, dear love, do not be anxious for me. I shall hold our darling in my arms."

The nurse gave him a warning look not to encourage her to talk, and, understanding the silent monition, he kissed Rachel tenderly, and went down to muse and pray.

The settlement of all his debts had left him almost a beggar. He owed not a shilling, except to the doctor, who had said nothing about his account; the week's money for the nurse was carefully put away: he could not have afforded to engage her for a longer term, for all the money he had left in the world amounted to barely two pounds. What was he to do when that was spent? Commence business again upon borrowed capital? That seemed to be the only course open to him. But who would lend it to him? It was no small sum that would be required, and all his friends, with the exception of Mr. Moss, were poor. Mr. Moss was comparatively a new friend, and he could not expect him to render such substantial assistance without security. And what security could he offer but his own bare word? There were money-lenders; the newspapers teemed with their advertisements. It would be folly to apply to any one of them for so large a loan as fifty pounds, which sum, he calculated, was the least he could begin business again with; he would be sure to be met with a refusal. But what was he to do?

He thrust these worldly contemplations aside, and indeed it was impossible for him to dwell upon them with a heavier sorrow at his door, and with a dread crisis so very near. He trusted in God--yes; but he knew that a man must work for his livelihood. Well, he would work; he was willing and ready for any honest occupation; but he must wait--for what? He became confused. The pressing worldly necessity, with its exacting and imperative demands, and the overwhelming human sorrow were contending for supremacy. He stepped into the passage, and softly ascending the stairs, listened at Rachel's door. As he stood there the nurse came out.

"Go for the doctor," she whispered.

He flew. There was no conflict now in his mind between the two extremities; his worldly trouble was forgotten; he thought only of his beloved wife and their unborn child. The doctor was not in, but was expected in a quarter of an hour, and would be sure to come round at once. Leaving an urgent entreaty not to delay a moment, Aaron hastened back to his house, and on the road found himself intercepted by Prissy, who had grown taller but no stouter since the night upon which she introduced herself to him. By reason of her increased height she looked thinner and scraggier than ever; as usual, Victoria Regina, who had grown plumper and rounder, was in the girl's arms.

"Mr. Cohen, Mr. Cohen!" cried Prissy.

"I can't stop now," he replied, passing her quickly.

But Prissy's long legs were as active as his, and though Victoria Regina was a heavy weight to carry, she kept pace with him.

"D'yer know wot some people's saying about yer, Mr. Cohen?"

"Never mind, never mind, my good girl; I have no time to listen."

"They're saying, everybody is," persisted Prissy, "that yer as good as ruined, and that yer 'aven't got a shilling left to pay yer way with."

"What does it matter what some people say, Prissy? There are good and bad, just and unjust. Never listen to tittle-tattle."

"'Ow's it to be 'elped, Mr. Cohen, when it's dinged in yer ears? Mr. Whimpole, he ses he sor wot was coming all along, and when I ups and gives 'im a bit o' my mind he slaps my face he does, and pushes me into the gutter. I don't mind that, but no one's going to speak agin yer when I'm by. It ain't likely after all yer've done for me."

"You are a good girl, but take no notice of what Mr. Whimpole says. There are many here who still have a good word for me."

"Plenty, sir, and that's wot makes Mr. Whimpole mad; he can't make everybody think as he wants 'em to. There's plenty as speaks up for yer. You look ill, Mr. Cohen. I 'ope missis is no wus, I do."

"She is still weak and ill, Prissy; but she will get well soon--eh, Prissy?--she will get well soon?"

He cast a swift anxious look upon her; even from the lips of this poor girl he sought the comfort of a consoling word.

"Yes, sir, she's sure to. Don't you worry yerself, Mr. Cohen. Gawd won't let nothink wrong 'appen to 'er. He knows what He's up to, Gawd does. Wot did Mrs. Cohen say 'erself to me more nor once? 'Be a good gal,' she ses, 'and tell the truth, and be as kind as yer can to everybody, and Gawd'll look after yer.' And ain't she good, sir, and does she ever say anythink but the truth, and ain't she as kind as kind can be to everybody about 'er? Why, it's in everybody's mouth, 'xcept Mr. Whimpole's! Nobody 'xcept 'im's got a word to say agin '*er*. She's sure to get well, Mr. Cohen, and then yer'll let me see 'er, sir, won't yer?"

"Yes, Prissy, yes," said Aaron, laying his hand for a moment on Prissy's tangled hair. He had reached his house, and was unlocking the door. "She will get well, please God, and you shall see her. Thank you, thank you, my good girl; and now run away."

"I'm off, Mr. Cohen," said Prissy; "this is going to bring yer luck, it is." And slipping a large paper parcel into his hand, she scuttled away.

He did not know what it was he held until he reached his room, and then he examined it. When he removed the paper he saw a horseshoe and two penny pieces which had been rubbed bright with sand, so that they shone like gold. Something shone in Aaron's eyes as he gazed at the humble offering. He smiled wistfully, and muttering, "It is an omen of good fortune; God bless you, little Prissy!" put the shoe and the pennies carefully aside. Then he stepped softly up the stairs, and gently tapped at the bedroom door.

"How is she, nurse?"

"Bearing up wonderfully, sir."

"Thank God! The doctor will be here presently. I will wait for him at the street door."

He had not long to wait; in a very short time he saw the welcome form turning the corner, and the doctor, with a friendly, smiling nod, passed into the house.

Aaron paced to and fro in the room below, and waited for the word that was to bring joy or despair to his soul. He had put his slippers on, in order that his footsteps should not be heard. In such times of tribulation his thoughts were invariably directed to the Divine footstool; as with all devout Jews, prayer was part of his life, and never, since the day of his birth, had he prayed so earnestly and fervently as now. Every few moments he paused in the supplications he was sending forth, and went into the passage and listened. He heard no sound, not a sob, not a cry; and after remaining in the passage several minutes, he returned to his room and resumed his prayers. His heart was with Rachel, and he knew that she was thinking of him. In the light of the perfect love that existed between them, in the anxious expectancy of these lagging minutes, what mattered poverty or riches, what mattered mere worldly misfortune? A stout spirit, a strong shoulder to the wheel, and all would be well; thus much could a right-minded man do with a cheerful spirit. But here and now he was helpless, impotent; here and now was impending a graver issue, which he was powerless to influence. A life--the life of his beloved--was hanging in the balance; and all he could do was to wait, and hope, and pray.

Hush! What was that? An infant's wail--the cry of a new-born child! With his heart in his ears he stood in the passage, then sank upon the stairs, with his face in his hands. His child lived--but Rachel! how was it with her? "Lord of the universe," he prayed, inwardly, "spare my beloved! With Thee is the fountain of life; by Thy light only do we see light. Let Thy light shine upon me and upon her!"

The bedroom door opened and closed, and the doctor came down. The passage was dark, for it was now evening, and Aaron could not see the doctor's face. Taking Aaron's arm, which shook in his grasp like a leaf in a strong wind, the doctor led him into the sitting-room, and lit the gas.

"Doctor!" implored Aaron, with clasped hands.

"You have a little girl."

"And Rachel--my wife!"

"Be comforted. She is in no immediate danger. She is a brave and noble woman. I will return in a couple of hours. The nurse will tell you when you can go up and see her."

Aaron laid his head upon the table and wept.

CHAPTER XIX.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

"Aaron!"

"My beloved!"

"Is our darling beautiful?"

"Very beautiful--like you."

"You spoil me, dear; you think too much of me."

"It is not possible, Rachel. Without you my life would not be perfect; without you I should be a broken man."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she said, clasping his hand tight. "It is out of my power to repay you for all your goodness to me."

"You repay me every moment of your life. Not for a throne would I exchange my place by your side; not for a palace would I exchange my humble home, with you to hallow it." Their lips met, and there was silence in the room awhile.

"Dear husband, you are not disappointed that our child is a girl?"

"I am rejoiced that we have with us a daughter in Israel. What greater happiness could I desire? When you are strong, when I hear your footsteps about the house again, all will be well."

A holy joy dwelt in her face. "My darling, my darling!" she murmured, as she held the sleeping babe to her breast. "I had a fear, but it is gone, a fear that our precious one would be deprived of sight. What happiness entered my heart when the doctor told me that her eyes were bright and beautiful, and that she could see! I was fearful that my affliction might be visited upon her. It would have broken my heart. But I am blessed--I am happy; our child can see the light, the green fields, the flowers. If only the gracious Lord will not take her, if only He will spare her to live to an honoured old age!"

"He will, He will, my beloved! We must not talk any more. Sleep and grow strong."

He sat by her bedside in silence, gazing upon her face, which was as the face of an angel, and then he stole softly downstairs. He had much to occupy his thoughts; Rachel's danger happily passed, as he hoped, he could turn his attention to his worldly affairs, which, indeed, being at a desperate pass, would have forced themselves to the front under any circumstances. By the doctor's orders he had been compelled to make certain purchases which had not only emptied his purse, but had driven him to the necessity of parting with two or three articles of jewellery which he and Rachel possessed. These proceeds gone he was an absolute beggar.

Never in his life had he been placed in so serious a position. Difficulties had been encountered and confronted with courage and success, times of embarrassment had been tided over, losses had been made good, and he had fought his way cheerfully; but now his heart sank within him at the prospect that was opening out. Rachel needed not only care and unremitting attention, but delicacies in the shape of food, to keep up her strength. Nourishing soups, a glass of port wine, a chicken--these were no trifles to a man in Aaron's position; and, unable to afford the regular services of a servant, he had to look after these matters himself, to perform domestic work, to cook, and to keep the whole house in order. The nurse's attention was devoted solely to the sick-room, and he could not therefore look to assistance from her. Prissy made her appearance daily, but Aaron dismissed her quickly, feeling the injustice of accepting services for which he could not pay. It was no easy matter to get rid of Prissy, who was not only willing but anxious to remain, and she feebly protested against being turned away so unceremoniously. Her protests would have been more vigorous had she not entertained a certain awe of Aaron's strength of character, before which she, as it were, was compelled to prostrate herself. Thus Aaron, from force of circumstance and from his inherent sense of justice, was thrown entirely upon his own resources.

Counting the money in his purse he calculated that it was sufficient to last for nine or ten days. In four days the nurse would take her departure, and then he and Rachel and their babe would be left alone in the house. At the expiration of less than a week after that he must be prepared to face the most serious difficulties. He had friends in London, to whom he had already written, and had received replies of regret that they were unable to assist him. Mr. Moss had been so good a friend that he hardly dared appeal again to him, and he resolved to leave it to the last moment. With a troubled heart, and hardly having the strength to hope against hope, he went about the house and attended to his duties. The four days passed, the nurse, having taken her leave of Rachel, came down to Aaron to receive her wages, and bid him good-bye. He paid her with a sad smile, and thanked her for her services. The "good-day" exchanged, she lingered a moment. With quick apprehension he divined why she delayed.

"You have something to say to me, nurse, about my wife."

"Yes, Mr. Cohen, I have," she replied; "and I am glad you have mentioned it, as I did not know how to bring it out." She paused again.

"Well, nurse?"

"I think you ought to know, Mr. Cohen, that your wife is not so well as you suppose."

"Nurse!"

"She keeps it from you, sir, and has begged me not to alarm you, but it is my duty. I should never forgive myself if I went away without speaking. No, sir, she is far from well, and is not getting on as she ought. She grows weaker and weaker--and baby, too, is not thriving. It is that which keeps Mrs. Cohen back."

"What can be done, nurse?" asked Aaron, the agony of his feelings depicted on his countenance. "Tell me--only tell me!"

"It isn't for me to say, Mr. Cohen. If I were you I would ask the doctor to speak plainly."

"I will, I will. Nurse, does she suffer?"

"She's just the one to suffer, sir, and to say nothing. It would be a dreadful thing for you, sir, if----" But here the woman stopped suddenly and bit her lip. She had said more than she intended. "Good-day, sir, and I hope we may all be wrong."

He caught her arm. "No, no, nurse. I will beg the doctor to speak plainly to me; but he will not be here till to-morrow, and I cannot go to him and leave my wife and child alone in the house. Finish what you were about to say. 'It would be a dreadful thing if----'"

"Well, sir, it is best to face the truth. If your poor lady was to die."

"Great God! There is danger, then?"

"I am afraid there is, sir. Don't take on so, sir, don't! I am sorry I spoke."

"You have done what is right," Aaron groaned.

"We must all of us be prepared, sir; trouble comes to all of us."

"Alas, it is a human heritage! But you do not know what this means to me--you do not know what it means to me."

"Perhaps I have made things out worse than they are; I hope so, I am sure. But you ask the doctor, sir, and don't give way. I shall think of your lady a good deal when I'm gone."

With that, and with a sympathetic look at him, the woman departed.

At length, at length, the truth had been spoken; at length, at length, he knew the worst. It was

as if a sentence of death had been pronounced. His Rachel, his beloved wife, the tenderest, the truest that man had ever been blessed with, was to be taken from him. His child, also, perhaps; but that was a lesser grief, upon which he had no heart to brood. His one overwhelming anxiety was for Rachel, who, as it now seemed to him, was lying at death's door in the room above.

He had some soup ready, and he took a basin up to her.

"Can you drink this, dear?"

"I will try."

He assisted her to rise, and put a pillow at her back. As he fed her he watched her face, and he saw that it had grown wan and thin. It was well for both of them that she could not see him; the sight of his agony would have deepened her sufferings and added to his own. With wonderful control he spoke to her with some semblance of cheerfulness, and his voice and words brought a smile to her lips. So through the day he ministered to her, and every time he left her room his fears grew stronger. He did not expect the doctor till the following day, and he was startled and alarmed when he made his appearance at nightfall.

"I happened to be passing," he said to Aaron, "and I thought I would drop in to see how we are getting along."

When they came down from the sick-room Aaron observed a graver expression on his face.

"It is unfortunate that you have no nurse, Mr. Cohen," he said; "your wife needs constant care and watchfulness."

"She will have it, doctor. Is she any better, sir? How is she progressing?"

"She is still the same, still the same, no better and no worse."

"It is not in her favour, doctor, that she remains the same?"

"No, I cannot conscientiously say it is. At this stage a little additional strength would be of great assistance to her. Nature's forces require rallying; but we will hope for the best, Mr. Cohen."

"We will, doctor, but will hope avail?"

His sad voice struck significantly upon the doctor's ears. "Perhaps not, but it is a consolation."

"There are griefs, sir, for which there is no consolation. I cannot wrest my thoughts from the selfish view. There are sorrows that come so close home as to take complete possession of us."

"It is human, Mr. Cohen, it is natural; but we must not shut out resignation, fortitude, submission."

"Doctor, I implore you to conceal nothing from me. It will be merciful."

"What is it you wish to know?"

"Tell me exactly how my wife and child are, so that I may be prepared"--his voice faltered--"for the worst."

"You do not know, then?"

"I fear--but I do not know."

"We doctors have frequently hard duties to perform, Mr. Cohen, duties which to others appear cruel. I will speak plainly; it will be best. It is due to your wife's gentle and loving nature that I have not done so before, and I yielded to her imploring solicitations, deeming it likely that you would discover the state of the case from your own powers of observation. Mr. Cohen, I have rarely had so sad and affecting an experience as I find here. It would be wrong for me to say that your wife is not in danger; she has been in danger for some days past, and it is only an inward moral strength that has supported her through the crisis. Physically she is very weak, spiritually she is very strong. She has still a vital power which, under certain conditions, will be of immense assistance to her, which will enable her--so far as it is in human power to judge--to pull through. You will gather from my words that her safety, nay, her life, depends not so much upon herself as upon others; upon you to some extent, but to a much greater extent upon her babe. It is her deep love for you both that has sustained her, that still sustains her. Were anything to happen to either of you I should fear the gravest results. It would react upon her, and in her delicate state there would be no hope."

"I am strong and well bodily, doctor; nothing is likely to happen to me. Her danger, then, lies in our child?"

"You have clearly expressed it. Her life hangs upon the life of her child. So fine and delicate are her susceptibilities, so profound is her love for those who are dear to her, that I, a doctor,

who is supposed to be nothing if he is not scientific, am compelled to confess that here my learned theories are at fault. I will no longer disguise from you that her life hangs upon the balance."

"And our child, doctor, how is it with her?"

"I can answer you with less certainty. Something of the delicate susceptibilities of the mother has in the course of nature entered her child's being. The baby is not strong, but she may grow into strength; it is as yet a problem to be solved, and a physician's skill is almost powerless to help to a happy issue. Hope, Mr. Cohen, hope; and in bidding you hope, and in explaining matters to you, I have not said all that it is necessary for me to say. There remains something more."

"One question first, doctor," said Aaron, in a hushed voice; "if our child lives, there is hope that my wife will live?"

"A strong hope; I speak with confidence."

"And if our child dies?"

"The mother will die. Forgive me for my cruel frankness."

"It is the best kindness you can show me. You have something more to tell me."

"Something almost as cruel, but it must be spoken. Mr. Cohen, your wife has been severely tried; the shock of the fire, the shock of her sudden blindness, both coming so close upon her expected confinement, have left their effects upon her. If things take a favourable turn with her it will be imperative, in the course of the next three or four weeks--earlier if possible, and if she can be removed with safety--that you take her to a milder climate, where she can be nursed into permanent' strength. We are going to have a severe winter, and I will not answer for its effects upon her. From three or four weeks hence till the spring in a warmer atmosphere, where there are no fogs or east winds, will be of invaluable service to her, will set her up probably for many years to come. You must recognise this yourself, and if by any possibility or sacrifice you can manage it, you must do so."

"Is it vitally necessary, doctor?"

"You have used the right word--it is vitally necessary. And now, good-night, Mr. Cohen. I leave my best wishes behind me."

CHAPTER XX.

A MOMENTOUS NIGHT.

Each day, each hour, Aaron became more anxious and troubled. In the doctor's plain speaking there was no reading between the lines, and no possible mistaking of his meaning. The stern truth had been revealed, and there was no arguing it away. Aaron saw clearly what was before him, but he could not see a way out of his difficulties, nor to doing what he was warned it was imperative upon him that he should do, in the happy event of Rachel's coming safely through her present crisis. There was no apparent change in her; she lay weak and powerless in her bed, receiving Aaron always with sweet and patient words, and nursing her child as well as her feeble state would allow her. The condition of the babe pained and troubled him. He observed no indication of suffering, no querulousness in the child; it was simply that she lay supine, as though life were flowing quietly out of her. Every time Aaron crept up to the bedside and found the babe asleep, he leant anxiously over her to catch the sound of her breathing; and so faint and low was her respiration that again and again he was smitten with a fear that she had passed away. Acutely sensitive and sensible now of every sign in his wife, it became with him an absolute conviction that the doctor was not mistaken when he declared that her life and the life of her babe were inseparable, that if one lived the other would live, that if one died the other would die. During this torturing time strange thoughts oppressed him, and oppressed him more powerfully because he scarcely understood them. The tenor of these thoughts resolved itself into the one passionate desire to do something--he knew not what--to keep his wife with him even if she should lose her babe, and towards the accomplishment of which he felt that a power outside the sphere of human influence was necessary. Normally he was a man of sound understanding, not given to mysticism nor to a belief in the effects of supernatural power upon mundane affairs; but during these agitating days there was a danger of his healthy mind becoming unbalanced. Human resource had failed him; he must seek elsewhere for aid; if he were to be successful in

steering his beloved to a haven of peace and health it must be through outside influences which had not yet made themselves visible to him. "Show me the way, O gracious Lord, show me the way!" This was his constant prayer, and although in less agitated times he would have blamed himself for praying for a seeming impossibility, he encouraged himself in it now, in the dim and despairing hope that some miracle would occur to further his agonising desire.

Meanwhile his funds had run completely out, and he saw with terror the wolf approaching the door. He had not the means to pay for the necessaries of the next twenty-four hours. Then it was that he resolved to make an urgent appeal to Mr. Moss. He would tell him everything, he would reveal his hapless position in the plainest terms, and he would beg for an immediate temporary loan of money, which he would promise to faithfully repay when the cloud was lifted from his house.

It was a cold and bitter evening. The snow had been falling heavily; a fierce wind was raging. He thought of poor people he had seen in such inclement weather as this walking along with sad faces, homeless and hungry; he recalled the picture of a young good-looking woman whom he had seen years ago in a London park during a heavy snow-storm; she was thinly clad, want was in her face, she pressed a babe to her bosom. Shivering with cold she walked slowly onward, and looked around with despairing eyes for succour. He slipped a shilling into her hand, and as he hurried away, he heard, with a feeling of remonstrant shame, her gratitude expressed in the words "God Almighty bless you, sir!" as though he had performed an act of extraordinary generosity. Between this wretched woman and his beloved Rachel there seemed to be an affinity, and his heart was torn with woe. He was the breadwinner; to him she looked for food, for warmth, for shelter; he was her shield. Could he not keep desolation and despair from her? could he not keep death from her? He did not know that the angel was already in his house.

The doctor had paid a visit early in the morning, and had spoken even more gravely of Rachel.

"Much depends," he said, "upon the next day or two. For some days past she has been silently suffering, and I have succeeded in piercing the veil of sorrow which hangs upon her soul. She fears that her child will not live, and if unhappily her fears are confirmed----" He did not finish the sentence; there was no need for further words to convey his meaning. "This harrowing thought," he continued, "keeps her from rest, prevents her sleeping. There are periods of sickness when sleep means life. I will send round a sleeping draught, which you will give her at eight o'clock to-night; it will ensure her oblivion for a good twelve hours, and if when she wakes all is well with the child, all will be well with her."

"Can you tell me, doctor, why this fear has grown stronger within these last few days?"

"The babe lies quietly in her arms; she does not hear its voice, and only by its soft breathing can she convince herself that it lives. Tender accents from the child she has brought into the world would fall as a blessing upon her sorrowing heart. At any moment the child may find its voice; let us hope that it will very soon."

The sleeping draught was sent to Aaron, and it was now on the table. The hour was six--in a couple of hours he would give it to her; and while he waited he sat down to write his letter to Mr. Moss. It was a long letter, for he had much to say, and he was but half way through when a postman's knock summoned him to the street door. He hurried there quickly, so that the knock should not be repeated, and to his surprise received a telegram. It was from Mr. Moss, and it informed him that that gentleman was coming to see him upon a very important matter, and that he was to be sure not to leave home that night. Aaron wondered what this important matter could be, and there was a joyful feeling in his heart that the telegram might be the presage of good fortune. He knew enough of Mr. Moss's kindly nature to be convinced that he would not be the herald of bad news. "There is a rift in the clouds," he murmured, as he pondered over the message; "I see the light, I see the light!" Would Mr. Moss's errand open up a means of giving Rachel the benefit of soft air and sunshine in a more genial clime? He prayed that it might, and he had never prayed more fervently. But the night was inclement, and Mr. Moss might not be able in consequence to pay the promised visit. Time pressed; the necessity was imminent, and would brook no delay; therefore he determined to finish his letter and to post it this night, in the event of Mr. Moss not making his appearance.

It wanted a few minutes to eight when his task was completed. He read the letter over, and addressed an envelope, but did not stamp it; he had but one stamp, and every penny was of importance. He looked at the clock; eight o'clock. With gentle steps he went up to Rachel.

"It is time for the draught, my love," he said.

"I will take it, dear."

He poured it into a glass, and she drank it reclining in his arms.

"If our dear one lives, Aaron," said Rachel, "we will call her Ruth, after your mother."

"It shall be so, love," answered Aaron, laying her head upon the pillow. "God will vouchsafe the mercy to us. She will live, Rachel, she will live!" Desirous that she should not talk now that she had taken the sleeping draught, he kissed her tenderly and would have left her, but she held him by the hand.

"Has the doctor told you that I am in sorrow, Aaron?"

"You have the gift of divinity, love. Yes, he has told me, and he said that to-morrow, perhaps, please God, you will hear our darling's voice."

"Did he say so? Heaven bless him! She is sleeping?"

"Yes, beloved."

"I pray that the good doctor may be right. I shall dream of it. To-morrow--perhaps to-morrow! Ah, what happiness! It needs but that, dear husband, it needs but that! How tired you must be with all that you are doing for me! Kiss me again. God guard you!"

And so she fell asleep.

The small fire in the room required attention, and Aaron arranged each piece of coal and cinder with scrupulous care; never had there been so much need for thrift as now. In all his movements there was not the least sound; so softly did he step that his feet might have been shod with velvet pile. One of Rachel's arms was lying exposed on the counterpane; he gently shifted it beneath the warm coverings; then he quitted the apartment and closed the door upon his wife and child, and upon the Angel of Death, who was standing by the bedside to receive a departing soul.

Aaron did not return to his room below; he stood by the open street door, looking anxiously up and down for Mr. Moss, and thinking with sadness that if that gentleman delayed his visit he would be compelled in the morning to part with his silver-mounted pipe, which was the only article of any value that was left to him. Of all his personal belongings he cherished this pipe the most; so often had she filled it for him that he regarded it almost as part of herself. It was not between his lips at the present moment; he had no heart to smoke. For nearly an hour he stood upon the watch, interrupting it only for the purpose of creeping upstairs to see if Rachel were still sleeping. At nine o'clock Mr. Moss made his welcome appearance in the street; even as he turned the corner at a distance of many yards Aaron recognised him. He was enveloped in his great fur coat, which was pulled up close to his ears; he was puffing at one of his large cigars, and between the puffs was humming a celebrated air from the latest operatic success--

"Toreador attento,
Toreador, Toreador,
Non obliarche un occhio tutt' ardor
Adammirarti è intento,
E che t' aspett' amor,
Toreador t' aspett' aspetta amor."

He scorned the English tongue in operas, and though by no means a well-educated man, never sang but in Italian. The last flourish brought him close to Aaron.

"Why, Cohen" he said, in a hearty tone, "what are you standing at the door for on such a cold night?"

"I have been expecting you," Aaron answered, "and I did not wish you to knock. Rachel has taken a sleeping draught, and must not be disturbed."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Mr. Moss, accompanying his friend into the house. "How is she?"

"Not well, not at all well, I am grieved to say. Mr. Moss, my heart is almost broken." He turned aside with a sob.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Mr. Moss. "That will never do, Cohen. You mustn't give way--a strong, clever man like you. Look on the best side. Things will right themselves; they will, mark my words. I am here to set them right."

"To set them right!" exclaimed Aaron, all his pulses throbbing.

"Yes, to set them right. What is this?--an envelope addressed to me?"

"I was writing you a letter when your telegram arrived."

"And then you did not stop to finish it?"

"I did finish it, Mr. Moss, in case you did not come."

"May I read it?"

"Yes; it will explain matters; you will learn from it what it would pain me to tell you in any other way."

"Smoke a cigar while I read."

Aaron took the cigar, and laid it aside, and then Mr. Moss, who had taken off his thick coat, sat down and perused the letter.

"I have come in the nick of time, Cohen," he said. "There is a silver lining to every cloud; I have brought it with me."

"I felt," said Aaron, his hopes rising, "that you could not be the bearer of bad news."

"Not likely, friend Cohen. I am the bearer of good news, of the best of news. Don't be led away; it isn't a legacy--no, no, it isn't a legacy, but something almost as good, and I hope you will not throw away the chance."

"If it is anything that will relieve me from my terrible embarrassments it is not likely that I shall throw it away."

"It will do that for a certainty, and there is money attaching to it which I have in my pocket, and which I can pay over to you this very night."

"How can I thank you? how can I thank you?"

"Don't try to, and don't be surprised at what you hear. It is a strange piece of business, and I should have refused to undertake it if I had not said to myself, 'This will suit my friend Cohen; it will lift him out of his trouble.' But upon my word, now that I'm here I don't know how to commence. I never met with anything like it in all my life, and if you were well off you would be the last man in the world I should have dreamt of coming to. But you are not well off, Cohen; you have lost everything; Rachel is ill, and the doctor says she must be taken out of this cold and dismal climate to a place where she can see the sun, and where the air is mild and warm. I dare say you're thinking, 'Moss is speaking in a strange way,' and so I am; but it's nothing to what I've got to tell you. Cohen, what will happen if you can't afford to do as the doctor advises you?"

"Do not ask me," groaned Aaron. "I dare not think of it--I dare not, I dare not!"

"I don't say it unkindly, Cohen, but it seems to me to be a matter of life and death." Aaron clasped his forehead. "Very well, then; and don't forget that it is in your own hands. Before I commence I must say a word about myself. I can't do all you ask me in this letter; as I'm a living man I should be glad to assist you, but I have entered into a large speculation which has taken all my spare cash, and all I could afford would be eight or ten pounds. How long would that last you? In two or three weeks it would be gone, and you would be no better off than you were before; and as to taking Rachel to the South of France, that would be quite out of the question."

"But you held out hope to me," said the trembling Aaron, "you said you were the bearer of good news!"

"I said what is true, Cohen, but it is not my money that I have to deal with. I have brought fifty pounds with me; another man's money, entrusted to me for a special purpose, and which you can have at once if you will undertake a certain task and accept a certain responsibility. It is only out of my friendship for you, it is only because I know you to be so badly off that you hardly know which way to turn, it is only because Rachel is ill and requires what you can't afford to pay for, that it entered my mind to offer you the chance."

"Fifty pounds would be the saving of me, Mr. Moss," said Aaron, in an agony of suspense. "It would restore my Rachel to health, it would bring happiness into my life. Surely Heaven has directed you to come to my assistance!"

"You shall judge for yourself. Listen patiently to what I am going to tell you; it will startle you, but don't decide hastily or rashly. And bear in mind that what passes between us is not to be disclosed to another person on earth."

CHAPTER XXI.

OVER A BRIGHT CLOUD A BLACK SHADOW FALLS.

Mr. Moss then proceeded to unfold the nature of the mission he had undertaken for Mr. Gordon, with the particulars of which the reader has been made acquainted in the earlier chapters of this story. Aaron listened with attention and astonishment: with attention because of his anxiety to ascertain whether the proposal was likely to extricate him from his cruel position, with astonishment because the wildest stretch of his imagination would not have enabled him to

guess the purport of the singular disclosure. When Mr. Moss ceased speaking the afflicted man rose and paced the room in distress and disappointment.

"I told you I should startle you," said Mr. Moss, with a shrewd observance of his friend's demeanour, and, for the good of that friend, preparing for a battle. "What do you say to it?"

"It is impossible--impossible!" muttered Aaron. "I told you also," continued Mr. Moss, calmly, "not to decide hastily or rashly. In the way of ordinary business I should not, as I have said, have dreamt of coming to you, and I should not have undertaken the mission. But the position in which you are placed is not ordinary, and you are bound to consider the matter not upon its merits alone, but in relation to your circumstances. I need not say I shall make nothing out of it myself."

"Indeed you need not," said Aaron, pressing Mr. Moss's hand. "Pure friendship has brought you here, I know, I know; but surely you must see that it is impossible for me to assume the responsibility."

"I see nothing of the kind. Honestly and truly, Cohen, I look upon it as a windfall, and if you turn your back upon it you will repent it all your life. What is it I urge you to do? A crime?"

"No, no, I do not say that. Heaven forbid!"

"You are naturally startled and agitated. Cohen, you are a man of intelligence and discernment. My wife has often said, 'If Mr. Cohen were a rich man he would be one of the heads of our people.' She is right; she always is. But there are times when a man cannot exercise his judgment, when he is so upset that his mind gets off its balance. It has happened to me, and I have said afterwards, 'Moss, you are a fool': it happens to all of us. Let me put the matter clearly before you. Have you ever been in such trouble as you are in now?"

"Never in my life."

"Misfortune after misfortune has fallen upon you. All your money is gone; everything is gone; you can't get through this week without assistance. You have tried all your friends, and they cannot help you; you have tried me, and I can only offer you what will meet the necessities of the next few days. It is known that you are badly off, and you cannot get credit; if you could it would cut you to the soul, because you know you would be owing money that there was no expectation of your being able to pay. You would be ashamed to look people in the face; you would lose your sense of self-respect, and every fresh step you take would be a step down instead of up. Poor Rachel is lying sick almost to death; she has a stronger claim than ever upon your love, upon your wisdom. The doctor has told you what she requires, and of the possible consequences if you are unable to carry out his directions. Cohen, not one of these things must be lost sight of in the answer you give to what I propose."

Great beads of perspiration were on Aaron's forehead as he murmured, "I do not lose sight of them. They are like daggers in my heart."

"Strangely and unexpectedly," pursued Mr. Moss, "a chance offers itself that will extricate you out of all your difficulties. You will not only receive immediately a large sum of money, but you will be in receipt of a hundred a year, sufficient to keep your family in a modest way. What are you asked to do in return for this good fortune? To take care of an innocent child, who has no one to look after her, who will never be claimed, and about whom you will never be troubled. You can engage a servant to attend to her, and when you explain everything to Rachel she will approve of what you have done. Before I came to you, Cohen, I consulted a gentleman--Dr. Spenlove--who has a kind heart and correct principles, and he agreed with me that the transaction was perfectly honourable. I have no doubt of it myself, or I should not be here. Be persuaded, Cohen; it will be a benevolent, as well as a wise, act, and all your difficulties will be at an end. What is it Shakespeare says? 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood,----' you know the rest. Why, there are thousands who would jump at the opportunity. Come, now, for Rachel's sake!" Mr. Moss was genuinely sincere in his advice, and he spoke with earnestness and feeling.

"The child is a girl, Mr. Moss?"

"A dear little girl, of the same age as your own."

"Hush! You forget. This little stranger is born of Christian parents."

"That is no crime, Cohen."

"Do I say it is? But we are Jews. The stipulation is that she should be brought up as one of our family; and, indeed, it could scarcely be otherwise. She would live her life in a Jewish household. It is that I am thinking of Mr. Moss, I am at war with my conscience."

"She will be none the worse off for living with you and Rachel. Your character is well known, and Rachel is the soul of kindness. You would be committing no sin, Cohen."

"I am not so sure."

"Then who is to know? You and Rachel are alone, and when she is able to be moved you will

take her for a time to another place. You need not return here. Rachel's health restored, you should go to London, or Liverpool, or Manchester, where your talents would have a larger field. I always thought it wrong for you to bury yourself in so small a town as this. There is no scope for you in it; you would never make your fortune here."

"If I go from this place I shall not return to it. You ask who is to know. Mr. Moss, God would know; Rachel and I would know. How can I reconcile it with my conscience to bring up a child in a faith in which she is not born? It would weigh heavily upon me."

"That is because your views are so strict. I do not see why it should weigh heavily upon you. If it were a boy I should not press it upon you; but girls are different. There is very little for them to learn. To pray--there is only one God. To be good and virtuous--there is only one code of morality. You know that well enough."

"I do know it, but still I cannot reconcile it with my conscience."

"In your position," continued Mr. Moss, perceiving that Aaron was wavering, "I should not hesitate; I should thank God that such a chance fell in my way. Even as it is, if I did not have eleven children, and expecting the twelfth, I would take this lamb into my fold--I would indeed, Cohen. But my hands are full. Cohen, let me imagine a case. It is a cold and bitter night, and the world is filled with poor struggling creatures, with little children who are being brought up the wrong way. Rachel is asleep upstairs. You are here alone. Suddenly you fancy you hear a cry in the street, the cry of a babe. You go to the door, and upon the step you see an infant lying, unsheltered, without a protector. What would you do?"

"I should bring it into my house."

"With pity in your heart, Cohen."

"I hope so. With pity in my heart."

"Poor as you are, you would share what you have with the deserted babe; you would nourish it, you would cherish it. You would say to Rachel, 'I heard a cry outside the house on this bitter night, and upon the doorstep I discovered this poor babe; I brought it in, and gave it shelter.' What would Rachel answer?"

"She is a tender-hearted woman; she would answer that I did what was right."

"Look upon it in that light, and I will continue the case. In the child's clothes you find a fifty-pound note, and a letter unsigned, to the effect that the little one has no protector, is alone in the world, and beseeching you to take charge of it and save it from destitution and degradation. No scruples as to the child being a Christian would disturb you then; you would act as humanity dictated. In the case I have imagined you would not be at war with your conscience; why should you be at war with it now?"

"Still I must reflect; and I have a question or two to ask. The name of the mother?"

"Not to be divulged."

"The name of the father?"

"The same answer. Indeed, I do not know it myself."

"Where is the child?"

"At the Salutation Hotel, in the charge of a woman I brought with me."

"My decision must be made to-night?"

"To-night."

"Supposing it to be in the affirmative, what position do you occupy in the matter in the future?"

"None whatever. The task I undertook executed, I retire, and have nothing further to do with it. Anything you chose to communicate to me would be entirely at your discretion. Voluntarily I should never make reference to it."

"What has passed between us, you informed me, is not to be disclosed to any other person?"

"To no other person whatever."

"Am I to understand that it has been disclosed to no other?"

"You are. Only Dr. Spenlove and the gentleman who entrusted me with the commission have any knowledge of it."

"How about the woman who is now taking care of the child at the Salutation Hotel?"

"She is in entire ignorance of the whole proceeding."

"Is she not aware that you have come to my house?"

"She is not. In the event of your deciding to undertake the charge I myself will bring the child here."

"Is the mother to be made acquainted with my name?"

"It is an express stipulation that she is to be kept in ignorance of it."

"And to this she consented willingly?"

"Willingly, for her child's good and her own."

"Is Dr. Spenlove to be made acquainted with it?"

"He is not."

"And the gentleman whose commission you are executing?"

"Neither is he to know. It is his own wish."

"The liberal allowance for the rearing of the child, by whom will it be paid?"

"By a firm of respectable London lawyers, whose name and address I will give you, and to whom I shall communicate by telegram to-night. All the future business will be solely between you and them, without interference from any living being."

"Mr. Moss, I thank you; you have performed the office of a friend."

"It was my desire, Cohen. Then you consent?"

"No. I must have time for reflection. In an hour from now you shall have my answer."

"Don't throw away the chance," said Mr. Moss, very earnestly. "Remember it is for Rachel's sake."

"I will remember it; but I must commune with myself. If before one hour has passed you do not see me at the Salutation Hotel, you will understand that I refuse."

"What will you do then, Cohen? How will you manage?"

"God knows. Perhaps He will direct me."

Mr. Moss considered a moment, then took ten five-pound banknotes from his pocket, and laid them on the table.

"I will leave this money with you," he said.

"No, no!" cried Aaron.

"Why not? It will do no harm. You are to be trusted, Cohen. In case you refuse I will take it back. If you do not come for me, I will come for you, so I will not wish you good-night. Don't trouble to come to the door; I can find my way out."

Aaron was alone, fully conscious that this hour was, perhaps, the most momentous in his life. The money was before him, and he could not keep his eyes from it. It meant so much. It seemed to speak to him, to say, "Life or death to your beloved wife. Reject me, and you know what will follow." All his efforts to bring himself to a calm reflection of the position were unavailing. He could not reason, he could not argue with himself. The question to be answered was not whether it would be right to take a child born of Christian parents into his house, to bring her up as one of a Jewish family, but whether his dear wife was to live or die; and he was the judge, and if he bade his friend take the money back, he would be the executioner. Of what value then would life be to him? Devout and full of faith as he was, he still, in this dread crisis, was of the earth earthy. His heart was torn with love's agony.

The means of redemption were within his reach: why should he not avail himself of them?

Rachel enjoyed life for the pleasure it gave her. Stricken with blindness as she was, he knew that she would still enjoy it, and that she would shed comfort and happiness upon all who came in contact with her. Was it for him to snap the cord, to say, "You shall no longer enjoy, you shall no longer bestow happiness upon others; you shall no longer live to lighten the trouble of many suffering mortals, to shed light and sweetness in many homes"? Was this the way to prove his love for her? No, he would not shut the door of earthly salvation which had been so providentially opened to him, he would not pronounce a sentence of death against the dear woman he had sworn to love and cherish.

Aaron was not aware that in the view he was taking he was calling to his aid only those

personal and sympathetic affections which bound him and Rachel together, and that, out of a common human selfishness, he was thrusting from the scale the purely moral and religious obligations which usually played so large a part in his conduct of life. In this dark hour love was supreme, and held him in its thrall; in this dark hour he was intensely and completely human; in this dark hour the soft breathing of a feeble woman was more potent than the sound of angels' trumpets from the Throne of Grace, the sight of a white, worn face more powerful than that of a flaming sword of justice in the skies.

He had arrived at a decision; he would receive the child of strangers into his home.

Before going to the Salutation Hotel to make the announcement to Mr. Moss he would see that his wife was sleeping, and not likely to awake during his brief absence from the house. The doctor had assured him that she would sleep for twelve hours, and he had full confidence in the assurance; but he must look upon her face once more before he left her even for a few minutes.

He stood at her bedside. She was sleeping peacefully and soundly; her countenance was now calm and untroubled, and Aaron believed that he saw in it an indication of returning health. Certainly the rest she was enjoying was doing her good. He stooped and kissed her, and she did not stir; her sweet breath fanned his cheeks. Then he turned his eyes upon his child; and as he gazed upon the infant, in its white dress, a terror for which there is no name stole into his heart. Why was the babe so still and white? Like a marble statue she lay, bereft of life and motion. He put his ear to her lips--not a breath escaped them; he laid his hand upon her heart--not the faintest flutter of a pulse was there. With feverish haste he lifted the little hand, the head, the body, and for all the response he received he might have been handling an image of stone. Gradually the truth forced itself upon him. The young soul had gone to its Maker. His child was dead!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

"If our child lives, there is hope that my wife will live?"

"A strong hope. I speak with confidence."

"And if our child dies?"

"The mother will die."

No voice was speaking in the chamber of death, but Aaron heard again these words, which had passed between the doctor and himself. If the child lived, the mother would live; if the child died, the mother would die.

A black darkness fell upon his soul. His mind, his soul, every principle of his being, was engulfed in the one despairing thought that Rachel was doomed, that, although she was sleeping peacefully before his eyes, death would be her portion when she awoke to the fact that her babe had been taken from her.

"If, when she wakes, all is well with the child, all will be well with her."

The spiritual echo of the doctor's words uttered but a few hours ago. He heard them as clearly as he had heard the others.

How to avert the threatened doom? How to save his Rachel's life? Prayer would not avail, or he would have flown to it instinctively. It was not that he asked himself the question, or that in his agony he doubted or believed in the efficacy of prayer. It may be, indeed, that he evaded it, for already a strange and terrible temptation was invading the fortress of his soul. To save the life of his beloved was he ready to commit a sin? What was the true interpretation of sin? A perpetrated act which would benefit one human being to the injury of another. Then, if an act were perpetrated which would ensure the happiness and well-doing not of one human creature, but of three, and would inflict injury upon no living soul, that act was not a sin--unmistakably not a sin. But if this were really so, wherefore the necessity for impressing it upon himself? The conviction that he was acting justly in an hour of woe, that the contemplated act was not open to doubt in a moral or religious sense, was in itself sufficient. Wherefore, then, the iteration that it was not a sin?

He could not think the matter out in the presence of Rachel and of his dead child. He stole

down to his room, and gave himself up to reflection. He turned down the gas almost to vanishing point, and stood in the dark, now thinking in silence, now uttering his thoughts aloud.

A friend had come to him and begged him to receive into his household a babe, a girl, of the same age as his own babe lying dead in the room above. She was deserted, friendless, alone. All natural claims had been abandoned, and the infant was thrown upon the world, without parents, without kith or kin. Even while he believed his own child to be alive he had decided to accept the trust. Why should he hesitate now that his child was dead? It was almost like a miraculous interposition, or so he chose to present it to himself.

"Even as we spoke together," he said aloud, "my child had passed away. Even as I hesitated the messenger was urging me to accept the trust. It was as if an angel had presented himself, and said, 'The life of your beloved hangs upon the life of a babe, and the Eternal has called her child to Him. Here is another to take her place. The mother will not know; she is blind, and has never seen the face of her babe, has scarcely heard its voice. To-morrow she lives or dies--it is the critical day in her existence--and whether she lives or dies rests with you, and with you alone. Science is powerless to help her in her hour of trial; love alone will lift her into life, into joy, into happiness; and upon you lies the responsibility. It is for you to pronounce the sentence--life or death for your beloved, life or death for a good woman who, if you do not harden your heart, will shed peace and blessings upon all around her. Embrace the gift that God has offered you. Allow no small scruples to drive you from the duty of love.' Yes," cried Aaron in a louder tone, "it was as if an angel spoke. Rachel shall live!"

If there was sophistry in this reasoning he did not see it; but the still small voice whispered,--

"It is a deception, you are about to practise. You are about to place in your wife's arms a child that is not of her blood or yours. You are about to take a Christian babe to your heart, to rear and instruct her as if she were born in the old and sacred faith that has survived long centuries of suffering and oppression. Can you justify it?"

"Love justifies it," he answered. "The good that will spring from it justifies it. A sweet and ennobling life will be saved. My own life will be made the better for it, for without my beloved I should be lost, I should be lost!"

Again the voice: "It is of yourself you are thinking."

"And if I am," he answered, "if our lives are so interwoven that one would be useless and broken without the other, where is the sin?"

Again the voice: "Ah, the sin! You have pronounced the word. Remember, it is a sin of commission."

"I know it," he said, "and I can justify it--and can I not atone for it in the future? I will atone for it, if the power is given me, by charity, by good deeds. In atonement, yes, in atonement. If I can relieve some human misery, if I can lift a weight from suffering hearts, surely that will be reckoned to my account. I record here a solemn vow to make this a purpose of my life. And the child!--she will be reared in a virtuous home, she will have a good woman for a mother. With such an example before her she cannot fail to grow into a bright and useful womanhood. That will be a good work done. I pluck her from the doubtful possibilities which might otherwise attend her; no word of reproach will ever reach her ears; she will live in ignorance of the sad circumstances of her birth. Is all this nothing? Will it not weigh in the balance?"

Again the voice: "It is much, and the child is fortunate to fall into the hands of such protectors. But I repeat, in using these arguments you are not thinking of the child; you think only of yourself."

"It is not so," he said; "not alone of myself am I thinking. I am the arbiter of my wife's earthly destiny. Having the opportunity of rescuing her from death, what would my future life be if I stand idly by and see her die before my eyes? Do you ask of me that I shall be her executioner? The heart of the Eternal is filled with love; He bestows upon us the gift of love as our divinest consolation. He has bestowed it upon me in its sublimest form. Shall I lightly throw away the gift, and do a double wrong--to the child that needs a home, to the woman whose fate is in my hands? Afflict me no longer; I am resolved, and am doing what I believe to be right in the sight of the Most High."

The voice was silent, and spake no more.

Aaron turned up the gas, took the money which Mr. Moss had left upon the table, and quietly left the house. As he approached the Salutation Hotel, which was situated at but a short distance, he saw the light of Mr. Moss's cigar in the street. That gentleman was walking to and fro, anxiously awaiting the arrival of his friend.

"You are here, Cohen," he cried, "and the hour has barely passed. That is a good omen. How pale you are, and you are out of breath. In order that absolute secrecy should be preserved I thought it best to wait outside for you. You have decided?"

"I have decided," said Aaron, in a husky voice. "I will receive the child."

"Good, good, good," said Mr. Moss, his eyes beaming with satisfaction. "You are acting like a sensible man, and you have lifted yourself out of your difficulties. I cannot tell you how glad you make me, for I take a real interest in you, a real interest. Remain here; I will bring the babe, and we will go together to your house. It is well wrapped up, and we will walk quickly to protect it from the night air. I shall not be a minute."

He darted into the hotel, and soon returned, with the babe in his arms. Upon Aaron's offering to take the child from him, he said, gaily, "No, no, Cohen'; I am more used to carrying babies than you. When you have a dozen of them, like me, I will admit that we are equal; but not till then, not till then."

Although his joyous tones jarred upon Aaron he made no remark, and they proceeded to Aaron's house, Mr. Moss being the loquacious one on the road.

"The woman I brought with me does not know, does not suspect, where the child is going to, so we are safe. She goes back to Portsmouth to-night; I shall remain till the morning. The baby is fast asleep. What would the world be without children? Did you ever think of that, Cohen? It would not be worth living in. A home without children--I cannot imagine it. When I see a childless woman I pity her from my heart. They try to make up for it with a cat or a dog, but it's a poor substitute, a poor substitute. If I had no children I would adopt one or two--yes, indeed. There is a happy future before this child; if she but knew, if she could speak, her voice would ring out a song of praise."

When they arrived at the house Aaron left Mr. Moss in the room below, and ran up to ascertain if Rachel had been disturbed. She had not moved since he last quitted the room, and an expression of profound peace was settling on her face. His own child lay white and still. A heavy sigh escaped him as he gazed upon the inanimate tiny form. He closed the door softly, and rejoined his friend.

"I will not stay with you, Cohen," said Mr. Moss; "you will have enough to do. To-morrow you must get a woman to assist in the house. You have the fifty pounds safe?" Aaron nodded. "I have some more money to give you, twenty-five pounds, three months' payment in advance of the allowance to be made to you for the rearing of the child. Here it is, and here, also, is the address of the London lawyers, who will remit to you regularly at the commencement of every quarter. You have only to give them your address, and they will send the money to you. I shall not leave Gosport till eleven in the morning, and if you have anything to say to me I shall be at the Salutation till that hour. Good-night, Cohen; I wish you happiness and good fortune."

Alone with the babe, who lay on the sofa, which had been drawn up to the fire, Aaron stood face to face with the solemn responsibility he had taken upon himself, and with the still more solemn deception to which he was pledged. For awhile he hardly dared to uncover the face of the sleeping child, but time was precious, and he nerved himself to the necessity. He sat on the sofa, and gently removed the wrappings which had protected the child from the cold night, but had not impeded its powers of respiration.

A feeling of awe stole upon him; the child he was gazing on might have been his own dead child, so strong was the resemblance between them. There was a little hair upon the pretty head, as there was upon the head of his dead babe; it was dark, as hers was; there was a singular resemblance in the features of the children; the limbs, the feet, the little baby hands, the pouting mouth, might have been cast in the same mould. The subtle instinct of a mother's love would have enabled her to know instinctively which of the two was her own babe, but it would be necessary for that mother to be blessed with sight before she could arrive at her unerring conclusion. A father could be easily deceived, and the tender age of the children would have been an important--perhaps the chief--factor in the unconscious error. "Surely," Aaron thought, as he contemplated the sleeping babe, "this is a sign that I am acting rightly." Men less devout than he might have regarded it as a Divine interposition. But though he strove still to justify his act, doubt followed every argument he used in his defence.

The next hour was occupied in necessary details which had not hitherto occurred to him. The clothing of the children had to be exchanged. It was done; the dead was arrayed as the living, the living as the dead. Mere words are powerless to express Aaron's feelings as he performed this task, and when he placed the living, breathing babe in the bed in which Rachel lay, and took his own dead child to an adjoining room, and laid it in his own bed, scalding tears ran down his cheeks. "God forgive me, God forgive me!" he murmured, again and again. He knelt by Rachel's bed, and buried his face in his hands. He had committed himself to the deception; there was no retreat now. For weal or woe, the deed was done.

And there was so much yet to do, so much that he had not thought of! Each false step he was taking was leading to another as false as that which had preceded it. But if the end justified the means--if he did not betray himself--if Rachel, awaking, suspected nothing, and heard the voice of the babe by her side, without suspecting that it was not her own, why, then, all would be well. And all through his life, to his last hour, he would endeavour to make atonement for his sin. He inwardly acknowledged it now, without attempting to gloss it over. It *was* a sin; though good would spring from it, though a blessing might attend it, the act was sinful.

His painful musings were arrested by a knock at the street door. With a guilty start he rose to

his feet, and gazed around with fear in his eyes. What did the knock portend? Was it in some dread way connected with his doings? The thought was harrowing. But presently he straightened himself, set his lips firmly, and went downstairs to attend to the summons.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLUCKED FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.

Mr. Moss stood at the street door, bearing in his arms the little iron casket which Dr. Spenlove, at the intercession of the mother who had consented to part with her child, had entrusted to him.

"In my excitement, Cohen," he commenced, before Aaron could speak, "something slipped my memory when we were talking together. I rapped softly at first, fearing to disturb Rachel, but no one answering, I had to use the knocker. I hope I have not disturbed her."

"She is sleeping peacefully," replied Aaron, "and is taking a turn for the better, I am thankful to say. To-morrow, I trust, all danger will be over. Come in."

He closed the door gently, and they entered the parlour.

"I have come back about this little box," said Mr. Moss, depositing it on the table; "it belongs to the task I undertook. The mother of the babe made it a stipulation that whoever had the care of the child should receive the box, and hold it in trust for her until she claimed it."

"But I understood," said Aaron, in apprehension, "that the mother had no intention of claiming her child."

"In a certain sense that is true. Don't look worried; there is no fear of any trouble in the future; only she made it a condition that the box should go with the child, and that, when the girl was twenty-one years of age, it should be given to her, in case the mother did not make her appearance and claim the property. It stands this way, Cohen. The mother took into consideration the chance that the gentleman she is marrying may die before her, in which event she stipulated that she should be free to seek her daughter. That is reasonable, is it not?"

"Quite reasonable."

"And natural?"

"Quite natural. But I should have been informed of it."

"It escaped me, it really escaped me, Cohen; and what difference can it make? It is only a mother's fancy."

"Yes, only a mother's fancy."

"I'll lay a thousand to one you never hear anything more about it. Put the box away, and don't give it another thought."

Aaron lifted it from the table. "It is heavy, Mr. Moss."

"Yes, it is heavy."

"Do you know what it contains?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"It must be something that the mother sets store on--jewels, perhaps."

"Nothing more unlikely. The poor woman didn't have a shilling to bless herself with. I shouldn't trouble about it if I were you."

"I have gone too far," said Aaron, sighing; "I cannot retreat."

"It would be madness to dream of such a thing. Remember what depends upon it. Cohen, in case anything occurs, I think I ought to tell you what has been passing in my mind."

"In case anything occurs!" repeated Aaron, in a hollow tone, and with a startled look. "What

can occur?"

"The poor child," continued Mr. Moss, "has had a hard time of it. We almost dug her out of the snow last night; the exposure was enough to kill an infant of tender years, and there's no saying what effect it may have upon her. If it had been a child of my own I should be alarmed for the consequences, and I should scarcely expect her to live through it." Aaron gasped. "The idea distresses you, but we must always take the human view. Should she not survive no one can be blamed for it. How is your own dear little girl?"

"She is well," replied Aaron, mechanically. He passed his hand across his eyes despairingly. The duplicity he was compelled to practise was hateful to him, and he despised himself for it.

"Good-night again," said Mr. Moss. "I have sent my telegram to the London lawyers. Don't forget that I shall be at the Salutation till eleven in the morning. I should like to hear how Mrs. Cohen is before I leave."

It was not only the incident of the iron safe that Mr. Moss, in the first instance, had omitted to impart to Aaron. In the agreement formulated by Mr. Gordon there was an undertaking that in the event of the child's death, or of her marriage if she grew to womanhood, the lawyers were to pay the sum of five hundred pounds to the person into whose home the child was received. Mr. Moss had not mentioned this, and Aaron was in consequence ignorant of the fact. Had he been aware of it, is it likely that he would have shrunk from carrying out the scheme inspired by his agony? It is hard to say. During these pregnant and eventful hours he was dominated by the one overpowering, passionate desire to save the life of his beloved; during these hours all that was highest and noblest in his nature was deadened by human love.

There was no rest for him on this night; he did not dare to undress and seek repose. The moments were too precious; some action had to be taken, and to be taken soon, and, his mind torn with agony and remorse, he devoted himself to the consideration of it. In the course of this mental debate he was plunged at times into the lowest depths of self-abasement; but the strength of his character and the serious issues at stake lifted him out of these depths. Ever and anon he crept into Rachel's room and derived consolation from the calm sleep she was enjoying. The doctor's prognostications of returning health seemed to be on the point of realisation; when she awoke in the morning and clasped her child to her bosom, and heard its sweet voice, all would be well with her. What need, then, for further justification?

But his further action must be decided upon and carried out before Rachel awoke. And it was imperative that she should be kept in ignorance of what had taken place. On no account must it be revealed to her that he had taken a strange child into the house, and that it had died there within a few hours. In her delicate state the news might be fatal.

Gradually all that it was necessary for him to do unfolded itself, and was mentally arranged in consecutive order. He waited till three o'clock, and then he went from his house to the Salutation Hotel. The night porter, half asleep, was in attendance, and after some demur he conducted Aaron to Mr. Moss's sleeping apartment.

"Who is there?" cried Mr. Moss, aroused by the knocking at his door.

"It is I," replied Aaron; "I must speak to you at once."

Mr. Moss jumped from bed.

"Is it all right, sir?" asked the night porter.

"Of course it is all right," said Mr. Moss, opening the door, and admitting his visitor.

The night porter returned to his duties, and fell into a doze.

"What brings you here at this time of night?" exclaimed Mr. Moss; and then, seeing the distress in Aaron's face, "Good God! It is not about Rachel?"

"No, it is not about Rachel; it is bad enough, but not so bad as that. How shall I tell you--how shall I tell you?"

"Stop a moment," said Mr. Moss. "I ordered half a bottle of port before I went, and there is a glass or two left. Drink this."

The wine gave Aaron courage to proceed with his task.

"I have dreadful news to tell you," he said, putting down the glass.

"I guess it," interrupted Mr. Moss. "The child!"

"Yes," answered Aaron, with averted eyes, "the child."

"Is she very ill?"

"Mr. Moss, the child is dead."

"Heavens!" cried Mr. Moss, slipping into his clothes as fast as he could. "What a calamity! But at the same time, Cohen, what a release! Tell me all about it. Does Rachel know?"

"Rachel does not know. She is still sleeping, and she must not know. It would kill her--it would kill her!'

"I see the necessity, Cohen; it must be kept from her, and I think I see how it can be managed. It is a fortunate thing that the woman who accompanied me here with the poor child has not returned to Portsmouth, as I bade her. She met with some friends in Gosport who persuaded her to stop the night, and she was going back with me in the morning. I promised to call for her, but she will have to remain here now till the child is buried. She will not mind, because it will be something in her pocket. A sad ending, Cohen, a sad ending, but I feared it. Did I not prophesy it? What else was to be expected after last night's adventure? A child of such a tender age!' The wonder is it did not die in my arms. But you have not told me how it occurred."

"It is very simple," said Aaron, in a low tone. "I laid the babe in my own bed, intending to call in a woman as soon after daylight as possible to attend it till Rachel was well and able to get about. She seemed to be asleep, and was in no pain. I determined not to go to bed, but to keep up all night, to attend to the little one, and to Rachel and my own child---- Bear with me, Mr. Moss, I am unstrung."

"No wonder. Take time, Aaron, take time."

"Now and again I went up to look at the babe, and observed nothing to alarm me. An hour ago I closed my eyes, and must have slept; I was tired out. When I awoke I went upstairs, and was startled by a strange stillness in the child. I lifted her in my arms. Mr. Moss, she was dead. I came to you at once, to advise me what to do. You must help me, Mr. Moss; my dear Rachel's life hangs upon it. You know how sensitive she is; and the doctor has warned me that a sudden shock might be fatal."

"I will help you, Cohen, of course I will help you; it is my duty, because it is I who have brought this trouble upon you. But I did it with the best intentions. I see a way out of the difficulty. The woman I employed--how fortunate, how fortunate that she is still here!--is a god-send to us. She is a kind-hearted creature, and she will be sorry to hear of the child's death, but at the same time she is poor, and will be glad to earn a sovereign. A doctor must see the child, to testify that she died a natural death. She must have passed away in her sleep."

"She did. Is it necessary that the doctor should visit my house in order to see the child?"

"Not at all. I have everything planned in my mind. Now I am ready to go out. First to the telegraph office--it is open all night here--to despatch a telegram to the London lawyers to send a representative down immediately, who, when he comes, will take the affair out of our hands, I expect. Afterwards to the house of the woman's friends; she must accompany us to your house, and we will take the child away before daylight. Then we will call in a doctor, and nothing need reach Rachel's ears. Don't take it to heart, Cohen; you have troubles enough of your own. The news you give me of Rachel is the best of news. Joy and sorrow, Cohen--how close they are together!"

In the telegraph office Mr. Moss wrote a long message to Mr. Gordon's lawyers, impressing upon them the necessity of sending a representative without delay to take charge of the body, and to attend to the funeral arrangements.

"Between ourselves, Cohen," he said, as they walked to the house of the woman's friends, "the lawyers will be rather glad of the news than otherwise; and so will Mr. Gordon, when it reaches him. I am not sure whether I made the matter clear to you, but there is no doubt whatever that, so far as Mr. Gordon is concerned, the child was an encumbrance--to say nothing of the expense, which perhaps he would not have minded, being almost a millionaire. But still, as it has turned out, he has got rid of a difficulty, and he will not be sorry when he hears of it."

"And the mother," said Aaron, "how will she take it?"

"I will not pretend to say. *We* know, Cohen, what we think of our own children, but there are people in the world with different ideas from ours. The mother of this little one will feel grieved at first, no doubt, but I dare say she will soon get over it. Then, perhaps her husband will not tell her. Here we are at the woman's house."

They halted before a small cottage, inhabited by people in humble circumstances. Before he aroused the inmates, Mr. Moss said,--

"I shall keep your name out of the affair, Cohen; but to a certain extent the woman must be taken into our confidence. Secrecy will be imposed upon her, and she will be paid for it. Remain in the background; I will speak to her alone."

The woman herself came to the door, and when she was dressed Mr. Moss had a conversation with her, the result of which was that she and the two men walked to Aaron's house, where she took charge of the dead child, and carried it to the cottage. Then she went for a doctor--to Aaron's relief not the doctor who attended his wife--and as there was no doubt that the child had

died a natural death, a certificate to that effect was given. At six in the morning Aaron returned to Rachel, and sitting by her bedside, waited for her awakening. The potion she had taken was to ensure sleep for twelve hours; in two hours he would hear her voice; in two hours she would be caressing a babe to which she had not given birth.

It seemed to Aaron as though months had passed since Mr. Moss had presented himself at his house last night, and for a while it almost seemed as though, in that brief time, it was not himself who had played the principal part in this strange human drama, but another being who had acted for him, and who had made him responsible for an act which was to colour all his future life. But he did not permit himself to indulge long in this view of what had transpired; he knew and felt that he, and he alone, was responsible, and that to his dying day he would be accountable for it. Well, he would bear the burden, and would, every by means within his power, endeavour to atone for it. He would keep strict watch over himself; he would never give way to temptation; he would act justly and honourably; he would check the hasty word; he would make no enemies; he would be kind and considerate to all around him. He did not lay the flattering unction to his soul that in thus sketching his future rule of life he was merely committing himself to that which he had always followed in the past. This one act seemed to cast a shadow over all that had gone before; he had to commence anew.

A strange and agonising fancy haunted him. The child of his blood, Rachel's child, was lying dead in the house of a stranger. The customary observances of his religion could not be held over it; Christians had charge of the lifeless clay. With his mind's eye he saw his dead child lying in the distant chamber, alone and unattended, with no sympathising heart near to shed tears over it, with no mourner near to offer up a prayer in its behalf. The child opened its eyes and gazed reproachfully upon its father; then it rose from the couch, and in its white dress went out of the house and walked through the snow to its father's dwelling. The little bare feet left traces of blood in the snow, and at the door of its father's house it paused and stood there crying, "Mother, mother!" So strong was this fancy that Aaron went to the street door, and, opening it, gazed up and down the street. The snow was still falling; no signs of life were visible, and no movement except the light flakes fluttering down. A mantle of spotless white was spread over roads and roofs, and there was silence all around. But in Aaron's eyes there was a vision, and in his heart a dead voice calling. His babe was there before him, and its voice was crying, "Mother, mother! Why am I deserted? why am I banished from my father's house?" When he drew back into the passage he hardly dared shut the street door upon the piteous figure his conscience had conjured up.

At eight o'clock in the morning Rachel stirred; she raised her arm and put her hand to her eyes, blind to all the world, blind to her husband's sin, blind to everything but love. Then instinctively she drew the babe nearer to her. A faint cooing issued from the infant's lips, and an expression of joy overspread the mother's features. This joy found its reflex in Aaron's heart, but the torturing anxiety under which he laboured was not yet dispelled. It was an awful moment. Was there some subtle instinct in a mother's love which would convey to Rachel's sense the agonising truth that the child she held in her arms was not her own?

There was no indication of it. She fondled the child, she suckled it, the light of Heaven shone in her face.

"Aaron!"

"My beloved!"

"Do you hear our child, our dear one? Ah, what happiness!"

"Thank God!" said Aaron, inly. "Oh, God be thanked!"

"Is it early or late, dear love?" asked Rachel. "It is morning, I know, for I see the light; I feel it here"--with her hand pressing the infant's head to her heart.

"It is eight o'clock, beloved," said Aaron.

"I have had a long and beautiful sleep. I do not think I have dreamt, but I have been so happy, so happy! My strength seems to be returning; I have not felt so well since the night of the fire. Our darling seems stronger, too; it is because I am so much better. I must think of that; it is a mother's duty to keep well, for her child's sake--and, dear husband, for your sake also. I do not love you less because I love our child so dearly."

"I am sure of that. Should I be jealous of our child? That would be as foolish as it would be unwise."

"You speak more cheerfully, Aaron. Is that because of me?"

"It is because of you, beloved. We both draw life and happiness from you. Therefore, get strong soon."

"I shall; I feel I shall. My mind is clear, there is no weight on my heart. Before many days have passed I shall be out of bed, learning my new duties. Aaron, our child will live."

"She will live to bless and comfort us, beloved."

She passed her hand over his face. "You are crying, Aaron."

"They are tears of joy, Rachel, at seeing you so much better. A terrible fear has weighed me down; it is removed, thanks be to the Eternal. The world was dark till now; I dared not think of the future; now all is well."

"Am I, indeed, so much to you, dear husband?"

"You are my life. As the sun is to the earth, so are you to me."

The wife, the husband, and the child lay in each other's embrace.

"God is good," murmured Rachel. "I did so want to live for you and for our child! But I feared, I feared; strength seemed to be departing from me. What will they do, I thought, when I am gone? But God has laid His hand upon us and blessed us. Praised be His name for ever and ever!"

"Amen, amen! I have not yet said my morning prayers. It is time."

She sank back in bed, and he put on his taleth and phylacteries, and prayed fervently. He did not confine himself to his usual morning devotions, but sought his book for propitiatory supplications for forgiveness for transgressions. "Forgive us, oh, our Father! for we have sinned; pardon us, oh, our King! for we have transgressed; for Thou art ever ready to pardon and forgive. Blessed art Thou, the Eternal, who is gracious and doth abundantly pardon." And while he supplicated forgiveness, Rachel lay and sang a song of love.

His prayers ended, Aaron folded his taleth and wound up his phylacteries, and resumed his seat by Rachel's bed.

"While you slept last night, dear love," he said, "a piece of good fortune fell to my share, through our friend Mr. Moss. I shall be able to take a servant in the house."

"How glad I am!" she answered. "It distressed me greatly to know that you had everything to attend to yourself. A woman, or a girl, is so necessary!"

"There is altogether a brighter outlook for us, Rachel. Do you think Prissy would do?"

"She is very handy, and very willing. If you could manage till I can get up I could soon teach her."

"I will go, then, and see if she is able to come. You must not mind being alone a little while."

"I shall not be alone, dear," said Rachel, with a bright smile at the child.

He prepared breakfast for her before he left, and she partook of it with a keen appetite. Then he went on his mission, and met Mr. Moss coming to the house.

"I have received a telegram," said that gentleman, "in reply to mine. A gentleman will arrive from London this afternoon to attend to matters. You look brighter."

"Rachel is much better," said Aaron.

"You are in luck all round, Cohen. There are men who always fall on their feet. I'm one of them; you're another. This time yesterday you were in despair; now you're in clover. Upon my word, I am as glad as if it had happened to myself. You know one of our sayings--'Next to me, my wife; next to my wife, my child; next to my child, my friend.' My good old father told me it was one of the wise sayings of Rabbi ben--I forget who he was the son of. A friend of ours who used to come to our house said to my father that there was no wisdom and no goodness in the saying, because the Rabbi put himself first, as being of more consequence than wife, and child, and friend. My father answered, 'You are wrong; there is wisdom, there is goodness, there is sense in it. Self is the greatest of earthly kings. Put yourself in one scale, and pile up all the world in the other, and you will weigh it down.' He was right. What comes so close home to us as our own troubles and sorrows?"

"Nothing," said Aaron, rather sadly; "they outweigh all the rest. We are human, and being human, fallible. Can you imagine an instance, Mr. Moss, where love may lead to crime?"

"I can, and what is more, I would undertake to justify it. Who is this little girl?"

The diversion in the conversation was caused by Prissy, who had run to Aaron, and was plucking at his coat.

"A good girl who attends to our Sabbath lights."

"'Ow's missis, please, sir?" inquired Prissy, anxiously.

"Much better this morning, thank you."

"And the babby, sir?"

"Also better and stronger, Prissy." Prissy jumped up and down in delight. "I was coming to see you. Do you think your aunt would let you come to us as a regular servant, to live, and eat, and sleep in the house?"

This vision of happiness almost took Prissy's breath away; but she managed to reply, "If yer'd make it worth 'er while, she would, Mr. Cohen. She's allus telling me I'm taking the bread out of 'er mouth, and ain't worth my salt. Oh, Mr. Cohen, *will* yer take me, *will* yer? I don't care where I sleep, I don't care wot yer give me to eat, I'll work for yer day and night, I will! Aunty makes my life a misery, she does, and I've lost Wictoria Rejiner, sir. She's got another nuss, and I ain't got nobody to care for now. Aunty sed this morning I was a reg'lar pest, and she wished she could sell me at so much a pound."

"You don't weigh a great deal," said Aaron, gazing at Prissy in pity; and then, with a sad touch of his old humour, "How much a pound do you think she would take?"

"Come and arks 'er, Mr. Cohen, come and arks er," cried Prissy, running before Aaron, and looking back imploringly at him.

He and Mr. Moss followed the girl into the presence of Prissy's aunt, and, although he did not buy Prissy by the pound weight, he made a bargain with the woman, and by the outlay of five shillings secured the girl's permanent services, it being understood that she was not to take her niece away without Prissy's consent. As they walked back to Aaron's house he spoke to Prissy about wages; but the girl, who felt as if heaven's gates had opened for her to enter, interrupted him by saying,--

"Don't talk about wages, sir, please don't. I don't want no wages. Give me a frock and a bone, and I'll work the skin off my fingers for yer, I will!"

Extravagant as were her professions, never was a poor girl more in earnest than Prissy. Blithe and happy she set to work, and never did valiant soldier polish up his arms with keener zest than did Prissy her pots and pans. The kitchen was her battleground, and she surveyed it with the air of a conqueror. There was joy in Rachel's heart in the room above, there was joy in Prissy's heart in the room below.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CURTAIN FALLS AWHILE.

Mr. Moss and Aaron spent the greater part of the day together, awaiting the arrival of Mr. Gordon's legal representative. The doctor who attended Rachel called only once, and gave a good report of her condition.

"The crisis is over," he said to Aaron. "Your wife and child will live. In a few days Mrs. Cohen will be strong enough to be removed, and I advise you to take her without delay to the South of France, where before spring her health will be completely re-established."

It was not until the doctor had departed that the question presented itself to Aaron whether he had any right to the fifty pounds he had received from Mr. Moss. He was clear as to the second sum of twenty-five pounds--that must be returned. He wished Mr. Moss to take it back; but that gentleman would have nothing to do with it, and as to Aaron's right to retain the fifty pounds he entertained no doubt.

"It is undisputably yours," he said. "It was handed to me by Mr. Gordon himself for a specific purpose, and I look upon it as a retaining fee. No lawyer returns such a fee when the case breaks down--trust them for that. Understand, please, Cohen, that I am no longer acting in the affair: it rests now between you and the lawyers."

Late in the afternoon Mr. Moss went to the railway station to meet the lawyer, and the two proceeded together to the house where the dead child lay. Arrangements for the funeral were made, and then Mr. Moss conducted the lawyer, whose name was Chesterman, to Aaron's house.

"Mr. Chesterman has something to say to you, Cohen," he said. "I will leave you together." He took Aaron aside. "It is something of great importance--a wonderful stroke of fortune. Don't throw it away; it will be the making of you; and remember Rachel."

"Mr. Moss," commenced Mr. Chesterman, when he and Aaron were alone, "has related to me all that has occurred. In a general sense the death of the child is to be regretted, as would be the death of any person, old or young; but there are peculiar circumstances in this case which render this visitation of God a relief to certain parties. It removes all difficulties from the future, and there is now no likelihood of our client's plans being hampered or interfered with. You are aware that he is a gentleman of fortune?"

"I have been so informed."

"You may not be aware, however, that he is a gentleman of very decided views, and that he is not to be turned from any resolution he may have formed. We lawyers have to deal with clients of different temperaments, and when a case is submitted to us by a strong-minded gentleman, we may advise, but, if we find our client determined, we do not waste time in arguing. I understand from Mr. Moss that you have some scruples with respect to the money you have received from him."

"I wish to know whether I may consider the first sum of fifty pounds mine; I have my doubts about it. As to the second sum of twenty-five pounds, paid in advance for the rearing of the child, I have no doubts whatever."

"We have nothing to do with either of those sums; they did not come from us, but from our client to Mr. Moss, and from Mr. Moss to you. Without being consulted professionally, I agree with Mr. Moss that the fifty pounds is yours. I offer no opinion upon the second sum."

"If you will give me your client's address, I will communicate with him."

"We cannot disclose it to you. It is confided to us professionally, and our instructions are to keep it secret."

"You can give him my name and address?"

"No. His stipulation is that it is not to be made known to him. If at any time he asks us voluntarily for it, that is another matter, and I will make a note of it. The special purpose of my visit is to complete and carry out to the last letter our client's instructions. The conditions to which he bound himself were very liberal. With a generous desire for the child's welfare, in the event of her living and marrying, he placed in our hands the sum of five hundred pounds as a marriage dowry, to be paid over to her on her wedding-day."

"A noble-minded gentleman," said Aaron.

Mr. Chesterman smiled, and continued,--

"In the event of the child's death this five hundred pounds was to be paid over to the party or parties who undertook the charge of her. The child is dead; the five hundred pounds is to be paid over to you."

"But, sir," said Aaron, in astonishment, "do you not understand that I cannot accept this money?"

"It is not for us to consider any scruples you may have; it is for us to carry out our instructions. It does not come within our province to argue with you. I have brought the cheque with me, and all I have to do is to hand it over to you, and to take your receipt for it. Mr. Moss hinted to me that you might raise objections; my reply was, 'Nonsense.' The money belongs to you by legal and moral right, and I decline to listen to objections. If it is any satisfaction to you, I may tell you that our client can well afford to pay it, and that by its early payment he is a considerable gainer, for he is no longer under the obligation to pay a hundred a year for the child's maintenance. Here is the receipt, legally drawn out; oblige me by signing it."

It was in vain for Aaron to protest; the lawyer insisted, and at length, fearing the consequences of a decided refusal, Aaron put his name to the paper.

"Our business being concluded," said Mr. Chesterman, rising, "I have the pleasure of wishing you good-day. Should in the future any necessity for the statement arise, I shall not hesitate to declare that the child was placed in the care of an honourable gentleman, who would have faithfully performed his duty towards her."

"God forgive me," said Aaron, when his visitor was gone, "for the sin I have committed! God help me to atone for it!"

But he would have been less than human had he not felt grateful that the means were placed in his hands to restore his beloved wife to health and strength. Before a week had passed he and Rachel and the child, accompanied by Prissy, were travelling to a milder clime.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

HONOUR AND PROGRESS.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

A man upon whose face all that is noble and steadfast seems to have set its seal, to give the world assurance that here was one who, had his lot been so cast, would have ruled over men with justice, truth, and honour. He is of a goodly height, and his features are large and clearly defined. A sensitive, resolute mouth; calm, well-proportioned lips, which close without restraint and are eloquent even when the tongue is silent; a nose gently arched, with curved indented nostrils; a massive forehead, almost oval at the top, and with projecting lower arches, the eyebrows near to the large brown eyes; the chin and cheeks clothed in a handsome beard, in which grey hairs are making themselves manifest. Powerful, benignant, and self-possessed as is his appearance, there is an underlying sadness in his eyes which could be variously construed--as born of a large experience of human ways and of the errors into which mortals are liable to fall, or, maybe, of an ever-abiding remembrance of one moment in his own life when he also was tempted and fell. But no such thought as the latter ever entered the minds of those who knew him personally and those who judged him by the repute he bore, which could only have been earned by a man who walked unflinchingly and unerringly in the straight path and was just and merciful to all who came in contact with him. There were instances when mercy so predominated that persons who had wronged him were allowed to go free, and when a helping hand was held out to men who had sinned against him. This is Aaron Cohen, now close upon his fiftieth year.

A woman whose tranquil eyes never see the light of day, but in which, nevertheless, there is no sign of repining or regret. Purity and sweetness dwell in her face, and as she stands motionless in a listening attitude, her white hand resting on the table, no more exquisite representation of peace and universal love and sympathy could be found in living form or marble statue. She is fair almost to whiteness, and although her figure is slight and there is no colour in her cheeks, she is in good health, only that sometimes during the day she closes her eyes and sleeps in her armchair for a few minutes. In those intervals of unconsciousness, and when she seeks her couch, she sees fairer pictures, perhaps, than if the wonders of the visible world were an open book to her. Her dreams are inspired by a soul of goodness, and her husband's heart, as he gazes upon her in her unconscious hours, is always stirred to prayer and thankfulness that she is by his side to bless his days. Not only in the house is her influence felt. She is indefatigable in her efforts to seek out deserving cases of distress and relieve them; and she does not confine her charity to those of her faith. In this regard Jew and Christian are alike to her, and not a week passes that she does not plant in some poor home a seed which grows into a flower to gladden and cheer the hearts of the unfortunate and suffering. Grateful eyes follow her movements, and a blessing is shed upon her as she departs. A ministering angel is she, whose words are balm, whose presence brings sweet life into dark spaces. So might an invisible herald of the Lord walk the earth, healing the sick, lifting up the fallen, laying his hand upon the wounded breast, and whispering to all, "Be comforted. God has heard your prayers, and has sent me to relieve you." This is Rachel Cohen, Aaron's wife, in her forty-fourth year.

A younger woman, in her springtime, with life's fairest pages spread before her. Darker than Rachel is she, with darker hair and eyes and complexion, slim, graceful, and beautiful. It is impossible that she should not have felt the influence of the home in which she has been reared, and that she should not be the better for it, for it is a home in which the domestic affections unceasingly display themselves in their tenderest aspect, in which the purest and most ennobling lessons of life are inculcated by precept and practice; but a profound student of human nature, whose keen insight would enable him to plumb the depths of passion, to detect what lay beneath the surface, to trace the probable course of the psychological inheritance which all parents transmit to their children, would have come to the conclusion that in this fair young creature were instincts and promptings which were likely one day to give forth a discordant note in this abode of peace and love, and to break into rebellion. There is no outward indication of such possible rebellion. To the friends and acquaintances of the household she is a lovely and gracious Jewish maiden, who shall in time become a mother in Judah. This is Ruth Cohen, in the eyes of all

the world the daughter of Aaron and Rachel.

A young man, Ruth's junior by a year, with his father's strength of character and his mother's sweetness of disposition. He is as yet too young for the full development of this rare combination of qualities, the outcome of which is to be made manifest in the future, but he is not too young to win love and respect. His love for his parents is ardent, his faith in them indestructible. To him his mother is a saint, his father a man without blemish. Were he asked, to express his most earnest wishes, he would have answered, "When I am my father's age may I be honoured as he is: when I marry may my wife be as my mother is." This is Joseph Cohen, the one other child of Aaron and Rachel.

A tall, ungainly woman of thirty, working like a willing slave from morning to night, taking pride and pleasure in the home, and metaphorically prostrating herself before every one who lives beneath its roof. Esteemed and valued by her master and mistress, for whom she is ready to sacrifice herself and to undergo any privation; especially watchful of her mistress, and tender towards her; jealous of the good name of those whom she serves with devotion. Of Aaron Cohen she stands somewhat in awe, he is so far above her in wisdom. She does not trouble herself about religious matters; questions of theology come not within her domain, her waking hours being entirely filled and occupied with the performance of her domestic duties. She listens devoutly to the chanting of Hebrew prayers, not one word of which does she understand, and is none the worse for them. Her master and mistress are the representatives of a race for which through them she entertains the profoundest respect; it is more than likely, if the choice had been hers and if she had deemed herself worthy of the distinction, that she would have elected to be born in the Jewish faith. She carries her allegiance even to the extent of fasting with the household on the Day of Atonement, and of not allowing bread to pass her lips during the Passover week. This is Prissy, the ever true, the ever faithful.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FOUNDATION OF AARON'S FORTUNE.

Eventful indeed to Aaron Cohen had been the twenty years since he left Gosport. In the South of France, where they remained for a much longer time than he intended, Rachel was restored to health, and Aaron had the joy of seeing her move happily about the house and garden, and of hearing her sing to her babe the songs and lullabies which, from a mother's lips, are so fraught with melodious and tender meaning. It almost seemed as if she had inward cause for thankfulness that blindness had fallen upon her, for Aaron had never known her to be so blithe and light-hearted as during those weeks of returning health. Prissy was invaluable to them, and proved to be a veritable treasure. The short time it took her to learn her duties, the swiftness and neatness with which they were performed, the delight she took in the babe, who soon replaced Victoria Regina in her affections, and the care and skill with which she guided her mistress's movements, amazed Aaron. He had divined from the first that she was a shrewd, clever girl, and he had the satisfaction of discovering that she was much cleverer than he would have ventured to give her credit for. She was tidier in her dress, too, and never presented herself unless she was clean and neat. She became, in a sense, her mistress's teacher, and Rachel was so apt a pupil that Aaron's apprehensions that she would meet with an accident if she moved too freely about were soon dispelled.

"Is it not wonderful, love?" she said. "I think I must have eyes at the tips of my fingers. But it is Prissy I have to thank for it."

She repaid the girl, be sure. Gradually Prissy's mode of expressing herself underwent improvement; she did not use so many negatives, she dropped fewer h's, she learned to distinguish between g's and k's; and Aaron himself laid the first stone in her education by teaching her the a b c. One thing Prissy would not learn; she obstinately refused to have anything to do with the French language. English was good enough for her, she declared, and to the English tongue she nailed her colours.

Fond as she was of babies, she would not countenance French babies, and said it was a shame to dress them so. "I'm a troo bloo, sir," she said to Aaron; "please don't force me." And with a hearty laugh he desisted.

He himself spoke French fluently, and to this may be ascribed the first change in his fortunes. Easy in his mind respecting Rachel, easy respecting money, he found himself at leisure to look about him and observe. He made friends, and among them a poor French engineer of great skill. In conversation one day this engineer mentioned that tenders were invited for the construction of

a local bridge. It was not a very important matter; the lake it was to span was of no great dimensions, and the bridge required was by no means formidable.

"There are only two contractors who will tender for it," said the engineer, "and they play into each other's hands. They will settle privately the amount of their separate tenders, and the lowest will obtain the contract. They will divide the profits between them. If I had a little money to commence with I would tender for the work, and my tender would be at least ten thousand francs below theirs. Then it would be I who would construct the bridge, and public money would be saved."

"What would be your profit?" asked Aaron.

"Twenty thousand francs," was the reply; "perhaps more."

"And the amount of your tender?"

"Eighty thousand francs. I have the plans and specifications, and every detail of expense for material and labour in my house. Will you come and look over them?"

Aaron examined them, and submitting them to the test of inquiry as to the cost of labour and material, found them to be correct. A simple-minded man might have been taken in by a schemer who had prepared complicated figures for the purpose of trading with another person's money, and standing the chance of winning if the venture resulted in a profit, and of losing nothing if it resulted in a loss; but Aaron was not simple-minded, the poor engineer was not a schemer, and the figures were honestly set down.

"It would not need a great amount of money," said the engineer. "If a certain sum were deposited in the bank, a further sum could be raised by depositing the contract as security; and, moreover, as the work proceeds, specified payments will be made by the local authorities."

"How much would be required to commence operations, and to make everything safe?"

"Ten thousand francs."

Roughly, that was four hundred pounds. The five hundred pounds he had received from the lawyers was as yet untouched, for they lived very economically and were in a part of the world where thrift was part of the people's education. Aaron believed the project to be safe.

"If I advanced it," he asked, "what proposition do you make?"

"We would make it a partnership affair," replied the poor engineer, eagerly.

Upon that understanding the bridge was tendered for, and the tender accepted. In four months the work was executed and passed by the inspectors; the contractors received the balance due to them, and a division of the profits was made. After paying all his expenses Aaron was the richer by three hundred pounds. He gave fifty pounds to the poor, which raised him in the estimation of the people among whom he was temporarily sojourning. He had not been idle during the four months occupied by the building of the bridge; under the guidance of his partner he had superintended the workmen and undertaken the correspondence and management of the accounts; and new as these duties were to him he had shown great intelligence and aptitude.

"We met on a fortunate day," said the engineer.

At about this time a new engineering project presented itself. It was on a larger scale than the first, and the two men, emboldened by success, tendered for it. Again did fortune favour them; everybody, with the exception of rival contractors, was on their side. In the carrying out of their first contract there had not been a hitch; they had paid their workmen better wages, they had behaved honestly and liberally all round, and they had already achieved a reputation for liberal dealing with the working man. Moreover, people were talking of Rachel's kindness and of Aaron's benevolence. Hats were lifted to them, women and children left flowers at their door; rich was the harvest they gathered for their charity.

When it was known that they had obtained another contract, the best workmen came to them for employment, and they learned what all employers of labour may learn, that it is wise policy to pay generously for bone and muscle. The hateful political economy of Ricardo, which trades upon the necessities of the poor, and would grind labour down to starvation pittance, could never find lodgment in the mind of such a man as Aaron Cohen. The new venture was entirely successful, and being of greater magnitude than the first, the profits were larger. Aaron was the possessor of two thousand pounds. He gave two hundred pounds to the poor. He did more than this. The doctor who had attended Rachel in Gosport had declined to accept a fee, and Aaron now wrote him a grateful letter, enclosing in it a draft for five hundred pounds, which he asked the doctor to distribute among the local charities. This five hundred pounds he regarded as a return of the sum he had received from the London lawyers. That the receipt of this money afforded gratification to the doctor was evidenced by his reply. "Every one here," he said, "has kind words for you and your estimable wife, and the general feeling is that if you had continued to reside in Gosport it would have been a source of pleasure to all of us. When I speak of your good fortune all the townsfolk say, 'We are glad to hear it.'" Thus did good spring out of evil.

Aaron felt that his foot was on the ladder. He entered into a regular partnership with his friend the engineer, and they executed many public works and never had a failure. The justness of their trading, their consideration for the toilers who were helping to build up a fortune for them, the honest wages they paid, earned for them an exceptional reputation for rectitude and fair dealing. In these matters and in this direction Aaron was the guiding spirit. He left to his partner the technical working out of their operations, and took upon himself the control of wages and finance. Occasionally there were arguments between him and his partner, the latter hinting perhaps that there was a cheaper market, and that money could be saved by employing middlemen who offered to supply labour and material at prices that were not equitable from the point of view of the toilers and producers. Aaron would not entertain propositions of this kind. "We are doing well," he said, "we are making money, we are harvesting. Be satisfied." His partner gave way. Aaron's character was too strong for resistance. "Clean and comfortable homes," said Aaron, "a good education for their children, a modest enjoyment of the world's pleasures--these are the labourers' due." Hearing of this some large employers called him quixotic, and said he was ruining trade; but he pursued the just and even tenor of his way, satisfied that he was a saviour and not a spoiler. Upon the conclusion of each transaction, when the accounts were balanced, he devoted a portion of his profits to benevolent purposes, and he became renowned as a public benefactor. The thanks that were showered upon him did not please him, but tended rather to humiliate and humble him; he would not listen to expressions of gratitude; and it will be presently seen that when he returned to England he took steps to avoid the publicity which was distasteful to him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER.

A point of friendly contention between Aaron Cohen and the engineer was the observance of the Sabbath day. From sunset on Friday till sunset on Saturday Aaron would do no work and attend to no business. He paid the workmen their wages on Friday, and made up the accounts on that day. They hailed the new arrangement with satisfaction, but the engineer was rather fretful over this departure from the usual custom.

"What is your objection?" asked Aaron.

"It must confuse affairs," replied the engineer.

"Are not the accounts faithfully kept," said Aaron, "and does not the work go on regularly?"

"Oh, I am not complaining," said the engineer, "only----"

"Only what?" said Aaron, with a smile.

The engineer could not explain; he was a skilful engineer, but a weak controversialist. The only answer he could make was,--

"You are living in a Christian land, among Christians."

"I am none the less a Jew. All over the world we live in Christian lands, among Christians; we are a nation without a country. You observe your Sunday Sabbath as a day of rest."

"Certainly I do."

"Allow me, also, to observe my Sabbath on the day appointed by my faith."

"What difference can it make to you," persisted the engineer, "Saturday or Sunday?"

"If that is your view," said Aaron, his eyes twinkling with amusement, "let us both keep our Sabbath on the Saturday."

Aaron conducted the argument with such perfect good temper that the engineer could not help laughing at the rebuff, and the subject was allowed to drop. Nor was it revived on the subsequent occasions of the Jewish holydays, which were zealously observed by Aaron and his wife. They were both orthodox Jews, and nothing could tempt them to neglect their religious obligations; neither of them had ever tasted shell-fish or touched fire on the Sabbath. The festival of the New Year in the autumn, with its penitential Day of Atonement and its joyful Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Lights (Chanukah) in the winter, the Festivals of Purim and Passover in the spring, the Feast of Pentecost in the early summer--not one of these days of memorial was

disregarded. The m'zuzah was fastened on the doorposts, and regularly every morning did Aaron put on his garment of fringes and phylacteries and say his morning prayers. Thus was he ever in communion with his Maker.

He experienced at first great difficulty in conforming to Jewish precepts. There was no synagogue in the village, and no killer of meat, according to the formula prescribed by the Mosaic law. For several days his family lived upon fish and vegetables and eggs; then he succeeded in arranging with a Jewish butcher in a town some fifty miles distant for a regular supply of meat and poultry. The only co-religionist with whom he came into close personal association was a man of the name of Levi, who had no such scruples as he in regard to food. This man was married, and had three sons, the eldest of whom was approaching his thirteenth year, the age at which all Jewish lads should be confirmed. In conversation with M. Levi Aaron learned that he had no intention of carrying out the ceremony of confirmation. Yearning to bring the stray sheep back into the fold, Aaron invited M. Levi and his family to celebrate the Passover with him, and there upon the table the Levis saw the white napkins with the special Passover cakes between the folds, the shankbone of a shoulder of lamb, the roasted egg, the lettuce, the chevril and parsley, the cup of salt and water, the savoury balls of almond, apple, and spice, and the raisin wine--all of which are symbols of the Passover, the most joyous of the Jewish festivals. In this year the first night of the holydays fell upon the Sabbath, and the apartment presented a beautiful appearance, with the lighted candles, the bright glass, and the spotless purity of the linen. The house had been cleaned from top to bottom, all leaven had been removed, and every utensil and article that was used for the cooking and partaking of food was new. M. Levi's eyes glistened as he entered the apartment and looked around; his wife's also, for she had been brought up in an orthodox Jewish home. Old memories were revived, and as they sat down at the table it was to them as if they had suddenly gone back to the days of their youth. Love and self-reproach shone in their faces as they gazed upon their children, to whom this picture of home happiness was a delightful revelation. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God!" said Aaron, in the ancient tongue, after the filling of the first glasses of wine. "King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hath chosen us from among all people, and exalted us above all languages, and sanctified us with His commandments; and with love hast Thou given us, O Lord, our God, Sabbaths for rest, and solemn days for joy, festivals and seasons of gladness, this day of rest, and this day of the feast of unleavened cakes, the season of our freedom; a holy convocation in love, a memorial of the departure from Egypt. For Thou hast chosen us and sanctified us above all people; and Thy holy Sabbaths and festivals hast Thou caused us to inherit with love and favour, joy and gladness. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who sanctifiest the Sabbath, and Israel, and the seasons." After this prayer the first glass of wine was drank, and the children smacked their lips. Rachel's blindness did not prevent her from superintending the kitchen, and under her direction everything was prepared for the table almost as skilfully and tastefully as if her own hands had done the work. Her raisin wine was perfect, and Aaron smacked his lips as well as the children: the finest vintage of champagne would not have been so palatable to him. Rachel's face was turned towards him as he raised the glass to his lips; she was anxious for his approval of the wine, which he had always praised extravagantly, and when she heard him smack his lips she was satisfied. Aaron proceeded with the ceremonies and prayers; he had purchased books of the "Hagadah," the Hebrew on the right-hand, and a translation in French on the left-hand pages, so that his guests, young and old, could understand what was being said and done. In silence they laved their hands, chevril was dipped into salt water and distributed around, and the middle cake in the napkins broken. Then Aaron held aloft the dish containing the roasted egg and the shankbone, and intoned, "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all that are hungry enter and eat; let all that are in want come hither and observe the Passover." The prayers were not uttered in a sing-song drawl; there was a joyous note in the chanting, which proclaimed that the hearts of the worshippers were glad. They heard from Aaron's lips what was said by the wise son, the wicked son, and the simple son; how a handful of the children of Israel went into Egypt, and how they increased and multiplied till they became a mighty nation; how they were oppressed by the Egyptians, and forced to build stone cities for Pharaoh, Pithom, and Raamses; how they prayed unto the Eternal, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and punished the oppressors with the ten plagues; how, under Divine protection, Israel went forth from Egypt, and walked through the Red Sea. "The sea beheld, and fled; Jordan was driven backward. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambkins. What ailed thee, O sea, that thou fledst--thou, Jordan, that thou wast driven backward--ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams--ye hills, like lambkins? Tremble, O earth! in the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flinty rock into a fountain of water." The first portion of the service ended, the books were laid aside, and the table spread for supper. While the preparations for the meal were being made by Prissy, who wore a new frock for the holydays and was as clean as a new pin, an animated conversation went on. Aaron was in the merriest of moods, and his witty sayings and jokes kept the company in a ripple of laughter. It is a special feature in the home worship of the Jew that it promotes good fellowship, breeds good feeling, and draws closer the domestic ties which so strongly distinguish the race. Innocent jest is encouraged, it is really as if it were a duty that every one shall be in a holiday humour. The subjects of conversation are of a cheerful nature, scandal is avoided, the tenderer feelings are brought into play. Scrupulous attention is paid to cleanliness, young and old attire themselves in their best. When we appear before the Sovereign we make ourselves resplendent; so does the Jew when he appears before the King of heaven and earth. On such occasions slovenliness would be a crime. It is not only the outer man that is attended to; the choicest special Jewish dishes are prepared; there is no stint, plenty abounds, and friends are gladly welcomed, and invited to

partake; everything is done that can contribute to harmony and content. Young people bill and coo, and their elders look on with approving eyes. These are the golden hours of love's young dream.

"It does my heart good," said Madame Levi, laughing heartily at one of Aaron's jokes, "to be among our own people again."

"Come often, come often," said Aaron Cohen. "You and yours will always be welcome."

The meal consisted of coffee, Passover cakes, fresh butter, and fried and stewed fish. Nothing could be more tempting to the eye than the large dish of stewed fish, with its thick yellow sauce of egg and lemon, and nothing more tempting to the palate, unless it were the fried fish, with its skin nicely browned, and cooked in such a way as to bring out the full sweetness of the flesh.

"We have the advantage of the Gentile," chuckled Aaron, who always took fried fish for his first course, and stewed for his second. "We know how to fry fish. It is strange that in all these thousands of years he has not discovered the simple secret."

"I have not tasted such stewed fish for I don't know how many years," observed Madame Levi, who had just been assisted to a second helping.

"Mrs. Cohen fries fish beautifully," said Aaron, "but her stewed fish is a marvel."

"That is the way my husband always speaks of me," said Rachel, with an affectionate smile. "He does not believe I have a fault."

"A woman who cooks fish as she does," said Aaron, oracularly, "cannot have a fault; she is a perfect woman. She is a glory and an honour to her sex. Again I assert, her stewed fish is a marvel."

"He forgets," said Rachel sweetly, to her guests, "that I have to trust others."

"My dear," persisted Aaron, "you stand by and direct. A victorious general does not rush into the battle; he stands aside, and gives his orders. With my own eyes I saw you squeeze the lemons; with my own eyes I saw you mix the batter; each slice of fish passed through your hands before it was put into the pan and saucepan. You know, Madame Levi, how important it is that the fish should be properly dried before it goes through the ordeal of fire."

"You bring it to my mind," said Madame Levi, speaking in a pensive tone; "my mother could fry and stew fish beautifully."

"But not like Rachel," rejoined Aaron. "I will give way on every other point, but not on this. If I were a plaice or a halibut I should be proud to be treated so; it would be a worthy ending of me, and I should bless the hand that cut me up. I should feel that I had not lived in vain. There is a spiritual touch," he continued, waiting until the laughter had subsided, "in these things. Half a lemon more or less makes all the difference in stewed fish; an egg more or less, the consistency of the batter, and the quality of the oil, make all the difference when you are frying. In England the poor and middle-class Christians are shocking cooks; the moment they touch it half the goodness of the food is gone. It is a melancholy fact, and it is the cause of innumerable domestic grievances. It drives away cheerfulness, it breeds sulks and bad temper, and yet the women will not learn--no, they will not learn. When you see a well-ordered household and a peaceful home, the children happy and contented, the husband and wife affectionate to each other, you know at once that the mistress is a good cook. You laugh; but it is really a very serious matter. It goes straight to the root of things."

Grace was said after supper, and the reading of the Passover prayers continued. Aaron had a fine baritone voice, and he did full justice to the ancient psalmody, which has been transmitted through long ages, from generation to generation. "Were our mouths filled with sacred song as the sea is with water, our tongue shouting loudly as its roaring billows, and our lips extended with praise like the widely spread firmament, and our eyes sparkling like the sun and the moon, and our hands extended like the eagle's wings in the skies, and our feet swift as the hind's, we should yet be deficient to render sufficient thanks unto Thee, O Lord our God, and the God of our fathers, or to bless Thy name for even one of the innumerable benefits which Thou hast conferred upon us and our ancestors." Then followed "It was at midnight." "When the blaspheming Sennacherib purposed to assail Thine habitation, Thou didst frustrate him through the dread carcases of his host in the night. Bel and its image were hurled down in the darkness of the night. To Daniel, the much beloved man, was the mysterious vision revealed in the night.... Thou wilt tread the wine-press for them who anxiously ask, Watchman, what of the night? Let the Eternal, the Watchman of Israel, cry out and say, The morning hath come as well as the night." Nearly at the end of the service there was a merry chant, "Oh, may He who is most mighty soon rebuild His house; speedily, speedily, soon, in our days." And the prayers ended with the curious poem, "One only kid, one only kid," supposed to be a parable illustrating the written and unwritten history of the Jewish race.

So conducive of cheerfulness and amiability had been the dedication of the Passover that smiles were on every lip and good feeling in every eye; amiability and good nature shone on their countenances. An hour was devoted to a chat upon general subjects, and after accepting an

invitation to come again upon the following night, the Levis took their departure. On their way home they spoke freely of the hospitality and geniality of their host, of the sweet disposition of Rachel, with whom they had all fallen in love, of the order and cleanliness of the house, of the salutary effects of an evening so spent. Never had they been so deeply impressed with the beauty of the religion into which they had been born, the obligations of which they had thrust aside and neglected, principally, as M. Levi would have advanced, on the score of convenience. Had Aaron Cohen argued with M. Levi upon this neglect it is likely he would have contributed to the defeat of the object he had in view; but he was far too astute to argue with a man who, being in the wrong, would have obstinately defended himself when thus attacked. He knew the value of the lesson the Levis had received, and he was content to wait for the result. He would have been greatly gratified had he heard the whispered words addressed to her husband by Madame Levi.

"Cannot we do the same? Cannot we live as they do?"

M. Levi, deep in thought, did not answer the question, but it was nevertheless treasured in his memory. Treasured also in his memory were some words that passed between his eldest son and his wife.

"Mother, I am a Jew?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I am glad."

"Why, my child?"

"Because M. Cohen is a Jew. I want to be like him."

M. Levi looked at his son, a handsome lad, whose face was flushed with the pleasures of the most memorable evening in his young life. To deprive him of his confirmation would be robbing him of God's heritage. The father was at heart a Jew, but, like many of his brethren residing in Christian communities, had found it easier to neglect his religion than to conform to its precepts. Putting it another way, he thought it would be to his worldly disadvantage. He had made his will, and therein was written his desire to be "buried among his people"--that controlling wish which, in their last moments, animates so many Jews who through all their days have lived as Christians. "Let me be buried among my people," they groan; "let me be buried among my people!" That is their expiation, that is their charm for salvation, for though all their years have been passed in attending to their worldly pleasures and temporal interests, they believe in a future life. These men have been guided by no motives of sincerity, by no conscientious inquiry as to how far the tenets of an ancient creed--the principal parts of which were formulated while the race was in tribulation--are necessary and obligatory in the present age; they are palterers and cowards, and grossly deceive themselves if they believe that burial in Jewish ground will atone for their backsliding. M. Levi was not a coward, and now that his error was brought home to him he was strongly moved to take up the broken threads of a faith which, in its purity, offers so much of Divine consolation. He himself broached the subject to Aaron, and his resolve was strengthened by the subsequent conversations between them.

"That man is to be honoured, not despised," said Aaron, "who changes his opinions through conviction. He may be mistaken, but he is sincere, and sincerity is the test of faith. You believe in God, you acknowledge His works, you live in the hope of redemption. In religion you must be something or nothing. You deny that you are a Christian. What, then, are you? A Jew. What race can boast of a heritage so glorious? We have yet to work out our future. Take your place in the ranks--ranks more illustrious than that which any general has ever led to victory--be once more a soldier of God."

These words fired M. Levi. The following Saturday his place of business was closed; from a box in which it may be said they were hidden, he took out his garment of fringes, his prayer-books, his phylacteries, and worshipped as of yore. Two vacancies occurring in his business, he filled them up with Jews; Aaron also induced a few Jews to settle there, and in a short time they could reckon upon ten adults, the established number necessary for public worship. In the rear of his house Aaron built a large room, which was used as a synagogue, and there M. Levi's eldest son was confirmed. In the autumn, when the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated, the little band of Jews found a booth erected in Aaron's garden; there was a roof of vines through which they saw the light of heaven. It was beautified with flowers, and numbers of persons came to see this pretty remembrance of a time when the Children of Israel dwelt in tents in the wilderness. The prayers in the synagogue over, the worshippers assembled in the booth, and ate and drank with Aaron and his family. Aaron had provided palms, citrons, myrtle, and willows for his co-religionists, and in an address he gave in the course of the service he told them how the citron was a symbol of innocent childhood, the myrtle a symbol of youth and of the purity that dwells on the brow of the bride and bridegroom, the firm and stately palm a symbol of upright manhood, and the drooping willow a symbol of old age. His discourses had always in them something new and attractive which had a special bearing upon the ancient faith in which he took so much pride.

"We have you to thank for our happiness," said Madame Levi to him.

"It is a good work done, my love," said Aaron to his wife, rubbing his hands with satisfaction;

"a good work done."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RACHEL'S LIFE IN THE NEW LAND.

Meanwhile Rachel throve. She walked with an elastic spring in her feet, as though in response to nature's greeting, and joy and happiness accompanied her everywhere. She was profoundly and devoutly grateful for her husband's better fortune, and daily rendered up thanks for it to the Giver of all good. She took pleasure in everything; blind as she was, she enjoyed nature's gifts to the full. In winter it was extraordinary to hear her describe the aspect of woods and fields in their white feathery mantle; with deep-drawn breath she inhaled the fresh cold air, and a glory rested on her face as she trod the snow-clad paths. When she visited the poor on those cold days Prissy accompanied her, carrying a well-filled basket on her arm. Her sympathy with the sick and suffering was Divine, and in the bleakest hours, when the sky was overcast and the light was hidden from shivering mortals, she was the herald of sunshine. A priest met her on one of these journeys, and gave her good-day.

"Good-day, father," she said.

"You know me!" he exclaimed, surprised; for though his priestly calling was apparent from his attire, Rachel could not see it.

"I heard your voice a fortnight ago," she replied, "in the cottage I am going to now, and I never forget a voice. After you were gone the poor woman told me you were her priest. I heard so much of you that was beautiful."

She put forth her hand; he hesitated a moment, then took it and pressed it.

"How sad, how sad, my daughter, that you are a Jewess!"

"I am happily a Jewess, father."

"Let me come and talk to you."

"Yes, father, come and talk to me of your poor, to whom you are so good. You do so much; I, being blind, can do so little. If you will allow me----" She offered him some gold pieces, and he accepted them.

"The Holy Mother have you in her keeping," he said; and went his way.

Dogs and horses were her friends, and were instinctively conscious of her presence. She scattered food for the birds, and they soon grew to know her; some would even pick crumbs from her hand. "I do not think," she said, "they would trust me so if I were not blind. They know I cannot see, and cannot harm them." Aaron thought differently; not a creature that drew breath could fail to trust and love this sweet woman whom God had spared to him.

Whom God had spared to him! When the thought thus expressed itself, he raised his eyes to Heaven in supplication.

She was the first to taste the sweet breath of spring. "Spring is coming," she said; "the birds are trilling the joyful news. How busy they are over their nests, the little chatterers, telling one another the news as they work! In a little while we shall see the flowers." She invariably spoke of things as if she could see them, as doubtless she did with spiritual sight, investing them with a beauty which was not of this world. It was her delight in summer to sit beneath the branches of a favourite cherry tree, and to follow with her ears the gambols of her children. For she had two now. A year after they left Gosport another child was born to them, Joseph, to whom Aaron clave with intense and passionate love. It was not that he was cold to Ruth, that he was not unremitting in showing her affection, but in his love for his son there was a finer quality, of which no one but himself was conscious. He had prayed for another child, and his prayer was answered. In the first flush of his happiness he was tempted to regard this gift of God as a token that his sin was forgiven, but he soon thrust this reflection aside, refusing to accept his own interpretation of his sin as an atonement for its committal. It was presumptuous in man to set lines and boundaries to the judgment of the Eternal. It was to Rachel that this blessing was vouchsafed, for a time might come when she would find in it a consolation for a revelation that would embitter the sweet waters of life. Both the children were pretty and engaging, and had winning and endearing ways, which, in the mother's sightless eyes, were magnified a thousandfold. In the following year a

picture by a famous painter was exhibited in the Paris *salon*; it was entitled "A Jewish Mother," and represented a woman sitting beneath a cherry tree in flower, with two young children gambolling on the turf at her feet. In the background were two men, the curé of the village and a Jew, the latter being the woman's husband, and looking like a modern Moses. The faces of the men--one full-fleshed, with massive features and a grand beard, the other spare and lean, with thin, clear-cut features and a close-shaven face--formed a fine contrast. But although the points of this contrast were brought out in masterly fashion, and although the rustic scene was full of beauty, the supreme attraction of the picture lay in the woman. In her sightless eyes dwelt the spirit of peace and purity, and there was an angelic sweetness and resignation in her face as, with head slightly inclined, she listened to the prattle of her children. You could almost hear a sigh of happiness issue from her lips. The woman's face photographed itself upon the minds of all who beheld it, and it is not too much to say that it carried with it an influence for good. Years afterwards, when their visit to the *salon* was forgotten, it made itself visible to their mind's eye, and always with beneficial suggestion. So it is also with a pure poem or story; the impression it leaves is an incentive to kindly act and tolerant judgment; it softens, it ameliorates, it brings into play the higher attributes of human nature, and in its practical results a benefit is conferred equally upon the sufferer by the wayside and the Samaritan who pours oil upon his wounds. The critics were unanimous in their praises of the picture. "Who is the woman?" they asked, and no one could answer the question except the painter, and he held his tongue.

The secret was this. The famous painter, passing through the village with the subject of his next great picture in his mind, saw Rachel, and was spellbound by the purity and grace of her face and figure. Travelling under an assumed name, in order that he should not be disturbed by the trumpet blasts of fame--a proof (clear to few men) that there is pleasure in obscurity--he cast aside the subject of the great picture he had intended to paint, and determined to take his inspiration from Rachel. He was assured from what he heard of her that he was in the presence of a good woman, and he was deeply impressed by her gentleness and grace. He did not find it difficult to obtain an introduction to Aaron, who invited him home, where he made himself welcome--no difficult matter, for Aaron was ever ready to appreciate intellect. Many an evening did the painter pass with them, sometimes in company with the curé, and many a friendly argument did they have. The priest and the artist were surprised at the wide range of subjects with which Aaron was familiar, and upon which he could converse with fluent ease. Upon great themes he spoke with so much force and clearness that even when they differed from him he generally succeeded in weakening their convictions. It was not his early schooling that made him so comprehensive and clear-sighted; a man's education depends chiefly upon himself--teachers and masters play but a subsidiary part, and all the coaching in the world will not make a weak intellect strong. Superficial knowledge may be gained; but it is as transient as a shadow, and in its effect is valueless in the business of life. Aaron was not a classical scholar; he was something better--a painstaking student, who extracted from his extensive reading the essence of a subject, and took no heed of the husk and shell in which it was embedded. Firm, perhaps to some extent dogmatic, in matters of religion, he was gifted with a large-hearted toleration which led him to look with a kindly eye upon men who did not think as he did; but his final judgment was the judgment of a well-balanced mind.

The artist did not ask Rachel and Aaron to be his models, but he made innumerable sketches of them, and remained in the village long enough to accumulate all the principal points and accessories for his picture. Then he departed and painted his masterpiece elsewhere. Some time afterwards he revisited the village with the intention of making acknowledgment for the inspiration, but Aaron and his family had departed, and the painter's secret was undivulged.

As it was with Rachel in winter and spring, so was it in summer and autumn. The flowers, the butterflies, the fragrant perfume of garden and hedgerow, all appealed powerfully to her, and all were in kinship with her. The village children would follow her in the gloaming, singing their simple songs; brawlers, ashamed, would cease contending when she came in sight; women would stand at their cottage doors and gaze reverently upon her as she passed. Not a harsh thought was harboured against her and hers; her gentle spirit was an incentive to gentleness; she was a living, tender embodiment of peace on earth and goodwill to all. The whisper of the corn in the autumn, when the golden stalks bowed their heads to the passing breeze, conveyed a Divine message to her soul; and, indeed, she said seriously to Aaron that she sometimes fancied she heard voices in the air, and that they brought a sense of ineffable pleasure to her heart.

In the ordinary course of events the partnership came to an end. The engineer was invited to Russia to undertake an important work for the Government, and Aaron would not accompany him.

"In the first place," he said, "I will not expose my wife and children to the rigours of such a climate. In the second place, I will not go because I am a Jew, and because, being one, I should meet with no justice in that land. In the annals of history no greater infamy can be found than the persecution to which my brethren are subjected in that horrible country. In former ages, when the masses lived and died ignorant and unlettered, like the beasts of the field, one can understand how it was that the iron hand ruled and crushed common human rights out of existence; but in these days, when light is spreading all over the world except in such a den of hideous corruption and monstrous tyranny as Russia, it is almost incredible that these cruelties are allowed to be practised."

"How would you put a stop to them?" asked the engineer.

"I will suppose a case," Aaron answered. "You are the ruler of an estate, upon which reside a number of families, who respect the laws you make for them, who pay you tribute, and who lead reputable lives. You know that these families are not all of one opinion upon religious matters. Some pray in churches, some in synagogues, some do not pray at all. You do not show favour to those with whose views you agree, and you do not oppress those from whom you differ. You say to them, 'You are all my subjects; so long as you obey my laws, so long as you conduct yourselves as good citizens, you shall live upon an equality, and shall have my protection. Thought is free. Worship God according to the dictates of your conscience, and be happy. For you the synagogue, for me the church. I am content.' What is the consequence? Between you and your people exists a bond of allegiance and affection. They are true and loyal to you, and you really look upon them as children of one family. In times of national distress, when a cry for help is heard in any part of your estate, the bishop of your Established Church, the Pope's cardinal, and the Chief Rabbi of the Jews meet upon common ground, free one and all to act as priests of humanity, and eager to alleviate the suffering which has arisen among them. In your government councils all creeds are represented, and the voice that is heard in decisions of national importance is truly the national voice. You have your reward. Order is preserved, property is safe, and you are respected everywhere. There are other estates in your neighbourhood which more or less resemble yours, and in which men of all creeds have equal rights. But there is one from which shrieks of agony issue daily and nightly, terrible cries of suffering, imploring appeals for help and mercy. They strike upon your ears; you cannot help hearing them. The brutal ruler of this estate has for his subjects a vast number of families, all of whom have been born on his land, all of whom recognise him as their king, and are ready and anxious to pay him respect, all of whom have a natural claim upon him for protection, all of whom work for him and contribute to the expenses of his household. To those whose religious views agree with his own he shows favour and gives protection; those who are born in a different faith he hates and tortures. From them proceed these shrieks of agony, these cries of suffering, these appeals for help. You see them torn and bleeding, their faces convulsed with anguish, their hearts racked with woe; they have no other home, and there is no escape for them. Every step they take is dogged and watched; whichever way they turn the lash awaits them, and torture chambers to drive them to the last stage of despair. And their shrieks and supplications eternally pierce the air you breathe, while the oppressed ones stretch forth their hands for mercy to the monster who makes their lives a hell upon earth. What do they ask? That they should be allowed to live in peace. But this reasonable and natural request infuriates the tyrant. He flings them to the ground and grinds his iron heel into their bleeding flesh; he spits in their faces, and orders his torturers to draw the cords tighter around them. It is not for a day, it is not for a week, it is not for a year, it is for ever. They die, and leave children behind them, who are treated in the same fashion; and for them, as it was with their fathers, there is no hope. No attempt is made to hide these infamies, these cruelties, which would disgrace the lowest order of beasts; they are perpetrated in the light of day, and the monster who is responsible for them sneers at you, and says, 'If you were in their place, I would treat you the same.' He laughs at your remonstrances, and draws the cords still tighter, and tortures the quivering flesh still more mercilessly, and cries, 'It is my estate, they are my subjects, and I will do as I please with them. Let them abjure their God, and I may show them mercy. Their bodies are mine, they have no souls!' To argue with him is presumption; in his arrogant estimation of himself the 'divinity that doth hedge a king' places him above human conditions--this man, who comes of a family with a social history so degrading that, were it attached to one of low degree, he would not be admitted into decent society. Talk to him of humanity, and he derides and defies you. You burn with indignation; but what action do you take?"

"It is a strong illustration," said the engineer; "but it is not with nations as with families."

"It is," said Aaron, with passionate fervour. "There is no distinction in the eyes of God. We are all members of one family, and the world is our heritage. The world is divided into nations, nations into cities, towns, and villages, and these are subdivided into houses, each having its separate rulers; and, though physically and geographically wide apart, all are linked by the one common tie of our common humanity. The same emotions, the same passions, the same aspirations, run through all alike. Does it make an innocent babe a malefactor because he is born in Russia instead of France or England? But it is so considered, and his life is made a misery to him by monsters who, when they give bloody work to their armies to do, blasphemously declare that the Lord of hosts is on their side, and call upon Him to bless their infamous banners."

It was seldom that Aaron expressed himself so passionately, and, as the engineer made no reply, they did not pursue the discussion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FAREWELL.

When it became known that Aaron was about to leave the quiet resting-place in which the last few years had been passed, and in which he had enjoyed peace and prosperity, a general feeling of regret was expressed, and efforts were made to induce him to change his resolution. Coming among them a stranger, a foreigner, and an alien in religion, he had won for himself the lasting esteem of all classes of the community. The village was now an important centre, its trade was in a flourishing condition, and its population had largely increased; as a natural consequence, property had risen in value, and the old residents were growing rich. It was ungrudgingly acknowledged that all this was due to Aaron Cohen's enterprise and to the integrity of his character. The well-to-do and the poor alike deplored the impending loss, and united in their appeals to him to remain; but they were unsuccessful. There was in Aaron a latent ambition, of which he himself was scarcely aware, to move in a larger sphere, and to play his part in life among his own people. His intention had been at first to remain in the pretty French village only long enough to benefit Rachel's health, and had it not been for the chance that threw him and the engineer together, and which opened up enterprises which had led to such fortunate results, he would have fulfilled this intention and have selected some populous city in England to pursue his career. One venture had led to another, and the success which had attended them was a sufficient inducement to tarry. But now that the partnership was at an end the incentive was gone, and he was not sorry that he was in a certain sense compelled to return to his native land. One thing in his life in the village had weighed heavily upon him. There was no established synagogue in which he and his family could worship, and, as we have seen, it was in his own home that he carried out all the ceremonials of his religion. Much as Aaron had reason to be grateful for, he yearned to follow the practices of his religion among a larger body of his co-religionists, to have the honour of taking the sacred scroll from the ark, to hear the chazan's voice from the pulpit and the melodious chant of the choir, followed by the deep responses of the congregation. He had an instinctive leaning to movement and colour. He loved the peace of his home; it was his ark of rest; but he loved also the bustle and turmoil of life. He was essentially an administrator, and fitted by nature for the control and direction of large bodies of men. Had he been single he would doubtless have migrated to one of the new colonies which perennially spring up under British rule, and have taken a prominent part in its growth and development. It is greatly due to Jewish spirit and enterprise that these new countries thrive and flourish so rapidly.

There was another consideration. Aaron wished his son Joseph to grow up amid his co-religionists, to mix with them, to become familiar with their ways, so that he might be fixed firmly in the faith of his forefathers. There was no Jewish school in the village in which the lad could be educated. He looked forward to the future. Joseph would become a man, and in this village there were limitations and restrictions which were not favourable to the formation of strong character. Here was a young mind to be trained; the more comprehensive the surroundings the better the chance of worldly advancement. He discussed these matters with Rachel.

"Yes," she said, "let us go. But I shall never forget the happy years we have passed here."

"Nor I," said Aaron. "Honour and good fortune have attended us. May a blessing rest upon the village and all the dwellers therein!"

Then Rachel spoke of her poor and of her regret at leaving them.

"We will bear them in remembrance," said Aaron, "and before we bid them, farewell something can be done to place them in permanent comfort."

Much was done by Rachel and himself. For some time past he had bestowed a great part of his benefactions in such a manner that those whom he befriended were ignorant of the source from which the good flowed. In order that this should be carried out as he wished he had to seek an agent; looking around he made his selection, and asked the curé of the village to be his almoner, explaining that he did not wish it to be known that the money came from him. The curé, much surprised, accepted the office; Aaron was grievously disturbing his opinion of the heretic. After the meeting with Rachel, which has been described in the previous chapter, he had visited her home with the laudable desire of converting the family to the true faith, and had found himself confronted with peculiar difficulties. He strove to draw them into argument, but in a theological sense they slipped through his fingers. Aaron's course in this respect was premeditated, Rachel's was unconsciously pursued. She listened to all he said, and smilingly acquiesced in his declaration that there was only one road open to heaven's gates.

"It is the road of right-doing, father," she said, "the road of kindness, of doing unto others as you would they should do unto you, of dispensing out of your store, whether it be abundant or not, what you can spare to relieve the unfortunate. You are right, father; there is only one road."

By her sweetness and charity, by her practical sympathy with the suffering, she cut the ground from under his feet. He spoke of the saints, and she said they were good men and women, and were receiving their reward. In a word, she took the strength and subtlety out of him, and he yielded with sighs of regret and admiration. With Aaron he was more trenchant, and quite as unsuccessful. Many of Aaron's humorous observations made the good priest laugh in spite of

himself, and the pearls of wisdom which fell from the Jew's lips crumbled his arguments to dust. There was no scoffing or irreverence on Aaron's part; he simply parried the thrusts with a wisdom and humanity deeper and truer than those of which his antagonist could boast.

"My son," said the curé, "would you not make me a Jew if it were in your power?"

"No," replied Aaron, "we do not proselytise, and even if we did you are too good a Christian for me to wish to make you a Jew."

This was one of the puzzling remarks which caused the curé to ponder, and which dwelt long in his mind; sometimes he thought that Aaron was a man of deep subtlety, sometimes that he was a man of great simplicity, but whether subtle or simple he felt it impossible to withhold a full measure of respect from one whose eternal lot he sighed to think was perdition and everlasting torment. That sincerity was the true test of faith, as Aaron declared, he would not admit; there could be no sincerity in a faith that was false, there could be no sincerity if you did not believe as he believed. Nevertheless, he had an uncomfortable impression that he was being continually worsted in the peaceful war of words in which they invariably engaged when they came together.

As Aaron was not to be turned from his resolution to leave the country, the villagers took steps to show their respect for him. Public meetings were held, which were attended by many persons from surrounding districts, and there was a banquet, of which Aaron did not partake, the food not being cooked according to the Jewish formula. He contented himself with fruit and bread, and made a good and sufficient meal. Speeches were made in his honour, and he was held up as an example to old and young. His response was in admirable taste. He said that the years he had spent among them were the happiest in his life, and that it was with true regret he found himself compelled to leave the village. He spoke of his first coming among them with a beloved wife in a delicate state of health, who had grown well and strong in the beautiful spot. It was not alone the sweet air, he said, which had brought the blessing of health to her; the bond of sympathy which had been established between her and her neighbours had been as a spiritual medicine to her, which had given life a value of which it would otherwise have been deprived. It was not so much the material reward of our labours that conferred happiness upon us as the feeling that we were passing our days among friends who always had a smile and a pleasant greeting for us. Riches were perishable, kindly remembrances immortal. The lessons of life were to be learned from the performance of simple acts of duty; for he regarded it as a duty to so conduct ourselves as to make our presence welcome, and agreeable to those with whom we were in daily association. As to the kind things that had been said of him, he felt that he was scarcely worthy of them. "There is," he said, "a leaven of human selfishness in all that we do; and the little I have, with the blessing of God, been enabled to do has conferred upon me a much greater pleasure than it could possibly have conferred upon others. To you and to my residence among you I owe all my good fortune, to you and to my residence among you I owe my dear wife's restoration to health; and it would be ingratitude indeed did I not endeavour to make some return for the good you have showered upon me. I shall never forget you, nor will my wife forget you; in our native land we shall constantly recall the happy years we spent in this pleasant village, and we shall constantly pray that peace and prosperity may never desert you." The earnestness and feeling with which these sentiments were uttered were unmistakable and convincing, and when Aaron resumed his seat the eyes of all who had assembled to do him honour were turned upon him approvingly and sympathisingly. "Ah," groaned the good curé, "were he not a Jew he would be a perfect man!" The flowers which graced the banqueting table were sent by special messenger to Rachel, and the following day she pressed a few and kept them ever afterwards among her precious relics. Aaron did not come home till late in the night, and he found Rachel waiting up for him. He delighted her by describing the incidents and speeches of the memorable evening. Aaron was a great smoker, and while they talked he smoked the silver-mounted pipe for which he had so great an affection.

There are in the possession of many men dumb memorials of insignificant value which they would not part with for untold gold, and this silver-mounted pipe of Aaron's was one of these. Before Rachel was blind she had been in the habit of filling it for him, and when she was deprived of sight he sorely missed the affectionate service. Tears started to his eyes one night when, with a loving smile, she handed it to him, filled; and now she did it for him regularly. Rachel had indulged in a piece of extravagance. She had a special case made for the pipe, adorned with the letters A. and R. outlined in brilliants, and Aaron handled his treasure almost with the care and affection he bestowed upon his children.

"Your health was proposed," said Aaron, "and the health of our little ones. What was said about you, my life, gave me much more pleasure than what was said about myself. It abashes one to have to sit and listen to extravagant praises far beyond one's merits, but it is the habit of men to run into extravagance."

"They could say nothing, dear husband, that you do not deserve."

"You too!" exclaimed Aaron, gaily. "It is well for me that you were not there, for you might have been called upon to give your testimony."

"I should not have had the courage." She fondly pressed his hand. "I am glad they spoke of me kindly."

"They spoke of you truly, and my heart leaped up within me at what the good curé said of you,

for it was he who proposed the toast. I appreciated it more from him than I should have done from any one else, and he was quite sincere for the moment in all the sentiments he expressed, whatever he may have thought of himself afterwards for asking his flock to drink the health of a Jewess. Well, well, it takes all sorts to make a world."

"How much we have to be grateful for!" said Rachel, with a happy sigh.

"Indeed, indeed, for boundless gratitude. Think of what we passed through in Gosport"--he paused suddenly; the one experience which weighed upon his conscience brought a dark and troubled shadow into his face.

"Why do you pause, dear? Has not my blindness proved a blessing to us? Do I miss my sight? Nay, I think it has made life sweeter. But for that we should not have come to this place, but for that we should not have had the means to do something towards the relief of a few suffering and deserving people. Nothing but good has sprung from it. Our Lord God be praised."

Aaron recovered himself. "There was Mr. Whimpole's visit to us before I commenced business, there were those stupid boys who distressed you so with their revilings, which I managed to turn against themselves. It was this pipe of yours, my life, that gave me the inspiration how to disarm them. It sharpens my faculties, it brings out my best points; it is really to me a friend and counsellor. And now I have smoked enough, and it is time to go to bed. I will join you presently."

In solitude the one troubled memory of the past forced itself painfully upon him. Did he deserve what had been said in his honour on this night? He valued men's good opinion, and of all the men he knew he valued most the good opinion of the curé. What would this single-minded, conscientious priest think of him if he were acquainted with the sin of which he had been guilty, the sin of bringing up an alien child in a religion in which she had not been born? He would look upon him with horror. And it was a bitter punishment that he was compelled to keep this secret locked in his own breast, that he dared not reveal it to a single human creature, that he dared not say openly, "I have sinned, I have sinned. Have mercy upon me!" To his own beloved wife, dearer to him than life itself, he had behaved treacherously; even in her he dared not confide. It was not with Rachel as it was with him; there was no difference in the love she bore her children; they were both equally precious to her. To fall upon his knees before her and make confession would be like striking a dagger into her heart; it almost drove him mad to think of the shock such a revelation would be to her. No, he must guard his secret and his sin jealously to the last hour of his life. So far as human discovery went he believed himself to be safe; the betrayal, if it ever came, lay with himself. True, he had in his possession testimony which might damn him were it to fall into other hands, the little iron safe which Mr. Moss had received from Dr. Spenlove, and at the mother's request had conveyed to him. In his reflections upon the matter lately the question had intruded itself, What did this little box contain? It was impossible for him to say, but he felt instinctively that there was evidence in it which would bring his sin home to him. He allowed his thoughts now to dwell upon the mother. From the day on which he received the five hundred pounds from Mr. Gordon's lawyers he had heard nothing from them, nothing from Mr. Moss or from anybody relating to the matter. Between himself and Mr. Moss there had been a regular though not very frequent correspondence, but his friend had never written one word concerning it, and Aaron, of course, had not referred to it. Thus far, therefore, it was buried in a deep grave.

But would this grave never be opened? If other hands were not responsible for the act would it not be his duty to cause the light of truth to shine upon it? The mother had stipulated that, in the event of her husband's death, she should be free to seek her child, should be free to claim the box. Upon this contingency seemed to hang his fate; but there were arguments in his favour. Mr. Gordon might live, and the mother could do nothing. Arguing that the man died, it was more than probable that his wife had borne other children who had a claim upon her love which she acknowledged. To seek then her child of shame would be the means of bringing disgrace upon these children of her marriage. Would she deliberately do this? He answered the question immediately, No. In the consideration of these phases of the matter he bore in mind that, although the false news of the child's death must of necessity have been communicated to Mr. Gordon by his lawyers, it was likely that it had been kept from the knowledge of the mother. Aaron had been made to understand that Mr. Gordon was a man of inflexible resolution, and that he had pledged himself never under any circumstances to make mention of the child to the woman he had married. Even setting this aside, even going to the length of arguing that, hearing of the child's death, Mr. Gordon departed from the strict letter of his resolution, and said to his wife, "Your child is dead," was it not likely that she would reply, "I do not believe it; you tell me so only to deceive me"? In that case, her husband dead and herself childless, would she not search the world over for her offspring?

Setting this all aside, however, the onus still devolved upon him to open the grave. One of the stipulations attached to his receipt of the box was that when Ruth was twenty-one years of age it should be handed over to her. Would he dare to violate this condition? Would he so far tamper with his conscience as to neglect an obligation which might be deemed sacred? The question tortured him; he could not answer it.

He heard Rachel moving in the room above, and with a troubled heart he went up to her. Thus this night, the events of which were intended to shed honour and glory upon him, ended in sadness, and thus was it proved that the burden of a new deceit may be as a feather-weight to the solemn and heavy consequences which follow in its train.

Everything was ready for the departure of the Cohens, which was to take place at the end of the week. Before the day arrived they received other tokens in proof of the appreciation in which they were held. A deputation of working men waited on Aaron, and presented him with an address. The employers of labour themselves--secretly glad, perhaps, that he was going from among them--paid him a special honour. Rachel's heart throbbed with gratitude and with pride in her husband. But her greatest pleasure, in which were mingled touches of deep sorrow, was derived from the affecting testimony of the poor she had befriended. Old men and women witnessed their departure, and bidding farewell to Rachel, prayed God's blessing upon her. Children gave her flowers, and their childish voices were full of affection. The tears ran from her eyes; she could hardly tear herself away. At length it was over; they were gone; but it was long before her sweet face faded from their memory.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT THE GRAVE OF HIS CHILD.

The years that followed until Ruth was grown to womanhood and Joseph was a young man were eventful years for Aaron and his family. He returned to England the possessor of a few thousands of pounds, and was received with open arms by the Jewish community. He found to his surprise that the story of his life in a foreign land was known to his co-religionists, who are ever eager to acknowledge the success of their brethren. With Jews, as with Christians, success is a power, an "open sesame;" they are proud of it as reflecting honour upon the race, and, as is the human fashion, are willing to overlook a retrograde step or two in matters of religious observance on the parts of those who have won their way into the front ranks. It is also human, perhaps, that they are less tolerant to those who have not been so successful. Aaron Cohen, as we know, had no need of such indulgence; by poor and rich, by the heterodox and the orthodox, he was hailed as a worthy upholder of the old faith which has survived the persecutions of thousands of years. Before he went to Gosport he had resided in the East End of London, and he derived pleasure from his visits to the old familiar ground and from the renewal of acquaintance with old friends who had not prospered in life's battle. That he should be asked to assist these was natural, and the practical aid he tendered brought its reward. In a certain sense he became suddenly famous. "That's Aaron Cohen," said the East End Jews, pointing him out as he passed; "he used to live here, and he has made an enormous fortune"--multiplying his riches, of course, a hundredfold. But a man may be famous without being popular; Aaron was both, and he was not allowed to remain in ignorance of the fact. He was offered an honourable office in his synagogue, and he gladly accepted it. He was asked to serve on the board of several of the Jewish charities with which London abounds, and he did not refuse one of these requests. It was his earnest wish to make himself practically useful to the community, and also to do something towards the stemming of the tide of loose religious observance which was steadily rising among his brethren. Upon this subject he had many conversations with the clerical leaders of the chosen people, who saw the inroads that were being made and seemed powerless to provide a remedy. It did not occur to them that by a bold grasp of the nettle danger they might pluck from it the flower safety. Aaron Cohen believed in the thirteen articles of the Creed framed by Maimonides, which are accepted as the fundamental articles of the Jewish faith. He believed in following--so far as was practicable in the present age--the precepts which Moses transmitted to his race, with which all faithful Jews should be familiar. Some, he knew, were obsolete; such as those affecting the Nazarites, of whom not one disciple exists to-day among English-speaking communities: others were impracticable; such, for instance, as those relating to the burnt sacrifices, the redeeming of the male firstling of an ass, and the punishment of criminals by stoning and the sword. But in this code of six hundred and thirteen precepts are to be found many which breathe the pure essence of the faith in which he was born, and these he believed it incumbent upon him to obey. His lectures and addresses to Jewish audiences in the East End of London were listened to with breathless interest; the halls were not large enough to accommodate those who thronged to hear him. He drew from history illustrations of their past grandeur which fired and thrilled them. Sensible of the impression he made upon them, Aaron Cohen had reason to be proud of the part he was playing, but there was more room in his heart for humbleness than pride; the shadow of a committed sin for ever attended him.

Apart from these communal matters he had much to do. In business hours business claimed him, and he answered zealously to the call. To such a man idleness would have been little less than a living death, and, taking up his residence in London, he embarked very soon in enterprises of magnitude. The knowledge he had gained during his partnership in France was of immense value to him, and in conjunction with other men of technical resource, he contracted for public works in various parts of the country. His fortune grew, and he gradually became wealthy. He moved from one house to another, and each move was a step up the ladder. A house in Prince's

Gate came into the market, and Aaron purchased it, and furnished it with taste and elegance. There he entertained liberally but not lavishly, for his judgment led him always to the happy mean, and his house became the resort of men and women of intellect and culture. Mr. Moss, who was wedded to Portsmouth, and continued to flourish there, paid periodical visits to London, and was always welcome in Aaron's home. He was as musically inclined as ever; and opportunities were afforded him of hearing the finest singers and players at Prince's Gate. On occasions, Aaron readily consented to give an introduction, through concerts held in his house, to young aspirants in whom Mr. Moss took an interest; and to other budding talent in the same direction Aaron's rooms were always open. In relation to their intimacy in Gosport a conversation took place between Mr. Moss and Aaron some three years after the latter was settled in London. Aaron had just completed a successful contract, and business had called Mr. Moss to the metropolis.

"I heard to-day," said Mr. Moss, "that you had cleared six or seven thousand pounds by the contract."

"The balance on the right side," replied Aaron, "is a little over seven thousand."

"I congratulate you. The gentleman I spoke with said that if he had had the contract he would have made a profit of three times as much."

"It is likely."

"Then, why didn't you do it, Cohen?"

Aaron smiled and shook his head. "Let us speak of another subject."

"But I want to get at the bottom of this. I should like you to know what the gentleman said about it."

"Very well. What did he say?"

"That you are ruining the labour market."

"Ruin to some men may mean salvation to others. He doubtless gives an explanation. How am I ruining the labour market?"

"By high wages and short hours."

"That is a new view."

"You do pay high wages, Cohen, according to what everybody says."

"Oh, it's everybody now, as well as your gentleman friend. Yes, I pay good wages, and I don't consider them high."

"And the hours are not as long as they might be."

"Quite true. They might be twelve, fourteen, sixteen, out of the twenty-four. We read of such unfair strains upon human labour. My hours are reasonably long enough. If I am satisfied and my workmen are satisfied, I give offence to no man."

"You are wrong, Cohen; you give offence to the capitalist."

"I regret to hear it."

"He says you are ruining the capitalist."

"Oh, I am ruining the capitalist now. But if that is the case, he is no longer a capitalist."

"You know what I mean. I don't pretend to understand these things as you do, because I have not studied political economy."

"I have, and believe me it is a horse that has been ridden too hard. Mischief will come of it. Apply your common sense. In what way would your friend have made twenty-one thousand pounds out of the contract instead of seven thousand?"

"By getting his labour cheaper and by making his men work longer hours."

"Exactly. And the difference of fourteen thousand pounds would have gone into his pocket instead of the pockets of his workmen."

"Yes, of course."

"Ask yourself if that is fair. The wages I pay my men are sufficient to enable them to maintain a home decently, to bring up their families decently, and perhaps, if they are wise and thrifty--only, mind you, if they are wise and thrifty--to make a small provision for old age, when they are no longer able to work. Their hours are long enough to give them just a little leisure, which they can employ partly in reasonable amusement and partly in intellectual improvement. I have gone

thoroughly into these matters, and I know what I am talking about. Men who do their work honestly--and I employ and will keep no others--have a right to fair wages and a little leisure, and I decline to grind my men down after the fashion of the extreme political economist. The contract I have just completed was tendered for in an open market. My tender was the lowest, and was accepted. I make a considerable sum of money out of it, and each of my men contributes a mickle towards it. They believe I have treated them fairly, and I am certain they have treated me fairly. Upon those lines I intend to make my way. Your sweater is a political economist. I am not a sweater. It is the course I pursued in France, and by it I laid the foundation of what may prove to be a great fortune. I am tendering now for other contracts, and I shall obtain my share, and shall pursue precisely the same course. Mr. Moss, you and I are Jews. At a great disadvantage because of the nature of your business, which I myself once intended to follow, you have made yourself respected in the town in which you reside. Why? Because you are a fair-dealing man. I, on my part, wish to make myself respected in whatever part of the world I live. To this end the conditions are somewhat harder for us than for our Christian neighbours. They drive as hard bargains as we do, they are equally guilty of malpractices. When one is found out--a terrible crime, as we know--it is not said of him, 'What could you expect? He is a Christian.' It is not so with us. When one of us is proved to be guilty of sharp dealing, it is said, 'What could you expect? He is a Jew.' I will not go into the question whether we have justly earned the reproach; but it certainly lays upon us the obligation of being more careful than perhaps we might otherwise be, of even giving way a little, of being a trifle more liberal. It is a duty we owe to ourselves. Surely there is no race to which it is a greater honour, and should be the greatest pride to belong, than the Jewish race; and by my conduct through life I trust I shall do nothing to tarnish that honour or lower that pride. Moreover, what I can do to weaken a prejudice shall be done to the last hour of my life. It may or may not be for that reason that I decline to follow the political economist to the depths into which he has fallen."

Mr. Moss's eyes gleamed. Aaron had touched a sympathetic cord; the men shook hands and smiled cordially at each other.

"When you were in Gosport," said Mr. Moss, "I ought to have asked you to go into partnership with me."

"If you had made the offer," responded Aaron, "I should have accepted it."

"Lucky for you that I missed my opportunity. It is a fortunate thing that you went to France when you did."

"Very fortunate. It opened up a new career for me; it restored my dear wife to health; my son was born there."

"About the poor child I brought to you in Gosport, Cohen. We have never spoken of it."

"That is true," said Aaron, outwardly calm; but his heart beat more quickly.

"Did the lawyers ever write to you again?"

"Never."

"And I have heard nothing. The iron box I gave you--you have it still, I suppose?"

"I have it still."

"I have often wondered what it contains, and whether the mother will ever call for it."

"If she does it shall be handed to her in the same condition as you handed it to me. But she does not know in whose possession it is."

"No, she does not know, and she can only obtain the information from Mr. Gordon's lawyers. My lips are sealed."

Aaron considered a moment. This opening up of the dreaded subject made him keenly sensible of the sword that was hanging over his head; but his sense of justice impelled him to say, "It may happen that the mother will wish to have the box restored to her, and that the lawyers may refuse to give her the information that it is in my possession. She may seek elsewhere for a clue, and may be directed to you."

"Who will direct her? Nothing is more unlikely."

"It is at least probable," said Aaron.

"Well," Mr. Moss rejoined, "if she does apply to me, I shall not enlighten her. It is none of my business."

"My desire is that you do enlighten her. The box is her property, and I have no right to retain it."

"Very well, Cohen, if you wish it; but it is my opinion that you will never see her again. She has forgotten all about it long ago."

"You are mistaken. A mother never forgets."

"And now, Cohen, I have a message for you from Mrs. Moss. She is burning to see you, and cannot come to London. We are about to have an addition to our family; that will be the sixteenth. Upon my word, I don't know when we are going to stop. Is it too much to ask you to pay us a visit?"

"Not at all; it will give me great pleasure. When?"

"It will give Mrs. Moss greater pleasure," said Mr. Moss, rubbing his hands joyously at this answer. "She will be delighted, and so will all our friends in Portsmouth. You have no idea how anxious she has been about it. She was afraid you would refuse because----"

He paused rather awkwardly.

"Finish the sentence," urged Aaron, in a kind tone.

"To tell you the truth," said Mr. Moss, with a frank laugh, "she thought you might be too grand now to visit us. I told her she was mistaken. 'Cohen is not the kind of man to forget the past,' I said to her."

"No," said Aaron; "I do not forget the past."

The sad tone in which these words were spoken escaped Mr. Moss. With a beaming face, he continued,--

"'Once a friend,' I said to Mrs. Moss, 'always a friend. It does not matter to him whether a man is up or down in the world, so long as he is honest and straightforward.' Why, if business went wrong, and I was in trouble, I should come straight to you."

Aaron pressed the hand of this warm-hearted friend.

"You would do right. I hope you may never need my services in that way; but if unhappily you should, do not hesitate to come to me."

"I promise you, Cohen, I promise you. Not that there is any likelihood of it. To bring up such a family as ours is no light matter, keeps one's nose to the grindstone, as the saying is; but we're not at all badly off. I return to Portsmouth on Thursday. Will that time suit you for the visit?"

"Yes; I will accompany you."

And away went Mr. Moss, overjoyed, to write to his wife to make all needful preparations. Not being acquainted with the secret which had become the torture of Aaron Cohen's life, he could have had no idea that the ready acceptance of the invitation sprang from a father's burning desire to stand by the grave of his child.

Aaron's visit lasted a week, and he spent one day and night in Gosport. Nothing was changed in the ancient town. The house he had occupied had been rebuilt; the streets were the same; the names over the shops were unaltered. His wish was to pass in and out of the town without being recognised; but the wish was not gratified. The Portsmouth newspapers circulated in Gosport, and Aaron Cohen's visit "to our esteemed neighbour, Mr. Moss," found its way into the local columns. It may be that Mr. Moss himself was the harbinger of this piece of news and that he was also responsible for certain creditable episodes in Aaron's career which were duly recorded in print; but if the reporters were indebted to him for the particulars he made no mention of the fact. He was certainly proud of the paragraphs, and sent copies of the papers to all his friends. The Gosport folk were therefore prepared for Aaron's visit; old friends came forward to greet him; and the kind physician who had attended to Rachel during her illness pressed him to be his guest, but Aaron excused himself. When he left the doctor his road lay past Mr. Whimpole's shop, at the door of which the proprietor was standing. Their eyes meeting, Aaron courteously inclined his head. The corn-chandler, very red in the face, returned the salute, and, after a momentary hesitation, advanced towards Aaron with outstretched hand. Aaron stopped, and took the hand of his old enemy.

"Mr. Cohen," said Mr. Whimpole, "I hope you do not bear animosity."

"I do not, sir," replied Aaron. "Life is too full of anxieties for needless enmity."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Cohen. I have often reproached myself for misjudging you; but the best of men may be mistaken."

"They may, sir. I trust you have changed your opinion of those whose religious views differ from your own."

"We speak as we find," said Mr. Whimpole; "and you have proved yourself to be a gentleman."

"It is never too late to admit an error," said Aaron; and, bowing again, he passed on, leaving Mr. Whimpole with an uncomfortable impression that he had once more been worsted by the man he despised.

It was night when Aaron stood by the grave of his child. Light clouds floated before the moon, and the shifting shadows played upon the graves of those who lay in peace in that solemn sanctuary. For a long time he stood in silence, musing upon the sin he had committed, the full measure of which had not yet come home to him. He held a high place among men; his name was honoured; he had been spoken of as Aaron Cohen the upright Jew; he had made himself a leader, and had but to speak to be obeyed; he had brought back strayed sheep to the fold. The Chief Rabbi had said to him, "The example of such a man as yourself is invaluable. Inroads are being made in our ancient faith, and you stand like a valiant soldier in the breach. You exercise an influence for incalculable good." And then he had blessed the man who was hugging an awful secret close, and veiling it from the eyes of men. How would it be if his sin were laid bare?

The spirit of his child seemed to rise from the grave.

"Why am I here?" it asked reproachfully. "Why am I cut off from my race?"

He beat his breast; the tears flowed down his beard.

"Forgive me, Lord of hosts," he sobbed, "for laying my child to rest in a Christian churchyard! It was to save my beloved! Pardon my transgression! Have mercy upon me!"

BOOK THE FIFTH.

THE GATHERING OF THE CLOUD.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AARON IS ASKED FOR A SUBSCRIPTION, AND RELATES THE STORY OF A CONVERT.

The highest point in Aaron Cohen's prosperity was reached in 1893. From the day of his return to England there had been no break in the onward march of his fortunes; every enterprise he undertook flourished, and the old saying was applied to him, "Everything he touches turns to gold." A kind of superstition is associated with such men; people regard them as under the spell of some beneficent enchantment. Aaron's reputation, however, was not due solely to the fact that he was uniformly fortunate in his ventures, but that he was a just and charitable man. No appeal for assistance in any worthy movement was made to him in vain; his purse was ever open, and he was ever ready to respond. Among his co-religionists he was a power for good, and his advice was sought by high and low. The poorest Jew, in a time of difficulty, did not hesitate to go to him for counsel, and only those held back whose conduct would not stand the searching light he threw upon all matters submitted to him. By the oppressor he was held in awe, by the oppressed he was worshipped. One of the former, who had grown rich by usury, came to him for advice. Aaron listened in silence, and spoke no word of counsel to assist him out of his difficulty. "Reform your life," he said; "give back to the poor what you have stolen from them; then come to me again."

He did not confine his labours and charities to the Jewish community; his name was to be found among the administrators of all their benevolent funds, and it was also to be found on the lists of numberless Christian charities. In so generous a spirit did he meet the appeals that were made to him, and so devoid of narrowness were his benefactions, that he grew into the esteem of all classes of society. Early in the year a public indignation meeting was held at the Mansion House under the auspices of the Lord Mayor, to protest against the barbarous treatment of the Jews in Russia. Church and synagogue joined hands in the common cause of human brotherhood. It was not a question of theology but of humanity, and Catholic Cardinal, Protestant Bishop, and Jewish Chief Rabbi stood shoulder to shoulder in the indignant protest. Aaron was requested to speak on the occasion, and his words went forth to the world, and were quoted far and wide. In the course of his speech he said: "We do not ask for favour, we scarcely dare ask for justice,

though it is to be hoped that this will come by-and-by, when the eyes of the rulers of Russia are open to the fact that in their oppression of the Jew they are not only violating the laws of God and man, but are retarding their own prosperity. We ask merely for toleration, for permission to follow the faith in which we were born, to worship God according to our ancient usage. The history of nations furnishes the proof that the Jew, fairly treated, is a good citizen, that he is obedient to the law, and loyal to the head of the State and in his support of lawful authority. In his love of family life, in the orderly regulation of his household, in the performance of his duty to wife and children, he is surely entitled to rank with his Christian brother. He is, moreover, industrious and enterprising, he excites emulation and stimulates the commercial activity of his neighbour, by which the wealth of the general community is increased. These are distinct virtues, private and national, but Russian rulers seem to account them crimes. When a tale of bodily slavery reaches a civilised country a thrill of horror runs through the land, and it is not the least of the glorious records of England that wherever the English-speaking race holds sway the shackles of the slave are removed, and he hears the blessed words, 'You are free!' But in Russia they are not content to chain the body; they hold man's soul in bondage. Not only do they say to the Jew, 'Your presence is a contamination; you shall not live in this or that town or city; you shall not engage in such or such pursuits; you shall wear badges of disgrace;' but they add, 'You shall not think; you shall not pray.' Incredible are the instances of cruelty which are brought before us: of families torn asunder; of the deliberate wrecking of cherished hopes and worthy aspirations; of steady and honourable lives brought to ruin; of shameful robbery and pillage, and even of worse doings which I should blush to name. It is indeed time that the voice of humanity should be forced upon the ears of the oppressors who are making life horrible for millions of helpless human beings; and we, the Jewish residents in this honoured land, render our grateful homage to this distinguished assembly, and our sincere thanks for its powerful assistance in the endeavour we are making to rescue our brethren from misery and despair."

He was congratulated on all sides for these stirring words, which were recognised and acknowledged as a fitting tribute to the Jewish character. Some called it a vindication; he would not have it so. "We need no vindication now in this happy land," he said. "We have proved ourselves; the old prejudice is dying away."

When the speech was read to Rachel her eyes overflowed with tears of joy. Aaron, coming in shortly afterwards, found her holding the newspaper to her heart. She took his hand, and raised it to her lips.

"No, no," he said; "you humble me."

He folded her in his arms, where she lay, contented and happy.

As a matter of course he was sometimes beguiled into bestowing money upon unworthy objects or persons, but it did not affect him. "Where lives the man who does not make mistakes?" he said. "If there is one deserving case in ten I am satisfied." In the wide scope of his charities he had some curious experiences, and one of these, becoming known, was the theme of much comment, both serious and humorous. A gentleman called upon him and solicited a contribution to an old-established society, the name of which he did not mention. He contented himself with saying that it was known all the world over, and that its objects were universally approved of.

"You do not, I suppose," said Aaron, "expect me to give in the dark. Favour me with the name of the society."

"You have doubtless heard of it," replied the gentleman. "It is the Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews."

Aaron smiled as he said, "Yes, I have heard of it. But, my dear sir, I am myself a Jew."

"I am aware of it," said the gentleman, "and the reason I make the appeal is that you have been described to me as a man who has no narrow prejudices, and who is in no sense dogmatic or bigoted."

"It is, then, a compliment you are paying me when you ask me to contribute to a fund which is antagonistic to my race."

"In your view antagonistic," observed the gentleman. "There are generally two sides to a question."

"I see. Meaning that my view is not necessarily the correct view."

The gentleman nodded courteously. He was not a collector for the society, nor a paid officer, but a man of means who was also noted for his benevolence.

"I have myself occasionally," he remarked, "given a donation to an object with which I was not in entire sympathy."

"When you decided to pay me a visit had you any hope of converting me?"

"Your conversion would give our society an immense impetus, but I had no hope of it. But there are men whose views are not so firmly fixed as your own, and I thought you would not

object to assist them in the praiseworthy task of examining their consciences."

"Through a lens made of gold. In other words, giving them mercenary assistance to a spiritual conclusion."

"It is an original way of putting it," said the gentleman, greatly interested in the turn the conversation was taking.

"I cannot but consider the matter seriously," said Aaron, thoughtfully, "for there can be no doubt of your sincerity. Still, it occurs to me that if we were both equally sincere in our advocacy of objects of a similar nature, it would be as well that we should pause and ask ourselves this question. Instead of endeavouring to convert Jews or Christians to a faith in which they were not born, would it not be better to employ ourselves in the effort to make those who call themselves Christians true Christians, and those who call themselves Jews true Jews?"

"There is force in your argument, but it is no answer to my appeal for a contribution to the objects of my society."

"You can probably," Aaron then said, "furnish me with particulars of the working of your society."

"Anticipating your request I have brought the papers with me."

Aaron looked through the printed books and papers handed to him, and made certain calculations.

"I perceive," he said, "that you take credit to yourselves for making a stated number of conversions during the past five years, and that you have spent a stated sum of money during that period. The number of conversions is very small, the amount of money expended very large. I have worked out the sum, and according to my figures each convert has cost you nearly eleven thousand pounds. You find these wavering Jews very expensive."

"Very expensive," assented the gentleman, with a half humorous sigh.

"I cannot say I sympathise with you, but I will make a proposition to you. You are zealous in the furtherance of an object which you believe to be worthy, and I am zealous in the furtherance of an object which I know to be worthy. I will give you a cheque as a donation to your object if you will give me a cheque for half the amount as a donation to mine. Do not be afraid; it is not for the promotion of Judaism among the Christians."

The gentleman, who was rich and liberal-minded, laughed good-humouredly as he said, "I consent, on the further understanding that your cheque is for a reasonable amount."

"Will this do?" asked Aaron, filling in a cheque for one hundred pounds.

The gentleman made a wry face, but, without remark, he wrote a cheque for fifty pounds, and they exchanged documents.

"My contribution," said Aaron, "represents the one hundred and tenth part of a convert--the one hundred and tenth part of one transitory and, in all probability, worldly and insincere conversion. Your contribution represents a sick bed for two years in a hospital for poor children. During those two years you will be engaged in converting the one hundred and tenth part of an apostate Jew, and my hospital beds will be occupied by two poor Christian children, who, by God's mercy, will, I trust, be restored to health. You will pardon me for saying that I think I have the best of the transaction."

"You are a singular man," said the gentleman, "and I will not dispute with you. But I should like a few words with you upon what you say as to our converts being worldly and insincere. Is that really your opinion?"

"It is something more than an opinion. It is a conviction."

"Based upon some kind of proof, I presume?"

"Based upon proof and observation. Once a Jew, always a Jew, whether he follows the Mosaic laws or disregards them. So powerful is the seed of Judaism that it can never be entirely destroyed in the heart of one born in the ancient faith. We who are Jews know this to be incontrovertible; you who are Christians may not be able to understand it. So much for observation; now for the proof. I observe on your list of converts the name of Borlinski."

"You know the name?" the gentleman interrupted, eagerly.

"It is very familiar to me," replied Aaron.

"There are two Borlinskis on the list," said the gentleman. "Josef and Izak."

"I am acquainted with them both."

"We are very proud of the Borlinskis," said the gentleman, speaking with enthusiasm, "as the most important converts on our books. They are under engagement with us."

"On a salary?"

"Yes, an insignificant salary; twenty-five shillings a week each."

"Employed by you to make other converts."

"Yes."

"Have they been successful?"

"They have been with us for a few months only," said the gentleman. "These things take time."

"Truly, they take time--and money. Would you mind relating to me how the Borlinskis became associated with your society?"

"Not at all. It was a matter of conscience, purely a matter of conscience. That is why we are so proud of them. Josef Borlinski came first. He presented himself at our office; he had doubts; he had had doubts since childhood. In his country--Poland--no such society as ours exists, where a man can obtain monition and teaching to confirm or dispel those doubts. There are in that country converted Jews, but the conversion is sudden and effected by a kind of terrorism. Josef Borlinski is a reasonable being, and wished to be convinced through his reason. We cheerfully took up the task of convincing him of the error of his ways; we argued with him, we gave him books, he attended our meetings, we expounded the Gospel to him. At length he was satisfied, and became a zealous and happy convert to Christianity."

"How many months or years did it take to convince Josef Borlinski of his error?" asked Aaron.

"Nearly two years."

"During which time you supported him."

"We could do no less. He was desperately poor, almost starving when he came to us. Then, he was a foreigner, and the only trade--if it can be called one--to which he could turn his hand was that of an itinerant glazier, at which he could not earn more than three or four shillings a week, sometimes not so much. In any circumstances, it would have been a dangerous occupation for him to follow; he would have had to be out the whole of the day exposed to the weather, and the poor fellow is consumptive."

"So that you first adopted, and then converted him. How did you get hold of Izak Borlinski?"

"He is Josef's cousin, and Josef brought him to us."

"Zealous Josef! Izak also had doubts, and wished to be convinced through his reason?"

"That is so."

"And you adopted and converted him as well as Josef?"

"Yes."

"Clever Josef! Poor, consumptive Josef! It would not surprise me if he presently introduces another of his countrymen to you who has had doubts since childhood, and wishes to be convinced--through his reason and your pocket. Him, also, you can adopt and convert. Ah, what a loss to the stage is Josef Borlinski! Only that he lacks industry, for in him are united a fox's cunning and a sloth's love of idleness. The rogue! He imposed upon me for months, until at length, my suspicions aroused, I unmasked the rascal."

"Do you mean to say that we have been imposed upon?" asked the gentleman, in an excited tone.

"Judge for yourself. Six years ago Josef Borlinski came to this country, and lived for some time upon charity. I am on the committees of several of our benevolent institutions, and at every meeting I attended, the name of Josef Borlinski cropped up. It was always Josef Borlinski, Josef Borlinski, destitute and starving. The continual recurrence of the name irritated me, and I went to see this Josef Borlinski, destitute and starving. I found him down Whitechapel way playing draughts with his cousin, Izak. I saw before me a young man with black eyes, black hair, and a general appearance of belonging to the lymphatic order of being. I questioned him. How long had he been in England? Eighteen months. Why had he lived upon charity all that time? He was unfortunate; he could not obtain work. Was he willing to work? Oh yes, yes, yes, several times repeated, his little cunning eyes watching me as we conversed. Was he married? No. Had he a trade? Unfortunately no, he had no trade. Then, what could he do, what did he feel himself fitted for? Anything, everything. He is a man of professions this Josef Borlinski, glib of tongue, quick at response, supple as a reed, slippery as an eel. I reflected. He spoke English fairly well; he looked strong and healthy, not a symptom of consumption visible. How much a week could he, a single man, live upon? Upon anything, nothing--a few shillings, a few pence. Thus spoke Josef Borlinski,

humbly and smoothly, interlarding his speech with Hebrew exclamations and pious adjurations. I offered him a situation at twenty shillings a week, to be increased if he gave satisfaction, which required no special knowledge of a trade, and in which he would have to work five days out of the seven. Boundless were his professions of gratitude. I was his benefactor; he would bless me all his life. He commenced work on the following Monday, and on the Tuesday he presented himself to me, with his coat rent, and black cloth round his hat. He had received a letter from Poland; his father was dead; a week of mourning was incumbent upon him; could he be spared to fulfil this religious obligation? Grief was in his countenance, tears in his eyes, his voice trembled. I sympathised with him; he could have his week's mourning. But he was destitute; he was starving; how was he to support himself during this week of enforced idleness? I gave him something more than a week's wages, and he departed, blessing me. His week of mourning over, it was reported to me that he had not returned to work. I sought him out, and found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. He made a thousand excuses; he was ill; he was overwhelmed with sorrow at the loss he had sustained; he did not understand English customs; he did not think it was lawful to resume work in the middle of the week; moreover, he was in rags. He obtained money from me for a new suit of clothes, and a further extension of leave till the end of the week. On the Monday he duly presented himself, and in the afternoon fell down in a swoon, and had to be conveyed home in a cab, where he remained for three weeks, supported, as usual, by charity. My wife sent him wine and jelly, and the rascal was in clover. I visited him, and found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. 'The game requires no exertion,' he said languidly; 'it is my only amusement; it diverts my mind from the sorrow by which I am oppressed.' I thought it extremely curious. The effects of his swoon having passed away, he commenced work again, and on the second day I received a letter from him. He had been compelled, he wrote, to take to his bed; he had spasms; he was doubled up with pain; he hoped to be better soon; meanwhile, could I send him a few shillings for medicine and food? He obtained what he asked for, and I called to see how he was progressing. I found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. I was now thoroughly interested in Josef Borlinski. Such a chapter of accidents--such a plausible speaker and writer--so regularly unfortunate when he went to work, and so fond of playing draughts with his cousin Izak. I He was weeks getting rid of his spasms, but at length he recommenced work. Would you believe it? On the evening of the first day I found him waiting for me in this house. His left hand was in bandages, and the linen was besmeared with blood. In Heaven's name what had happened? He told me a lugubrious tale of having cut three of his fingers to the bone. The accident happening in my service made me responsible, and I felt myself bound to support him, especially as I discovered that he had related his woes to my wife, who was filled with pity for the rascal. 'You will look after the poor man,' she said to me; 'I promised him that you would.' 'I will look after him,' I replied. I did, and at every visit I paid him I found him playing draughts with his cousin Izak. He was, however, so long getting well this time, that I sent my own doctor to him. I also employed an agent to make inquiries into the history of the Borlinskis. My doctor reported that it was with great difficulty he had succeeded in obtaining a sight of Josefs wounded fingers. He had him held fast while he took off the bandages, and then he discovered that the fingers were without a scar, no wound of any kind had been received. My agent reported that the Borlinskis were well known in the village in Poland from which they had emigrated. They had lived the lives of idle scamps there, and had never been known to do one day's honest work. They preferred to hang about the drinking shops, to beg, to pilfer on the sly, to impose on charitable strangers, to do anything but work. As liars they were pre-eminent. Josef lost his father fourteen years before he came to England, therefore his statement that he had just received a letter from Poland informing him of his father's death was an invention, a trick. His swoon was a trick; his spasms a trick; his cutting his fingers to the bone a trick. From the hairs of his head to the soles of his feet he is a knave and a trickster; through his blood runs the incorrigible vice of indolence, and rather than work he will resort to any subterfuge. Only on one day in the whole year does his conscience disturb him, on the day of the White Fast. To-day a Jew, to-morrow a Christian, the next day a Mohammedan, the next a Pagan--it matters not to him so long as he can make money out of it, and eat the bread of idleness. My dear sir, I wish you joy of your Borlinskis."

The gentleman rose to take his leave, his belief in the genuineness of the conversion of the Borlinskis visibly shaken. He put but one question to Aaron Cohen.

"Josef Borlinski being what you describe him to be, what becomes of your assertion, 'Once a Jew, always a Jew'?"

"I have spoken of the White Fast," replied Aaron, "as the only day upon which Josef's conscience is awake. He believes, as we all do, in a future state, in the immortality of the soul. The White Fast is the great Day of Atonement, when Jews pray to be forgiven the sins they have committed during the past year. The most ignorant of them believe that if they pray and fast on the Day of Atonement their transgressions are atoned for. We have our black sheep, as you have; but the blackest of them observes this day with superstitious fear, and Josef Borlinski is not an exception. This year, on the Day of Atonement, I myself saw Josef in synagogue, enveloped in the white shroud he brought from Poland, beating his breast, and praying for forgiveness for his sins. From sunset to sunset food did not pass his lips; from sunset to sunset he prayed, and grovelled, and trembled. Come to our synagogue next year, and you shall see him there, if before that time he is not called to his account. Though he be converted to twenty different religions, and baptized twenty times over, Josef Borlinski is a Jew, and will remain a Jew to the last hour of his life."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AARON COHEN ADDRESSES A JEWISH AUDIENCE.

The world gave Aaron Cohen credit for being exceedingly wealthy, and fabulous tales of the success of his ventures obtained credence with the people. Instead of the age of romance being over, there was never a time in the world's history which afforded so much material for romance as the present, and in which it was so eagerly sought after and believed in. Imagination is more powerful than science, and this is the age of both. Small wonder, therefore, for the current report that Aaron Cohen was a millionaire; but such was not the case. He had money and to spare, and his private establishment was conducted on a liberal scale. Had he retired at this period he might have done so on an income of some five thousand pounds, which people's imagination would have multiplied by ten; and he might have justified this flight as to his means were it not that in addition to the charities to which he openly subscribed, a considerable portion of the profits of his enterprises was given anonymously to every public movement for the good of the people and for the relief of the poor. For several years past great curiosity had been evinced to learn the name of the anonymous donor of considerable sums of money sent through the post in bank-notes in response to every benevolent appeal to the public purse. A colliery disaster, a flood, an earthquake in a distant country, a case of national destitution--to one and all came large contributions from a singularly generous donor, who, in the place of his signature, accompanied the gift with the simple words, "In Atonement." Several well-known benefactors were credited with these liberal subscriptions, but so careful was the giver in the means he adopted to preserve his anonymity that they were not traced to the right source. They were strange words to use to such an end. In atonement of what? Of an undiscovered crime, the committal of which had enriched the man who would not sign his name? A few ingenious writers argued the matter out in the lesser journals, and although specifically they were very far from the truth, they were in a general sense more often nearer to it than they suspected.

These charitable donations were Aaron's constant appeal to the Divine Throne for mercy and forgiveness for the one sin of his life, and thus did he effectually guard against becoming a millionaire.

He was, indeed, unceasing in his secret charities to individuals as well as to public bodies. Many a struggling man never discovered to whom he was indebted for the timely assistance which lifted him out of his troubles, and started him on the high road to prosperity; many a widow had cause to bless this mysterious dispenser of good. If upon his deathbed a life-long sinner, repenting, may be forgiven his numberless transgressions, surely a life-long record of noble deeds may atone for an error prompted by the purest feelings of love. Such a thought did not enter Aaron's mind; the flattering unction was not for him. He walked in sorrow and humility, wronging no man, doing good to many, and faithfully performing his duty to all. At the Judgment Seat he would know.

Perhaps of all the institutions in which he took a part, those which most deeply interested him were the Jewish working men's clubs in the East End. He was one of their most liberal patrons; their library shelves were lined with the books he had presented, and he frequently took the chair at their Sunday evening gatherings. The announcement of his name was sufficient to crowd the hall; to shake hands with Aaron Cohen was one of the ambitions of the younger members. When he made his appearance at these gatherings he felt that he was among friends; there was a freemasonry among them, as indeed there is among Jews all the world over. Aaron devoted particular attention to the young people. He knew that the hope of Judaism lay in the new generation, and it was his aim to encourage in the minds of the young the pride of race which engenders self-respect and strengthens racial character. He regarded old customs as something more than landmarks in his religion; they were essentials, the keystones of the arch which kept the fabric together, and he was anxious that they should be preserved. Symbols are unmeaning to the materialist; to those who have faith they convey a pregnant message, the origin of which can be traced back to the first days of creation, when God made man in His own image. They are the links which unite the past, full of glorious traditions, and the future, full of Divine hope. Of this past Aaron spoke in words which stirred the sluggish fires in the hearts of the old, and made them leap into flame in the hearts of the young. "I have heard," he said, "of Jews who were ashamed that it should be known that they were Jews; of Jews who, when Jews were spoken of slightingly in Christian society, have held their tongues in order that they might perchance escape from the implied disparagement. I will not stop to inquire whether this springs from cowardice or sensitiveness, for in either case it is both wrong and foolish. Lives there any member of an old historic family who is not proud of the past which has been transmitted to him as a heritage, who is not conscious that his lineage sheds a lustre upon the name he bears? Not one. He pores over the annals of his race, and, pausing at the record of a noble deed performed, thinks proudly, 'This deed was performed by my ancestor, and it lives in history.' He takes up a

novel or a poem, and reads it with exultant feelings, as having been inspired by another ancestor who, mayhap, shed his blood in defence of king and country. Let me remind you, if you have lost sight of the fact, that there is no historic family in England or elsewhere the record of whose deeds can vie in splendour with the record of the Jew. His history is at once a triumph of brain power and spiritual vitality, and the proudest boast a Jew can make is that he is a Jew. It is not he who holds the lower ground; he stands on the heights, a noble among the men who presume to despise him. Be true to yourselves, and it will not be long before this is made manifest and universally acknowledged. In personal as well as in racial history you stand pre-eminent. What greater schoolman than Maimonides? What greater master of philosophy than Spinoza? What poets more sublime than Isaiah and Ezekiel? In infamous Russia Jews who practised their religion in secret have been among its most eminent ministers of finance, and the glory of Spain departed when it persecuted our brethren and drove them from the country. The Disraelis, father and son, were Jews; Benary was a Jew; Neander, the founder of spiritual Christianity, was a Jew; in Germany the most celebrated professors of divinity were Jews; Wehl, a Jew, the famous Arabic scholar, wrote the 'History of Christianity'; the first Jesuits were Jews; Soult and Messina were Jews; Count Arnim was a Jew; Auerbach, Pasta, Grisi, Rachel, Sara Bernhardt, Baron Hirsch, the philanthropist, Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn--all Jews. These are but a few of the names which occur to me; are you ashamed to be associated with them? In war, in politics, in philosophy, in finance, in philanthropy, in exploration and colonisation, in all the arts and professions, you stand in the front rank. I see in this audience many young men, some of whom, I believe, are by their talents destined to become famous, and some to grow rich by their shrewdness and industry. To them I say, Work and prosper, and work in the right way. Whatever be the channel they have chosen to the goal they wish to reach, let them work honestly towards it, and when they stand upon the fairer shore let them not forget their religion, let them not forget that they owe their advancement to the intelligent and intellectual forces which have been transmitted to them by their great ancestors through all the generations."

This address was received with enthusiasm, and Aaron's hearers went to their homes that night stirred to their inmost hearts, and proud of the faith of their forefathers.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT SHALL BE DONE TO THE MAN WHOM THE KING DELIGHTETH TO HONOUR?

On a bright morning in the autumn of the year 1893 a number of influential persons wended their way to Aaron Cohen's house to take part in a function of a peculiarly interesting nature. They comprised representatives of literature and the arts, of politics, science, and commerce, and among them were delegates of the press, who were deputed to report the proceedings for their respective journals. That the pen is mightier than the sword was open to dispute at an earlier period of the world's history, but the contention exists no longer, and though the day is far distant when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, the press is now a powerful factor in peace and war, and can effectually hasten or retard the conflict of nations. It is an open question whether its invasion of the arena of private life is a desirable feature in the power it wields; but it is useless to resist its march in this direction, and earnest as may be a man's desire to hide his light (or the reverse) under a bushel, he does not live to see it gratified. The up-to-date journalist, argus-eyed, overruns the earth; it is to be deplored that his quill is sometimes poison-tipped, but as a rule he sets about his work with good-humoured zest, and it is not to be denied that he prepares many a piquant dish for his omnivorous public.

When a movement was set afoot to make some sort of semi-private, semi-public recognition of the remarkable position attained by the hero of this story, he made an effort to discourage it. The idea of any kind of publicity was distasteful to him, and he expressed an opinion to this effect. It was not heeded by the organisers of the testimonial, and he was thinking of remonstrating in stronger terms, when the matter was settled for him by a few simple words spoken by Rachel.

"Why do you object?" she asked. "You did not seek the honour, and it will reflect honour upon us."

"Do you wish it, Rachel?"

"It will give me pleasure, dear," she replied.

He did not argue with her, but yielded immediately, and allowed himself to be carried with the stream. Never in the course of their happy married life had he failed to comply with her lightest wish; never had there been the least conflict between them; to each of them the word of the other was law, and it was love's cheerful duty to obey.

The esteem in which he was held was to be demonstrated by two presentations, one a portrait of himself by a famous English artist, the other a picture also, the subject being withheld from his knowledge. This second painting was no other than the picture of Rachel sitting beneath the cherry tree, which had created so much interest in the Paris *salon* more than a dozen years ago. It had originally been purchased by a collector, who had lately died. After his death his collection had been brought to the hammer, and this particular picture was purchased by a London dealer, who exhibited it in his shop. The first intention was to present a silver memorial with Aaron's portrait, but a friend of his happened to see the French picture in London, and was struck by the wonderful resemblance of the principal figure to Rachel. He made inquiries privately of Aaron respecting his sojourn in the south of France, and learned that there was a picturesque cherry tree in the grounds at the back of the house, in the shadow of which Rachel was in the habit of sitting in sunny weather, that he had a friend, the curé of the village, and that one summer a French painter had visited the village and had made a number of sketches of Rachel and the garden. Following up his inquiries, Aaron's friend obtained from the London dealer some information of the history of the picture and of the year in which it was exhibited, and, putting this and that together, he came to the conclusion that Rachel had unconsciously sat for the picture. It was an interesting discovery, and the first idea of a silver presentation was put aside, and the picture substituted in its place.

Mr. Moss, of course, came from Portsmouth to attend the function. Our old friend was frequently in London now, to attend to certain complicated business matters. Sad to say, of late years fortune had not smiled upon him; he had met with losses, but that did not prevent him from humming his operatic airs at every possible opportunity. He had himself to blame for this reverse of fortune; certainly he had a tremendously large family, sixteen children to rear and provide for, and eight of them girls--he used to say jocularly that it was difficult to find names for them; but he had a comfortable business, and should have been content. Unhappily, one day he had a bright idea; he made a plunge in stocks, with disastrous results. Had he consulted Aaron Cohen, as he afterwards confessed, it would never have happened; Aaron would have shown him the folly of expecting to grow rich in a week. The consequence was that he found himself involved, and his frequent visits to London were necessitated by his personal endeavours to reduce his losses. It made no difference in Aaron's friendship for him; it may be said, indeed, to have strengthened it. In a time of more than ordinary difficulty Aaron came forward voluntarily, and afforded practical assistance to his old friend. "If you want to know the kind of metal Aaron Cohen is made of," he said to his wife, "go to him when you are in misfortune. That is the time to prove a man." Another strengthening tie was to be forged in the firm friendship of these men. One at least of Mr. Moss's numerous daughters was always in London on a visit to Rachel, and it was quite in the natural order of things that Joseph Cohen should fall in love with Esther Moss, the prettiest and sweetest of all the girls. Rachel and her husband were very fond of Esther, and regarded the attachment with favour. Joseph was too young yet to marry, but with the consent of his parents an engagement was entered into between the young people, and there was joy in Mr. Moss's estimable family.

It was a natural consequence of this family arrangement that Esther was frequently invited to make her home for a time with the Cohens in London, and she was in their house on the day of the presentations. Her lover was absent, and had been out of England for some months past. Young as he was, he already held a position of responsibility in an extensive firm, and had been sent to Australia to attend to business of an important nature. He was expected home at the end of the week, but was then to remain in England only a few days, his passage to India being taken, his mission being to establish agencies in that land for the gentleman by whom he was employed. Years ago the choice of a classical education had been offered him by his father; but his inclination was for commerce, and Aaron Cohen did not believe in forcing a lad into a career which was distasteful to him. Upon his return from India eight or nine months hence the marriage between him and Esther was to take place. Needless to say how proud and happy the young maid was in the contemplation of the approaching union.

Neither was Ruth Cohen a witness of the honour which was paid to the man she believed to be her father. She had invited herself to Portsmouth, to spend a week or two with Mrs. Moss. When she expressed the wish to go Rachel Cohen had remonstrated with her, and hinted that she should remain in London to attend the presentations; but Ruth was restless and rebellious, and said she did not care to be present. Rachel, inwardly grieved, did not press it upon her.

"Are you not happy at home?" she asked gently. Ruth did not speak, and Rachel continued, "You do not take pleasure in the society of our friends?"

"I am not very fond of them," Ruth replied.

Rachel said no more. Ruth's dislike of Jewish society was not new to her; it had caused her great pain, and she had striven in vain to combat it. The strength of Rachel's character lay in her moral and sympathetic affections: with those who recognised the sweetness and unselfishness of these attributes her power was great; with those who failed to appreciate them she was powerless. This was the case with Ruth, in whom, as she grew to womanhood, was gradually developed a stubbornness which boded ill for peace. Frequently and anxiously did Rachel ask herself, From whom could a daughter of her blood have inherited views and ideas so antagonistic and rebellious?

Aaron could have answered this question, had it been put to him, and had he dared to answer.

Ruth's instincts were in her blood, transmitted by parents whom he had never known, and of whose characters he was ignorant. Heredity lay at the root of this domestic misery. As a rule, vices, virtues, and all classes of the affections are hereditary, and the religious sentiments are not an exception. Aaron had studied the subject, and was conscious of the solemn issues dependent upon it.

He had obtained possession of Ruth's body, but not of her mind, and even of the former his guardianship would soon be at an end. Although he could not fix the exact day of her birth, she would soon be twenty-one years of age, when the duty would devolve upon him of delivering to her the iron casket of which he had been made the custodian, and he was in an agony how he should act. Every day that passed deepened his agony; he saw shadows gathering over his house which might wreck the happiness of his beloved wife. Again and again had he debated the matter without being able to arrive at any comforting conclusion. Undoubtedly the casket contained the secret of Ruth's parentage; when that was revealed the sword would fall.

However, he could not on this day give himself up to these disturbing reflections; he had consented to accept an honour of which he deemed himself unworthy, and it was incumbent upon him that he should not betray himself. There was still a little time left to him to decide upon his course of action. The man of upright mind was at this period laying himself open to dangerous casuistical temptations. Even from such unselfish love as he entertained for the wife who was deserving of love in its sweetest and purest aspects may spring an upas tree to poison the air we breathe.

Among the company was an old friend of ours--Dr. Spenlove, who had attained an eminent position in London. His career from the time he left Portsmouth had been a remarkable one. In the larger field of labour to which he had migrated his talents were soon recognised, and he began almost at once to mount the ladder of renown. Success in the medical profession is seldom gained upon an insecure foundation; there must be some solid justification for it, and once secured it lasts a lifetime. Dr. Spenlove was no exception to the rule, and was not spoilt by prosperity. He was still distinguished by that kindliness of nature which had made his name a household word in the humble neighbourhood in Portsmouth in which he had struggled and suffered. The poor never appealed to him in vain, and he was as attentive to those who could not afford to pay him as to those from whom he drew heavy fees. Many a time did he step from his carriage to a garret in which lay a poor sufferer whose fortunes were at the lowest ebb, and many a trembling hand which held a few poor coins was gently put aside with tender and cheerful words which were never forgotten by those to whom they were spoken.

A man so kindly-hearted was of necessity associated with the benevolent and public movements of the passing hour. Aaron Cohen, whom till this day he had not met, had subscribed to some of the charities in which he was interested, and he gladly availed himself of the opportunity of becoming acquainted with him. When the company were assembled in the reception room in Aaron's house, Dr. Spenlove happened to be standing next to Mr. Moss, whom he had not seen since he left Portsmouth. Except for the wear and tear of time, which, however, did not sit heavily upon him, there was little alteration in Mr. Moss; his worldly anxieties had not dimmed the brightness of his eyes, nor robbed his countenance of its natural cheerful aspect. There was a greater alteration in Dr. Spenlove; the thoughtful lines in his face had deepened, there was an introspection in his eyes. Mr. Moss seemed to be for ever looking upon the outer world, Dr. Spenlove for ever looking upon his inner self. As an observer of character Mr. Moss was Dr. Spenlove's superior; as a student and searcher after truth Dr. Spenlove towered above Mr. Moss. The man of business never forgot a face; the man of science often did. The first sign of recognition, therefore, came from Mr. Moss.

"Good day, Dr. Spenlove."

The physician looked up, and said, abstractedly, "Good day." He frequently acknowledged a salute from persons whose names he could not at the moment recall.

"You do not remember me," said Mr. Moss, with a smile.

"You will pardon me," said Dr. Spenlove, searching his memory; "I have an unfortunate failing----"

"Of forgetting faces," said Mr. Moss, with a smile. "It is very stupid of me."

"Not at all; one can't help it. Besides, it is so long since we met--over twenty years."

"In London?"

"No; in Portsmouth, the night before you left. We had an adventure together----"

"You quicken my memory. How do you do, Mr. Moss?"

They shook hands.

"Very well, thank you, and happy to see you again. I have heard a great deal of you, doctor; you are at the top of the ladder now. It is strange, after the lapse of years, that we should meet in this house."

"Why is our meeting in this house strange?" inquired Dr. Spenlove.

The question recalled Mr. Moss to himself. The one incident which formed a link between them was that connected with a wretched woman and her babe whom they had rescued from impending death on a snowy night long ago in the past. But he had not made Dr. Spenlove acquainted with the name of the man to whom he had entrusted the child, and upon this point his lips were sealed.

"I mean," he said, "that the circumstances of our meeting here and in Portsmouth are so different."

"Widely different. Varied as have been my experiences, I have met with none more thrilling than that in which we were both engaged on that eventful night. I have not forgotten your kindness, Mr. Moss. I trust the world has prospered with you."

"So-so. We all have our ups and downs. Health is the main thing, and that we enjoy. Doctors have a bad time with us."

"I am glad to hear it. By the way, Mr. Moss, my part of the adventure came to an end on the day I left Portsmouth; you had still something to do. Did you succeed in finding a comfortable home for the child?"

"Yes."

"Did you lose sight of her after that?"

"Very soon. Before she had been in her new home twenty-four hours the poor thing died."

"Dear, dear! But I am not surprised. It was hardly to be expected that the child would live long after the exposure on such a bitter night. She was almost buried in the snow. It was, most likely, a happy release. And the mother, Mr. Moss?"

"I have heard nothing of her whatever."

The conversation ceased here. The proceedings had commenced, and a gentleman was speaking. He was a man of discretion, which all orators are not. He touched lightly and pertinently upon the reputation which Mr. Aaron Cohen had earned by his unremitting acts of benevolence and by the worthiness of his career. Such a man deserved the good fortune which had attended him, and such a man's career could not fail to be an incentive to worthy endeavour. Rachel, seated by her husband, turned her sightless eyes upon the audience and listened to the speaker with gratitude and delight. It was not that she had waited for this moment to learn that she was wedded to an upright and noble man, but it was an unspeakable happiness to her to hear from the lips of others that he was appreciated as he deserved, that he was understood as she understood him. It was natural, said the speaker, that the gentleman in whose honour they had that day assembled should be held in the highest esteem by his co-religionists, but it was a glory that in a Christian country a Jew should have won from all classes of a mixed community a name which would be enrolled upon those pages of our social history which most fitly represent the march of true civilisation and humanity. They were not there to glorify Money; they were not there to glorify worldly prosperity; they were there to pay tribute to one whose example Christians well might follow, to a man without stain, without reproach. The influence of such a man in removing--no, not in removing, but obliterating--the prejudices of caste was lasting and all-powerful. He regarded it as a privilege that he had been deputed to express the general sentiment with respect to Mr. Aaron Cohen. This sentiment, he begged to add, was not confined to Mr. Cohen, but included his wife, whose charities and benevolence were perhaps even more widely known and recognised than those of the partner of her joys and sorrows. In the presence of this estimable couple it was difficult to speak as freely as he would wish, but he was sure they would understand that in wishing them long life and happiness he was wishing them much more than he dared to express in their hearing, and that there was but one feeling entertained towards them, a feeling not of mere respect and esteem, but of affection and love. In the name of the subscribers he offered for their acceptance two paintings, one a portrait of Mr. Cohen by an artist of renown, for which he had been good enough to sit, the other a painting which probably they would look upon now for the first time. The latter picture was an accidental discovery, but Mr. Cohen would tell them whether they were right in seizing the opportunity to obtain it, and whether they were right in their belief that his esteemed wife had unconsciously inspired the artist who had availed himself of a happy chance to immortalise himself.

The pictures were then unveiled amid general acclamation, and if ever Rachel wished for the blessing of sight to be restored to her it was at that moment; but it was only for a moment. The dependence she placed upon her husband, the trust she had in him, the pleasure she derived from his eloquent and sympathetic descriptions of what was hidden from her, were of such a nature that she sometimes said inly, "I am thankful I can see only through the eyes of my dear husband."

The portrait of himself, from his frequent sittings, was familiar to Aaron Cohen, but the picture of his beloved sitting beneath the cherry tree was a delightful surprise to him. It was an exquisitely painted scene, and Rachel's portrait was as faithful as if she had given months of her time towards its successful accomplishment.

Aaron's response was happy up to a certain point. Except to pay a deserved compliment to the artist and to express his gratitude to the subscribers, he said little about the portrait of himself. The presentation of the second picture supplied the theme for the principal part of his speech. He said there was no doubt that it was a portrait of his dear wife, and he recalled the time they had passed in the south of France, and described all the circumstances of the intimacy with the artist which had led to the painting of the picture. He was grateful for that intimacy because of its result, which he saw before him, and because of the pleasure it would afford his beloved wife, who, until to-day, had been as ignorant as himself that such a painting was in existence. "I went to the south of France," he said, "in the hope that my wife, who was in a delicate state of health, would be benefited by a short stay there. My hope was more than realised; she grew strong there; my son, whose absence from England deprives him of the pleasure of being present on this interesting occasion, was born there, and there the foundation of my prosperity was laid. It might be inferred from this that I believe all the events of a man's life are ruled by chance, but such is not my belief. There is an all-seeing Providence who shows us the right path; He speaks through our reason and our consciences, and except for the accident of birth, which lays a heavy burden upon many unfortunate beings, and which should render them not fully responsible for the evil they do, we ourselves are responsible for the consequences of our actions. We must accept the responsibility and the consequences." He paused a few moments before he continued. "When men of fair intelligence err they err consciously; it is idle for them to say that they erred in ignorance of the consequences. They must know, if they write with black ink, that their writing must be black." He paused again. "But it may be that a man commits a conscious error through his affections, and if that error inflicts injury upon no living being--if it even confer a benefit upon one or more--there may be some palliation of his error. In stating that you set for me a standard too high I am stating my firm belief. No man is stainless, no man is without reproach; the doctrine of infallibility applied to human affairs is monstrous and wicked; it is an arrogation of Divine power. I am, as all men are, open to error; in my life, as in the lives of all men, there have been mistakes; but I may still take the credit to myself that if I have committed a conscious error it has harmed no living soul, and that it has sprung from those affections which sweeten and bless our lives. A reference has been made to my being a Jew. I glory that I am one. The traditions and history of the race to which I am proud to belong have been of invaluable service to me, and to the circumstance of my being a Jew I owe the incidents of this day, which will be ever a proud memory to me and to my family. In the name of my dear wife and my own I thank you cordially, sincerely and gratefully for the honour you have paid to us--an honour not beyond my wife's merits, but far beyond my own."

Other speeches followed, and when the proceedings were at an end Dr. Spenlove asked Mr. Moss to introduce him to Mr. Cohen.

"Cohen," said Mr. Moss, "Dr. Spenlove wishes to be introduced to you. He practised in Portsmouth twenty years ago."

Aaron started. He never forgot a name or a face, and he recollected the mention of Dr. Spenlove's name when Mr. Moss came to him in Gosport with the child.

"Without exactly knowing it, perhaps," said Dr. Spenlove, "you have been most kind in movements in which I have taken an interest. I am glad of the opportunity of making your acquaintance."

Nothing more; no reference to the private matter. Aaron breathed more freely. He responded to Dr. Spenlove's advances, and the gentlemen parted friends.

Mr. Moss had been somewhat puzzled by Aaron's speech. It seemed to him that his friend did not place sufficient value on himself. "People are always ready to take you at your own price, so don't be too modest," was a favourite saying of his. Then what did Aaron mean by letting people suppose that he had done something wrong in his life? He spoke about it to Aaron.

"Look back," said Aaron, laying his hand kindly on Mr. Moss's shoulder, "and tell me if you do not recollect some action which you would gladly recall."

"I daresay, I daresay," said Mr. Moss, restlessly, "but what's the use of confessing it when there's no occasion? It's letting yourself down."

Aaron turned to greet another friend, and the subject was dropped; but it remained, nevertheless, in Mr. Moss's mind.

His daughter Esther was in the room during the proceedings, and her fair young face beamed with pride; it was her lover's father who was thus honoured, and she felt that she had, through Aaron Cohen's son, a share in that honour. When the gratifying but fatiguing labours of the day were at an end, and Aaron, Rachel, and Esther were alone, Rachel said,--

"I am sorry, dear Esther, that Joseph was not here to hear what was said about his father."

"It would not have made him love and honour him more," said Esther.

Rachel pressed her hand and kissed her; she had grown to love this sweet and simple girl, who seemed to have but one thought in life--her lover. Then the sightless woman asked them to describe the pictures to her, and she listened in an ecstasy of happiness to their words.

"Is it not wonderful?" she said to Aaron. "A famous picture, they said, and I the principal figure. What can the painter have seen in me?"

"What all men see, my life," replied Aaron; "but what no one knows as I know."

"It has been a happy day," sighed Rachel; she sat between them, each holding a hand. "You did not hear from our dear Ruth this morning?"

"No, dear mother." For thus was Esther already permitted to address Rachel.

"She will be home in two days, and our dear lad as well. I wish he were back from India, even before he has started, and so do you, my dear. But time soon passes. Just now it seems but yesterday that we were in France."

The day waned. Rachel and Esther were together; Aaron was in his study writing, and preparing for an important meeting he had to attend that night. A servant entered.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

Aaron looked at the card, which bore the name of Mr. Richard Dillworthy.

"I am busy," said Aaron. "Does he wish to see me particularly? Ask him if he can call again."

"He said his business was pressing, sir."

"Show him in."

The servant ushered the visitor into the room, a slightly-built, middle-aged man, with iron-grey hair and whiskers. Aaron motioned him to a chair, and he placed a card on the table, bearing the name and address of a firm of lawyers.

"I am Mr. Dillworthy, of Dillworthy, Maryx, and Co.," he said.

"Yes?"

"I have come to speak to you upon a family matter----"

"A family matter!" exclaimed Aaron, interrupting him. "Does it concern me?"

"It concerns you closely, and the client on whose behalf I am here."

"What is its nature?"

"Allow me to disclose it in my own way. I shall take it as a favour if you will regard this interview as private."

"Certainly."

"Briefly, I may say, as an introduction, that it refers to your daughter, Miss Ruth Cohen."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HONOURABLE PERCY STORNDALE.

For the second time on this eventful day Aaron felt as if his sin were about to be brought home to him, as if the temple which, by long years of honourable and upright conduct, he had built for himself, were about to crumble to dust. In that temple was enshrined not only his good name, but what was far more precious to him, his wife's happiness and peace of mind. He had not yet nerved himself to the effort to go to her frankly and say, "Ruth is not our child." Out of Rachel's innate goodness and sweetness sprang the love she bore for the young girl. The suggestion of love may come from without, but the spirit of love is the offspring of one's own heart, and it is made enduring and ennobling by one's own higher qualities; and in a like manner it is one's lower passions which debase and degrade it. In whatever fashion Rachel would receive her husband's confession, he knew full well that it would inflict upon her the most exquisite suffering; the cherished ideal of her life would be shattered, and she would sit for ever afterwards in sackcloth and ashes. This was his torturing belief; it was not that he dreaded exposure for his own sake; he had no wish to spare himself, but to spare Rachel inevitable suffering. He knew that the truth could not be much longer hidden, and yet he was too weak to take the deciding step. He had

sown a harvest of woe, and his constant fervent prayer was that he might not be compelled to reap it with his own hands.

Agitated as he was, he did not betray himself by word or sign, but by a courteous movement of his hand invited his visitor to proceed.

"It is a family matter," said Mr. Dillworthy, "of a peculiarly delicate nature, and my client thought it could best be arranged in a private personal interview."

"Being of such a nature," observed Aaron, "would it not have been better that it should be arranged privately between the parties interested instead of through an intermediary?"

"Possibly, possibly; but my client holds strong views, and feels he could scarcely trust himself."

"Favour me with the name of your client."

"Lord Storndale."

"Lord Storndale? I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"But you are familiar with his name."

"Not at all. It is the first time I have heard it."

"You surprise me. Lord Storndale is a peer."

"I know very few peers, and have had no occasion to study the peerage."

"But, pardon me, Storndale is the name; it may have escaped you."

"I repeat, the name is strange to me."

"I do not presume to doubt you, but it introduces a new element into the matter. Your daughter, then, has never mentioned the Honourable Percy Storndale to you?"

"Never, and I am at a loss to understand the association of their names."

The lawyer paused. In this unexpected turn of affairs a deviation suggested itself to his legal mind which would be likely to assist him.

"Mr. Cohen, you have the reputation of being an earnest and sincere Jew."

"I follow the precepts and the obligations of my faith," said Aaron, with a searching glance at his visitor.

"In this back-sliding and time-serving age orthodoxy--especially, I should say, in the Jewish religion--has a hard time of it. The customs and duties of an enlightened civilisation must clash severely with the precepts and obligations you speak of. It is because of the difficulty--perhaps the impossibility--of following the hard and fast laws of the Pentateuch that divisions have taken place, as in all religions, and that you have among you men who call themselves Reformed Jews."

"Surely it is not part of your mission to debate this matter with me," said Aaron, who had no desire to discuss these questions with a stranger.

"No, it is not, and I do not pretend to understand it; but in a general way the subject is interesting to me. If you will permit me, I should like to ask you one question." Aaron signified assent. "What is your opinion of mixed marriages?"

Aaron did not answer immediately; he had a suspicion that there was something behind, but the subject was one regarding which both he and Rachel held a strong view, and he felt he would be guilty of an unworthy evasion if he refused to reply.

"I do not approve of them," he said.

"You set me at ease," said the lawyer, "and it will gratify Lord Storndale to hear that you and he are in agreement upon the question. As our interview is private I may speak freely. Unhappily, Lord Storndale is a poor peer. Since he came into the title he has had great difficulties to contend with, and as his estates lay chiefly in Ireland these difficulties have been of late years increased. Happily or unhappily, also, he has a large family, two daughters and six sons. Of these sons the Honourable Percy Storndale is the youngest. I do not know who is more to be pitied, a poor peer struggling with mortgages, decreased rents, and the expenses of a large family, or a younger son who comes into the world with the expectation that he is to be provided for, and whose father can allow him at the utmost two hundred and fifty or three hundred a year. Father and son have both to keep up appearances, and the son's allowance will scarcely pay his tailor's and his glover's bills. There are a thousand things he wants, and to which he believes himself entitled. Flowers, horses, clubs, a stall at the theatre, and so on and so on, *ad infinitum*. The consequence is that the young gentleman gets into debt, which grows and grows. Perhaps he thinks of a means of

paying his creditors--he plunges on a horse, he plays for high stakes at his club. You know the result. Into the mire, deeper and deeper. A sad picture, Mr. Cohen."

"Very sad," said Aaron, who had listened patiently, and knew that the crucial part of the lawyer's mission--that which affected himself and Ruth--had not yet been reached.

"Lord Storndale," continued the lawyer, "is a gentleman of exclusive views, and is perhaps prouder in his poverty than he would be with a rent-roll of a hundred thousand a year. His son's extravagances and debts are not hidden from his knowledge--the moneylenders take care of that. From time to time, and at a great sacrifice, he extricates the young scapegrace from temporary difficulties, but at length he comes to a full stop. His own means are exhausted, and willing as he may be to keep putting his hand in his pocket, it is useless to do so, because the pocket is empty. But he has some influence in a small way, and he obtains for his son the offer of a post in the colonies; not very grand certainly, but affording an opening which may lead to something better, if the young gentleman will only condescend to look at life seriously--which, as a rule, such young fellows decline to do until it is too late. However, a father, whether he be a peer or a common labourer, can do no more than his duty. He informs his son of the appointment he has obtained for him, and the scapegrace--I am speaking quite openly, Mr. Cohen; the Honourable Percy Storndale *is* one--declines to accept it. 'Why?' asks the astonished father. 'I cannot live on it,' replies the son. Then the father points out how he can live on it by cutting down some of his extravagances, and that he may find opportunities in the colonies which he can never meet with here. The son remains obdurate. 'There is another reason for your refusal,' says the father. 'There is,' the son admits. 'I prefer to remain in London; it is the only city in the world worth living in.' 'And starving in,' suggests the father. The scapegrace shrugs his shoulders, and says something will turn up here, and that he will not submit to banishment because he happens to have been born a few years too late--a reflection upon his brother, the eldest son, who in course of time will inherit the family embarrassments and mortgages. The father remonstrates, argues, entreats, but the young man will not give way. Meanwhile the appointment is bestowed upon another and a worthier gentleman, and the chance is lost. I trust I am not wearying you."

"No. I am attending to all you say, and waiting to hear how my daughter's name comes to be mixed up with the family history you are giving me."

"You will understand everything presently. My object is to make the matter perfectly clear, and to have no concealment. For this reason I wish you to be aware of the character of the young gentleman, and I am describing it carefully at the express wish of his father. At the same time I lay no positive charge against him; I am not saying he is a bad man, but an undesirable man. There are thousands of young fellows who are living just such a careless, irresponsible, reckless life, who get into debt, who gamble, and who ultimately find themselves passing through the bankruptcy court. Young men without balance, Mr. Cohen, and who, in consequence, topple over. They sow trouble wherever they go, and they are always smiling, self-possessed, and pleasant-mannered. Women especially are caught by these externals; but speaking myself as the father of grown-up daughters, I should be sorry to see one of that class visiting my house as a suitor to one of my girls."

Aaron started, but did not speak.

"Lord Storndale suspected that there was another reason which his son had not mentioned for his refusal of the colonial appointment, and in a short time his suspicions were confirmed. It came to his knowledge that his son was paying attentions to a young lady whom he was in the habit of meeting at garden parties and tennis, and probably by arrangement in the parks, and he taxed the young gentleman with it. His son did not deny it; he said that he loved the lady, that her father was very wealthy, and that she was in every way presentable. 'I do not know,' said the young man, 'whether the circumstance of her father being a commoner will prejudice you against him.' Lord Storndale replied that he would have preferred his son had chosen from his own rank, but that marriages between rich commoners and members of the aristocracy were not unusual in these days, and that he would sanction the match if the lady's father were a gentleman. To be honest with you, Mr. Cohen, Lord Storndale has no liking for commoners who have made fortunes in trade or by speculating; but he did not allow these scruples to weigh with him, his hope being that the proposed union would be the means of extricating his son from his difficulties, and of steadying him. The young man said that the lady's father was a gentleman widely known for his benevolence and uprightness of character, and that he was held in universal esteem. Up to this point the interview had been of an amicable nature, but then arose an insurmountable difficulty. 'Who is the gentleman?' inquired Lord Storndale. 'Mr. Aaron Cohen,' replied the young man."

Observing Aaron's agitation the lawyer suspended his narration, and said,--

"Pardon me; you were about to speak."

Aaron by a great effort controlled himself.

"I will wait till you have quite finished, Mr. Dillworthy. Before I commit myself it will be as well that I should be in possession of all the facts."

"Quite so. I have been explicit and circumstantial in order that there shall be no mistake.

When I have finished you will have few, if any, questions to ask, because you will know everything it is in my power to tell. Upon hearing your name, his lordship remarked that it was a Jewish name. 'Yes,' said the young man, 'Mr. Cohen is a Jew.' Lord Storndale was angry and distressed. I admit that it is an unreasonable prejudice; but he has an invincible dislike to Jews, and it shocked him to think that his son contemplated a marriage with a Jewess. I need dwell no longer upon the interview, which now took a stormy turn, and it ended by the son abruptly leaving the room. On no account, whatever, Mr. Cohen, will Lord Storndale or any member of his family consent to such an alliance; if it is accomplished the young man will be thrown upon his own resources, and his wife will not be recognised by his kinsfolk. The trouble has already reached a climax. The young gentleman is hot-headed--a Storndale failing--and he declines to listen to remonstrances; the consequence is, that he has been forbidden his father's home till he comes to reason. But despite his extravagances and the constant and perplexing involvements issuing therefrom, his father has an affection for him, and is bent upon saving his family from----"

The lawyer pausing here, with an awkward cough, as though he was choking down a word, Aaron quietly added it.

"Disgrace?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Dillworthy, briskly; "we will not mince matters. It is not my word, but Lord Storndale's. He would account such an alliance a disgrace. I will say nothing in his excuse. In all civilised countries we have living evidences of happy unions between members of the aristocracy and wealthy daughters of Israel, and also living evidences of happy mixed marriages between persons neither aristocratic nor wealthy; and these might be brought forward as powerful arguments against the view my client entertains. But they would have no weight with him. We must take into consideration the pride of race."

"Yes," said Aaron, still speaking in a quiet tone, "we must take that into consideration. You have not quite finished, sir?"

"Not quite. As a last resource, Lord Storndale consulted me, and entrusted me with a painful task. He requested me to call upon you, and represent the matter in the plainest terms, which I have endeavoured to do, omitting or concealing no single incident of the unhappy affair. I am deputed to ask you to take a course with your daughter similar to that he has taken with his son--that is, to absolutely forbid the union. The young gentleman is in a state of extreme pecuniary embarrassment, and it is possible--I do not state it as a fact, but merely as a presumption--that he reckons upon your aid to settle with his creditors. When he finds that this aid will not be forthcoming, and that he cannot depend upon your making a suitable settlement upon your daughter, he is not unlikely, for prudential reasons, to beat a retreat."

"What is the inference you wish me to draw from this expression of opinion?"

"That Mr. Storndale is following your daughter for your money."

"And that he has no love for her?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. The interview was taking a turn not exactly pleasing to him.

"You are not flattering the young gentleman," Aaron said.

"I had no intention of doing so. Of course, it is for you to consider the matter from your own point of view. First, as a father----"

He paused.

"Yes, first as a father," repeated Aaron.

"Next, as a Jew."

"Yes, next as a Jew," said Aaron, again repeating the lawyer's words.

He was agitated by conflicting emotions, which no man but he could have understood--and which, indeed, in the light of the revelation which had been made, he himself could scarcely grasp, so strongly did it affect the secret of his life. But that secret still was his, and he had still to play his part.

"You are commissioned to take my answer to Lord Storndale?"

"He is anxiously awaiting it."

"I may trust you to convey that answer as nearly as possible in my own words?"

"It shall be my endeavour."

"You will tell him, then, that the mission with which he has entrusted you comes upon me as a surprise. As I have already informed you, I have never, until this day, heard his name or the name of his son. As to the character you give the young gentleman, it may or may not be correct, for

you speak of him as an advocate on the other side----"

"But surely," interrupted the lawyer, "that would not affect the religious aspect of the question."

"No, it would not affect it. But whether correct or not, it seems clear that the young gentleman has not acted as a man of honour, although he is Lord Storndale's son. A young girl's trustfulness and innocence should be her safeguard; but here they have been basely used, according to your own statement, by a man whose external accomplishments have unhappily attracted her."

"And from such a man," said the lawyer, rather too eagerly, "it is a fathers duty to protect his daughter."

"Undoubtedly," replied Aaron, who could not dispute the lawyer's reasoning. "That my wife and I should have been kept in ignorance of Mr. Storndale's attentions is to be deplored; and it appears certain that he must have bound Miss Cohen by a promise to say nothing to us about them. You speak of the pride of race as affecting Lord Storndale. We have also that pride, and if any Jewish parent were so far forgetful of the obligations of his faith as to admit your client's son into his family, it is upon him and upon Lord Storndale that honour would be conferred."

"It is a fair retort," said the lawyer. "I beg you to believe that the views I have expressed are not mine, but Lord Storndale's, in whose interests I am acting. I am, as you say, an advocate--merely a mouthpiece, as it were--and I am bound to follow out my instructions. Your disapproval of mixed marriages gives me confidence that my mission has not failed, and it will be a satisfaction to Lord Storndale. May I take it that you will pursue the course with your daughter that he has taken with his son, and that you will forbid the union?"

"Have I not made myself sufficiently clear?" asked Aaron, with an inward rebellion against the evasion he felt himself compelled to practise.

"Yes, yes," said the lawyer, hastily, too astute to press for precise words. "And I may inform Lord Storndale that you distinctly disapprove of marriages between Jews and Christians?"

"You may."

Mr. Dillworthy, believing he had gained his point, wisely dropped the subject, and expressing his obligations to Aaron, rose to take his departure. Before he reached the door, however, he turned, and in a tone of courteous deference, asked if Mr. Cohen could spare him a few moments more. Aaron assenting, the lawyer resumed his seat, and taking a pocket-book from his pocket searched in it for a letter.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SPIRIT OF THE DEAD PAST.

Aaron observed him anxiously. The disclosure that had already been made had so agitated him that he was apprehensive of further trouble.

"Ah! here it is," said the lawyer, opening the letter for which he had been looking; "I was afraid I had left it behind me. Excuse me a moment; I wish to refresh my memory."

He ran his eye over the letter, and nodded as he went through its points of importance.

"Does it concern the unhappy affair we have discussed?" inquired Aaron, unable to restrain his impatience.

"No," replied the lawyer; "I take it that is settled, and I trust, for the sake of both the families, that it will not be re-opened."

"I trust not."

"This is quite a different matter, and I hardly know how to excuse myself for troubling you with it. It is a sudden thought, for I came here with no such intention. You must thank your own reputation for it, Mr. Cohen; it is well known that you have never neglected an opportunity to do an act of kindness, and though what I am about to speak of has come to me in the way of business, the story contains elements so romantic and peculiar that it has strangely attracted me. The reference in the letter which induces me to think that you may be able to help me is that you

are a gentleman of influence in your community, and have a wide acquaintance with your co-religionists. Perhaps I had better read the words. My correspondent says--'I know that there are peculiar difficulties in the search I intend to make upon my return home, but before my arrival you may be able to discover something which will be of assistance to me. Probably if you consult some kind-hearted and influential member of the Jewish race you may, through him, obtain a clue; or, failing this, you might employ a Jewish agent to make inquiries.' It is a lady who writes to me, and her letter comes from Australia. May I continue? Thank you. Let me tell you the story; it will interest you, and I will be as brief as possible. The letter is too long to read throughout." He handed it to Aaron. "It occupies, you see, fourteen closely written pages, and it is somewhat in the nature of a confession. If you wish, I will have a copy of it made, and will send it on to you to-morrow."

Aaron, turning over the pages, came to the superscription:

"I remain,

"Yours truly,

"MARY GORDON."

Truly this was a day of startling surprises to him. He recollected the name as that of the gentleman for whom, twenty years ago, Mr. Moss had undertaken the commission which had lifted him from beggary by placing in his hands a large sum of money to which in strict justice he was not entitled, but which, from fear that the deception he had practised might otherwise be discovered, he was compelled to accept. He had, as an atonement, expended in secret charities a hundred times the sum; but this did not absolve him from the responsibility. The spirit of the dead past rose before him, and he was overwhelmed with the dread possibilities it brought with it.

"I fear," said the lawyer, "that I have been inconsiderate in introducing the matter at the present moment. I will postpone it to a future occasion."

"Pray continue," said Aaron, whose burning desire now was to know the worst. "I have had an exciting day, but I will pay due attention to what you wish to impart to me."

"I appreciate your kindness. If you cannot assist me, you may recommend me to an agent whom I will employ. I noticed that you referred in the letter to the name of my correspondent, Mrs. Gordon; the inquiry is of a delicate nature, and it may be her wish that her name is not too freely mentioned--at all events, for the present. Her story is not an uncommon one, but it takes an extraordinary and unusual turn. She is now, according to her own account, a lady of considerable means; her husband has lately died, and she has come into a fortune. Some twenty odd years ago she was a young woman, and had two lovers, one of whom wooed her with dishonourable intentions, and by him she was betrayed. This occurred during the absence in Australia of the gentleman who had proposed to her, and whom she had accepted. He was a resident in Australia, and it was his intention to make his home there. While he was on his way to England, with the intention of making her his wife and returning with her to the colony, she discovered that she was about to become a mother. In despair she fled from London, where he expected to find her, and sought to hide her shame among strangers. The place she selected was Portsmouth, and there she went through a series of harrowing trials, and was reduced to extreme poverty. In her letter to me she makes no effort to disguise the misery into which she was plunged, and she is frank and outspoken in order that I may properly understand how it was that she was forced to abandon the child that was born in Portsmouth under most distressing circumstances. For it appears that when the suitor who wooed her honourably arrived in London and learned the story of her betrayal, he was still desirous to make her his wife. He traced her to Portsmouth, and found her there with her babe, who was then but a few days old. This would have induced most men to forego their honourable intentions; but Mr. Gordon, whose name she now bears, was an exception to the rule, and, through a gentleman who acted as a go-between, he made a singular proposition to her. It was to the effect that she should consent to give up her child entirely, and during his lifetime to make no effort to recover it; he undertook to find a respectable and comfortable home for the babe, and to make a liberal provision for it. This is the bare outline of his proposition, and I need not go further into it. So desperate was her position that she and her child at the time were literally starving; she had not a friend but Mr. Gordon, who was stern in his resolve not to befriend her unless she accepted the conditions he dictated; the gentleman who acted as a go-between had behaved very kindly to her, but could not assist her further. In these circumstances she made the sacrifice, and parted with her child, who from that day to this she has never seen. Mr. Gordon honourably fulfilled the terms of the agreement; a home was found for the child, and he married the lady, and took her to Australia, where she has resided for the last twenty years. It was part of the agreement that she should not be informed of the name of the people who adopted the child, and should not, directly or indirectly, make the least endeavour to obtain any information concerning it while her husband was alive. If he died before her she was free to act as she pleased in the matter. This has occurred, and the widow, who has had no children by her marriage, is bent upon recovering her child, who, I may mention, is a girl.

The task is beset with difficulties, and may prove hopeless. Shortly stated, Mr. Cohen, this is the case as it at present stands."

"Is there a special reason," inquired Aaron, "for your applying to me for assistance?"

"Not exactly special; it is in a sense accidental, inspired by my visit this evening on the other matter we have spoken of. There are certain particulars in relation to Mrs. Gordon's search for her daughter which I have omitted. The arrangements for the future provision of the babe were carried out, I understand, by a firm of lawyers whose names Mrs. Gordon has been unable to ascertain; but she is acquainted with the name of the gentleman who in Portsmouth conveyed Mr. Gordon's proposition to her. This gentleman is Dr. Spenlove, who, leaving Portsmouth several years ago, has attained an eminent position in London. You may be acquainted with him."

"He was at my house to-day."

"Then you are on terms of intimacy with him."

"No. We met to-day for the first time."

"In her letter Mrs. Gordon refers me to Dr. Spenlove, and I have not yet communicated with him. The letter only reached me this morning, and I have not had time to see him."

"You have not explained why you apply to me."

"The explanation is simple. During her husband's lifetime Mrs. Gordon faithfully carried out her obligation, and, as it appears to me, no words passed between them on the subject of the child. In his last moments, however, he must have relented; unfortunately, he left it too late to give his wife the information she so eagerly desired; he could scarcely articulate, and all she could gather from him was that he had employed an agent to look after the child, and that this agent was of the Jewish persuasion. The conclusion is that he was a resident of Portsmouth, but he may not be living; and it has occurred to me that you, who have friends of your persuasion everywhere, may expedite the discovery by giving me the name and address of some old inhabitant who can put us on the track of Mr. Gordon's agent. When the lady arrives in England she will naturally go to Dr. Spenlove, who will doubtless assist her in her natural endeavour to obtain intelligence of the fate of her child. If you can also assist us you will earn a mother's gratitude."

"I will consider it," said Aaron, and his voice was troubled; "that is all I can promise at present."

"It is all we can expect of you. There is another peculiar feature in this strange case. Mrs. Gordon, before she left England, entrusted Dr. Spenlove with a metal casket in which she had deposited some memorials of interest; this casket was to be given to the man who undertook to bring up the child, on the understanding that it was to be handed to the young lady at the age of twenty-one (supposing, of course, that she lived to that age), or before that time to be returned to the mother if she came to claim it. The young lady, if she be living, is not yet twenty-one, and it is the mother's intention to recover this casket, if it be possible. It is to be hoped it fell into the hands of an honest man."

"It is to be hoped so," said Aaron, mechanically.

Mr. Dillworthy said in a kind tone, "It is not an opportune time to seek your aid in a cause in which you are not personally interested, when another subject, the welfare of a dear daughter, engrosses your attention. Pray forgive me, Mr. Cohen."

Aaron bent his head, and as the lawyer closed the door behind him, sank back in his chair with a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEFORE ALL, DUTY.

He sat silent for many minutes, his mind in a state of chaos; but presently his native strength of character came to his aid, and he resumed the task which the entrance of Mr. Dillworthy had interrupted! In addition to the important meeting he had to attend that night, his presence was expected at the board of a Jewish charity, of which he was the founder. This meeting came first, and his colleagues could not proceed to business without him; he must not disappoint them.

Before all, duty. The thought shaped itself in whispered words, which he repeated again and again, and their iteration brought to him a sense of their true significance. Duty had been a leading principle of his life, and in the part he had taken in public matters he had never neglected it, and had never studied his personal convenience. But he had now to consider the principle in its most comprehensive aspect, and he felt that its application to his private affairs was imperative in the conflicting interests in which he was engaged. This being so, what was his duty here at home in respect of his wife and the girl he had brought up as their daughter, and how should he perform it? Love played so vital a part in the consideration of this question that he could not thrust it aside. It was, indeed, its leading element. For years past he had lived in a fool's paradise, and time had crept on and on until suddenly he saw the flowers withering before him. He had been false to himself, he had worn a mask, and now it was to be torn aside; but this he could bear. How would Rachel bear it?

Unconsciously he had risen from his chair, and was pacing to and fro while he reflected. Pausing, he saw upon the table the papers he had been studying. The meeting of the Jewish society was of minor consequence, and required but little thought; the second meeting, however, was of vast importance, for there a decision was to be arrived at which would affect thousands of poor families and have a direct bearing upon the question of capital and labour. There had been a great strike in the building trade, and thousands of men had deliberately thrown themselves out of employment, choosing, in their adherence to a principle, what was almost next door to starvation. The strike had been brought about by a rival contractor, a Mr. Poynter, an employer of labour on an extensive scale, and a man as well known as Aaron himself. To say that these two were rivals does not necessarily imply that they were enemies, for that is a game that two must play at, and it was a game in which Aaron played no part. He did not approve of Mr. Poynter's methods: he went no further than that; and if he was called upon to express his opinion upon the subject he did so in a manner which robbed it of any personal application. Mr. Poynter, on the other hand, was nothing if he was not personal, and he hated Aaron with a very sincere and conscientious hate. He hated him because he had lost several profitable contracts, which Aaron had obtained; and this hatred may be applied in a general sense, because he hated every successful rival, great or small. He hated him because Aaron was genuinely respected by large bodies of working men, and had great influence with them; and this hatred may also be applied in a general sense, because he hated all employers of labour who were held by their workmen in higher respect than himself. He hated Aaron because he was a Jew; and this may certainly be applied in a general sense, because he had a bitter hatred of all Jews, and would have willingly subscribed liberally and joined in a crusade to hunt them out of the country. He did not subscribe to the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, because to Christianise them would be to admit them upon terms of equality, and the idea was abhorrent to him. On no terms could a Jew be made the equal of a Christian. That a Jew could be a good man, that he could be a just man, that he could do anything without an eye to profit or self-aggrandisement--these, in his belief, were monstrous propositions, and no man of sense, certainly no true Christian, could seriously entertain them. Mr. Poynter was a Christian, a true Christian, regular in his attendance at church, and fairly liberal, also, in his charities, though his left hand always knew what his right hand did. And here he found another cause for hating Aaron. He heard his name quoted as a man of large benevolence, and he went so far as to declare that Aaron's charities were a means to an end. "He looks upon them as an investment," he said; "they bring him a good return. Did you ever know a Jew part with money without an eye to the main chance?" When he heard that it was generally reported that Aaron gave away in secret much more than he gave away in public, his comment was, "What is easier than to set such a rumour afloat? Any rich man can do it by an expenditure of ten pounds a year! If money is bestowed in secret, who is to know of it but the donor? If it becomes public, who could have spoken of it first but the donor? No one but a fool would be gulled by so transparent a trick!" These detractions were generally uttered to men who sympathised with the speaker, and they were not without effect. By which it will be seen that Aaron had enemies, as all men have. Mr. Poynter posed as a moral man, and it is the very essence of these usurpers of morality that each of them must stand alone, and that upon the pedestal he sets up there shall be no room for any other braggart. He was a married man, with sons and daughters, and a wife, who all looked upon the husband and father as a pattern. Whether his children followed the pattern or not does not concern this history, which has to do with the head of the family alone. Whatever a man may be in the prime of life, the earlier Adam, if it differ from the later, will very likely assert itself in the blood of his descendants, and this may have been the case with Mr. Poynter's children, despite the respect in which they held him. You come into contact with a sober-faced man whose distinguishing mark is one of intense respectability; you see him at home in the bosom of his family, whom he entertains with severely respectable platitudes; you hear his opinions on matters of current interest, a trial, a scandal in high life, tittle-tattle of the stage, the Court, the Church, and society in general. What an intensely respectable gentleman, what severely respectable views, what strict morality, what an estimable father of a family! Ah, but draw the curtain of years aside, and we behold another man--another man, yet still the same, a man about town, philandering, deceiving, lying, and playing the base part to serve his selfish pleasures. Where is the morality, where the respectability now--and which of the two is the true man?

Was this the case with Mr. Poynter? The course of events may possibly supply the answer to this question presently. Meanwhile, nothing is more certain to-day than that he is accepted as he presents himself. But, if in the past life of such a man as Aaron Cohen may be found an episode of his own creating upon which he looks with dismay, why might it not be so with such a man as Mr. Poynter?

In a country like England, where operations of magnitude are being continually undertaken, there is room for all who occupy the higher rungs of the ladder; it is only the lower rungs which are overcrowded, and which need clearing by means of emigration to lands where there is room for the toiling, suffering millions. But Mr. Poynter chose to believe that there was not room for Aaron and himself, and he nursed and fostered a venomous desire to drag Aaron down. This desire, indeed, had really become a disease with him, and had grown by what it fed on. He hunted about for the means, he asked questions. It was unquestionably true that there were Jews who had grown rich through dishonesty and usury, and Mr. Poynter did not stop to consider that this applied equally to Christians. Perhaps it was the knowledge of his own early life that made him think, "If I could find something in his past that would bring shame upon him--if I could only rake up something that would show him in his true light! It would be the commercial and social ruin of him. He would never be able to hold up his head again." He would gladly have paid for some such discovery.

At the present time he had special reasons for hate. One reason was that the strike in the building trade was affecting him seriously. He was engaged in large contracts, in the carrying out of which thousands of men were needed, and it was chiefly against himself that the strike was ordered by the unions. He was on the brink of great losses, and Aaron had been called in as a mediator and arbitrator. The strike at an end, and the masters the victors, he was safe, and more prosperous than ever; but every day that it was prolonged meant so many hundreds of pounds out of his pocket. His fate seemed to hang upon the final advice to the men which Aaron was to give, and his profits would be large or small according to the nature of that advice. He laid the credit of the strike at Aaron's door; for in their enterprises he and Aaron employed different methods. Aaron had pursued in England the course he had pursued in France. He paid his men liberally, gave them bonuses, even to a certain extent acknowledged them as co-operators. In Mr. Poynter's eyes this was a crime, for it struck at the very root of his prosperity. "He is a rabid socialist," Mr. Poynter said; "men of his stamp are a danger to society."

Another reason was that tenders had lately been called for works of exceptional magnitude, and he had entertained hopes of obtaining the contract. Again he was worsted by this insidious enemy. Within the last few hours he had heard that Aaron's tender had been accepted. He ground his teeth with rage. He could have undertaken the works in spite of the strike, for he had very nearly completed arrangements for the introduction of foreign workmen, whom he was determined to employ if the English workmen held out. There would be a row, of course, and the lower classes would cast obloquy upon him, for which he would have to thank his rival and enemy. When he heard that he had lost the contract he said to a friend, "I would give half I am worth to drag him down." And he meant what he said.

The last meeting of the strikers was now being held. It had been called for seven o'clock, and it was known that the discussion would occupy several hours. Aaron was not asked to attend this discussion, which was to be private, even the representatives of the press not being admitted. Eleven o'clock was the hour at which he was expected, and it was understood that he would bring with him certain propositions from the masters, which, with the workmen's views, were to be discussed, and a decision arrived at. To-morrow morning's papers would announce whether the strike was to be continued or was at an end.

He studied the papers before him--the arguments and statements of employers of labour, comparisons of wages here and in foreign countries, the comparative rates of living here and there, and the conflicting views of the living wage, documents of every description, among which were pathetic letters from wives of the strikers, imploring him to put an end to the strike. He had mastered them all, and was familiar with every detail, but he read them again in order to divert his attention for this night from his own private affairs. His mind must be free; he would think of them to-morrow. He had public duties to attend to. Before all, duty.

The words haunted him, and he was dismayed to find that all his efforts to concentrate his attention upon his public duties were vain. Pictures of the past presented themselves: he saw his home in Gosport; he saw Rachel lying in bed with her dead babe by her side; he saw himself engaged in the task of completing the guilty deception, changing the clothing of the infants, and giving his own child to a strange woman,--every incident connected with his sin was stamped indelibly upon his brain, and now rose vividly before him. Very well. He had half an hour to spare before he left his house for the Jewish meeting; he would devote the time to a consideration of his private affairs.

He gathered his papers, arranged them in order, and put them in his pocket. He dallied with them at first, but feeling that he was prolonging the simple task in order to shorten the time for serious thought, he smiled pitifully at his weakness, and completed it expeditiously.

In admitting Ruth into his household, in adopting her as a daughter he had undertaken a sacred responsibility. He was fully conscious of this twenty years ago in Gosport, and what he had done had been done deliberately. It was a question then of the sacrifice of a precious life. The doctor had stated the case very clearly. The pregnant words they had exchanged were in his memory now, and might have been spoken only a few moments since. "Her life," the doctor had said, "hangs upon the life of her child." "If our child lives," Aaron had asked, "there is hope that my wife will live?" "A strong hope," the doctor had answered. "And if our child dies?" asked Aaron. The doctor answered, "The mother will die."

He recalled the agony of those hours, the sufferings through which Rachel had passed with so much sweetness and patience, his poverty and helplessness, the dark future before him. Then came the ray of light, Mr. Moss, with the strange commission of the deserted child. He had not courted it, had not invited it; he had had no hand in it. He had regarded it as a message from heaven. What followed? The death of his own babe, the calm and peaceful death, the young soul taken to heaven, his beloved wife in an untroubled sleep by the side of her dead babe. It was a visitation of God. Could he be accused of having had a hand in it? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, who could blame him for believing that it was a Divine direction of the course he was to take? And who was wronged? Surely not the mother who had deserted her babe. Surely not the babe, who had found a happy home. The wrong--and herein was the sting--was to Rachel, whose life had been saved by the deceit. So far, then, was he not justified?

But if, before the committal of a sin, we could see the consequences of the sin--if he had seen the consequences of his, would he not have paused, and said, "It rests with God; let it be as He wills; I will be no party to the deceit"? In that case Rachel's life would have been sacrificed. There was no human doubt of it. Rachel would have died, and the blessings she had shed around her, the good she had been enabled to do, the suffering hearts she had relieved, the light she had brought into despairing homes, would never have been. Against a little evil, so much good. Against a slight error, so much that was sweet and beautiful.

But in these reflections he had taken into account only Rachel and himself--only their two lives. How about Ruth herself?

He had never disguised from himself that there was much in Ruth's character which was not in accordance with Rachel's views or his own, which she did not assimilate with either of their natures. Being one of his family in the eyes of the world, he had brought her up as a Jewess. She was born a Christian. Was this not a crime of which she had been made the victim? He had experienced great difficulties in her education. He wished to correct the defect which exists in ninety-nine English Jewesses out of a hundred--he wished her to pray in the Hebrew tongue, and to understand her prayers. To this end he himself had endeavoured to teach her to read and translate Hebrew. She would not learn. Even now as a woman she understood but a very few words, and this scanty knowledge was mechanical. A parrot might have learned as much. She had an aversion to Jewish society. As a child, when she was necessarily in leading strings, she was taken by Rachel to the synagogue on every Sabbath day, but when she began to have intelligent ideas she rebelled; she would not go, and Rachel walked to the House of God alone. It was a grief to her that Ruth would not follow in her footsteps, and she and Aaron had frequently conversed upon the subject. "It is so with many Jewish women," Aaron said. "It would be wrong to force her; she will find out her error by-and-by." But Ruth never did, and Rachel suffered in silence.

There was another sorrow. Between their son Joseph and Ruth did not exist that love which brother and sister should bear each other. Joseph was ready with demonstrative affection, but Ruth did not respond. Aaron had taken note of this, but he was powerless to remedy it, and the lad, who was as solicitous as his father to spare the dear mother pain, made no trouble of it. Ruth respected and admired her reputed father, and in the feelings she entertained towards him there was an element of fear, because of his strength of character, but she did not love him as a child should. He, knowing what he knew, found excuses for her. "It is in her blood," he said to himself.

All this was hidden from Rachel, to whom Ruth was tender and kind. Who could be otherwise to so sweet a woman? But Rachel did not know of what she was deprived until Esther Moss began to make long visits to their home. "Esther is like a daughter to me," she said, and only Aaron was aware of the depth of meaning these simple words conveyed. In Rachel's association with Esther she had realised what a daughter might have been to her.

But now he had to consider the matter, not from his or Rachel's point of view, but from Ruth's. She was a woman in her springtime, and love had come to her, and she had held out her arms to it. And the man she loved was a Christian.

It was not within his right to take into consideration that the man she loved was a spendthrift and a scapegrace. The question had often intruded itself since she was grown to womanhood, whether he would not be adding sin to sin by encouraging her to marry a Jew. She had answered the question herself. What right had he to gainsay her? He might, as a true and sincere friend, say to her, "This man will not make you happy. He has vices and defects which will bring misery upon your home. You must not marry him." But he had no right to say to her "You must not marry this man because he is a Christian." It would be a detestable argument for one in his position, and in hers, to advance.

Then Mr. Dillworthy might be wrong in his estimate of the young man's character. The only objection Lord Storndale had to the union was that Ruth was a Jewess. But she was not a Jewess, and it was in his power to go to the young man's father and make the disclosure to him. Lord Storndale's natural reply would be, "Let it be clearly understood. You have done this lady a grievous wrong. You are a wealthy man. Repair the wrong by making a suitable settlement upon her. But it must be publicly done, and the injustice of which you have been guilty must be publicly acknowledged." The only answer he could make would be, "It is just. I will do as you dictate."

What would be the effect as regarded himself? Among his co-religionists he was held up as a pillar of the old Jewish faith. His voice had been raised against apostasy; he had taken a decided stand against the more liberal ideas of civilised life which prevailed and were adopted by a large section of his race. Even now he was pledged to deliver a public address against the backsliding of the modern Jew, who was disposed to adapt his life to the altered circumstances of the times. He had written this address, and public attention had been drawn to the coming event. His arguments were to himself convincing, and by them he hoped to stem the tide. He had always been orthodox, and he hoped to prevail against the wave of heterodoxy which was sweeping over modern Judaism. He had stepped forward as a champion. In the light of the domestic revelation which must presently be made, how dare he, himself a transgressor, presume to teach his brethren their religious duty? His sound judgment of things which interested or affected him was due to his common sense, which, he had been heard to say, was a rare quality.

"You are always right," Mr. Moss once said to him. "How is it?"

"If I form a correct opinion," he replied, with a smile, "it is because I exercise my common sense. I do not judge from my own standpoint."

He did this now. He put himself in the place of other men. He listened to his own confession. He passed the verdict upon himself.

"This man has been living the life of a hypocrite. He has accepted money for false service. Not perhaps by word of mouth, but most assuredly by his acts, he has lied. He has violated the canons of his religion. He has deceived his wife--for money, which he pretends to despise. He has robbed a young girl of her birthright. And he dares to preach to us of duty!"

Who would believe him if he told the true story of his hard trial, if he described the bitter tribulation of his soul when his beloved wife was lying at death's door? He had counselled many men in their days of struggle and temptation to be brave and do their duty. How had he performed his in *his* hour of temptation? No one would believe the only story he could plead in extenuation of his sin. He would be condemned by all.

And he was in the zenith of his fame. On this very day, when exposure seemed to be approaching with, swift and certain steps, he had been honoured as few men live to be. If he felt pleasure in the position he had won, it was because it was a source of pride and pleasure to Rachel. Was he, with his own hand, to destroy the ideal he had created? Was this the plain duty that lay now before him?

"The carriage is at the door, sir."

It was a servant who interrupted his tortured musings; he had given orders to be informed when his carriage was ready. With slow steps he left his study.

BOOK THE SIXTH.

RETRIBUTION.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ESTHER MOSS RECEIVES A LETTER.

There was an apartment in Aaron Cohen's house which was called the Cosy Room, where the family were in the habit of sitting when they had no visitors, and it was here that their real domestic happiness reigned. Here Aaron used to smoke his old silver-mounted pipe, and chat with his wife, and indulge in his entertaining pleasantries when he was in the humour; and here the feeling used to steal over him that life would hold more joy for him and those dear to him if

they dwelt in a smaller house and his doings were less under the public eye.

"I am convinced," he would say, "that those who are in the lower middle class are the best off. They have fewer cares, they have more time for domestic enjoyment, they can attend without hindrance to their own affairs. Their neighbours are not jealous of them; they are not high enough to be envied, nor low enough to be pitied. There is no happiness in riches. Miserable man that I am! Why do I continue to wish to accumulate more money?"

"Because," Rachel would answer affectionately, "it enables you to contribute to the happiness of others. But I should be as contented if we were poor."

On the occasion of Mr. Dillworthy's visit to Aaron a scene of a different nature was being enacted in the Cosy Room. Rachel was overpowered with languor, and she fell into a doze. The apartment was large; but an arrangement of screens, and the disposal of the furniture, made it look small; domestically speaking, there is no comfort in any but a small room. Esther, during her present visit, had noticed with concern that Mrs. Cohen appeared weak, that her movements, which were always gentle, were more languid than usual, and that her quiet ways seemed to be the result of physical prostration. She spoke of it to Rachel, who confessed that she had not felt strong lately, but cautioned the young girl to say nothing of it to Aaron.

"He is so easily alarmed about me," she said, "and he has great anxieties upon him."

"But you should see the doctor," urged Esther, solicitously.

"I will wait a day or two," answered Rachel, and again enjoined Esther not to alarm her husband.

On the evening of this exciting day she looked so pale and fatigued that she yielded to Esther's solicitations, and, without Aaron's knowledge, sent for the physician who was in the habit of attending her. While waiting for him she fell asleep in her armchair in the Cosy Room. At her request Esther played softly some of Rachel's favourite pieces; the piano was behind a screen at one end of the room, and Esther did not know that she had fallen asleep. While thus employed Prissy quietly entered the room. The faithful woman looked at her mistress, and stepped noiselessly to the screen.

"Miss Esther," she whispered.

The girl stopped playing immediately, and came from behind the screen.

"Is it the doctor, Prissy?" she asked.

"No, miss."

Prissy pointed to her mistress, and Esther went to the armchair and adjusted a light shawl which was falling from the sleeping lady's shoulder. It was a slight action, but it was done with so much tenderness that Prissy smiled approvingly. She liked Esther much better than Ruth, who did not hold in her affections the place the other members of the family did. Humble as was her position in the household, she had observed things of which she disapproved. Ruth was from home more frequently than she considered proper, and had often said to her, "You need not tell my mother that I have gone out unless she asks you." Prissy had not disobeyed her, and the consequence was that Ruth was sometimes absent from the house for hours without her mother or father being aware of it. Prissy's idea was that her young mistress would bring trouble on the house; but she kept silence because she would otherwise have got into trouble herself with Ruth, and would also have distressed her dear lady if she had made mention of her suspicions, for which she could have offered no reasonable explanation. Prissy's distress of mind was not lessened because Ruth, when she enjoined secrecy upon her, gave her money, as if to purchase her silence. She would have refused these bribes; but Ruth forced them upon her, and she felt as if she were in a conspiracy to destroy the peace of the family.

"I did not know she was asleep," said Esther, coming back to Prissy.

"I'm sure you didn't, miss. She falls off, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Esther, with affectionate solicitude.

"As she used to do a good many years ago--long before you knew her, miss. She had gone through a severe illness, and was that delicate for months afterwards that you could almost blow her away. She never complained, and never did a cross word pass her lips. I'm glad you're with her, Miss Esther: you're a real comfort to her. I've got a letter for you, miss."

"I didn't hear the postman."

"The postman didn't bring it, miss," said Prissy, giving her the letter. "A boy. Said immejiet."

"It must be from---- no." She was thinking of her lover as she looked at the letter, but she saw it was not his hand. She recognised the writing: it was Ruth's. "The envelope is not very clean, Prissy."

"So I told the boy when he brought it to the back door."

"The back door!" exclaimed Esther, rather bewildered.

"It's curious, isn't it, miss, that it wasn't sent by post?"

"Yes, it is. What did the boy say?"

"It's what I said first, miss. 'You've been and dropped it in the gutter,' I said; but he only laughed, and said it was give to him this morning, and that he was to bring it to the servants' entrance and ask for Prissy."

"But why didn't he deliver it this morning?" asked Esther, her bewilderment growing.

"I don't know, miss. He's been playing in the streets all day, I expect. Anyway, he said I was to give it to you when nobody was looking. It's Miss Ruth's writing, miss."

Esther made no remark upon this, but asked, "Did he say who gave it to him?"

"A young lady, he said, miss."

"That will do, Prissy."

"Can I do anything for you, miss?"

"Nothing, thank you."

Prissy gone, Esther looked at the envelope, and saw written in one corner, "Read this when you are alone." Troubled and perplexed, she stood with the letter in her hand; but when the door was opened again and the doctor was announced, she put it hastily into her pocket, and went forward to meet him.

Dr. Roberts had attended Rachel for some years past, and took the deepest interest in her.

"Sleeping," he said, stepping to her side. He turned to Esther, and, questioning her, learned why he had been sent for. "She falls asleep," he said, with his fingers on Rachel's pulse. "Ah, you are awake," as Rachel sat upright. "Now, let us see what is the matter. You are not in pain? No. That's good."

"There is really nothing the matter with me, doctor," said Rachel.

"But you feel weak and drowsy at times. We will soon set that right."

Dr. Roberts was one of those cheerful physicians whose bright ways always brighten their patients. "Make the best of a case," was a favourite saying of his, "not the worst."

He remained with Rachel a quarter of an hour, advised her to get to bed, gave her instructions as to food, ordered her a tonic, and took his leave. Esther went with him into the passage.

"There is no danger, doctor?"

"Not the slightest, my dear," he answered, in a fatherly manner. "But I would advise perfect rest. Don't tell her anything exciting. She must not be worried. Get a humorous story and read it to her. Make her laugh. Let everything be bright and cheerful about her. But I need not say that: it always is--eh? If you have any troubles, keep them to yourself. But what troubles should a young girl like you have?"

He met Aaron at the street door.

"Ah, Mr. Cohen, I have been to see your wife--in a friendly way."

"She is not ill?" asked Aaron, in an anxious tone, stepping back.

"No; a little weak, that is all. Don't go up to see her; I have just left her, and she will think there is something the matter, when there's nothing that cannot be set right in a few days. She wants tone, that is all, and rest, and perfect freedom from excitement. That is essential. Such a day as this, flattering and pleasant as it must have been, is not good for her. Keep her mind at rest, let her hear nothing that is likely to disturb her, speak of none but cheerful subjects to her, and she will be herself again in a week. Follow my advice, and there is not the least cause for alarm."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RUTH'S SECRET.

Dr. Roberts spoke so heartily and confidently that Aaron's anxiety was relieved, and the counsel that Rachel should be told nothing that was likely to disturb her was something like a reprieve, as it prevented him from precipitating matters. A few days were still left for reflection, and he went forth to his public duties with a lighter heart.

Esther, meanwhile, was busy for some time attending to Rachel, who wished the young girl to remain with her till she was asleep. With Ruth's letter in her pocket, which had been delivered almost clandestinely at the house, and which she was enjoined to read when she was alone, she was compelled to bridle her impatience. She did not dare to speak of it to Rachel, and the course the conversation took in the bedroom did not tend to compose her. Rachel spoke only of family matters, of her husband and children, and presently the conversation drifted entirely to the subject of Ruth.

"Young girls," said Rachel, "confide in each other. There is a true affection between you, is there not, my dear?"

"Yes," replied Esther, wondering what was coming, and dreading it.

"It happens sometimes," continued Rachel, with a sigh, "that parents do not entirely win their children's confidence. Joseph has not a secret from me. Do you think Ruth is quite happy, my dear?"

"I think so," said Esther.

"I am not asking you to break a confidence she may have reposed in you----"

Esther could not refrain from interrupting her.

"But, dear mother, I know nothing."

As she uttered the words a guilty feeling stole over her. What did the letter in her pocket contain?

Rachel drew the girl's face to hers, and caressed her.

"Now it is you," she said, "who are speaking as if you are in trouble. I am very inconsiderate; but love has its pains as well as its joys. You have no trouble, Esther?"

"None, dear mother. I am perfectly happy."

"See how mistaken I am; and I hope I am mistaken also about Ruth. I feared that she had some secret which she was concealing from me. Blind people are suspicious, and breed trouble for themselves and others."

"Not you, dear mother," said Esther, kissing her. "Now you must go to sleep. This is quite against the doctor's orders."

Rachel smiled and yielded. She took pleasure in being led by those she loved.

In the solitude of her chamber Esther read the letter.

"DARLING ESTHER,--

"I am in great trouble, and you must help me. You are the only friend I have in the world---- but no, I must not say that; it is not true. What I mean is, you are the only friend at home I can trust.

"Father and mother, and you, too, think I am in Portsmouth with your family. Dear Esther, I am in London; I have been in London all the week. The happiness of my life is in your hands; remember that.

"I went down to Portsmouth, but I only stayed two days. I told your father I had to pay a visit to other friends, and he believed me. And now I hear he is in London, and of course will come to the house. He is the only person you may tell; you must beg him not to say a word about my going from Portsmouth; you must make him promise; you don't know what depends upon it. Speak to him quietly, and say he must not betray me; he will do anything for you.

"Dear, darling Esther, I have a secret that I cannot disclose yet. I will soon--perhaps to-morrow, perhaps in a week; I cannot fix a time, because it does not depend upon me. But remember my happiness is in your hands.

"Your loving

"RUTH."

The young girl was bewildered and distressed by this communication. They had all believed that Ruth was on a visit to Esther's family, and Esther had received letters from her with the Portsmouth postmark on them. It was true that Ruth had asked her, as a particular favour, not to reply to the letters, and though Esther considered it a strange request, she had complied with it. Ruth's stronger will always prevailed with her. But what did it all mean? If Ruth had been in London a week, where was she stopping? Esther's character could hardly as yet be said to be formed: it was sweet, but it lacked decision, and now that she was called upon to act in a matter of importance she looked helplessly round, as if for guidance. She was glad when Prissy knocked at her door and said that her father was downstairs. Part of the responsibility seemed to be already lifted from her shoulders.

"Prissy," she said, before she went down, "you haven't spoken to anybody about the letter?"

"No, miss."

"Don't say anything about it, please. Mrs. Cohen is not well, and the doctor is very particular that she shall not be bothered or worried."

"I won't say anything, miss." She shook her head gravely as Esther tripped downstairs, and muttered, "Trouble's coming, or my name ain't what it is."

"I am so glad you are here, father," said Esther; "I have something to tell you."

"I have something to tell *you*," said Mr. Moss. "Such an odd impression! Of course I must be mistaken. But first I want to know how Mrs. Cohen is. I thought she was not looking strong to-day."

Esther told him of the doctor's visit and the instructions he had given, and then handed him Ruth's letter, which he read in silence.

"I don't like the look of it," he said. "I hate mystery, and I cannot decide immediately whether it ought to be kept from Mr. Cohen."

"Oh, father," cried Esther, "Ruth will never forgive me if I betray her."

"I don't think it is a question of betrayal," said Mr. Moss. "She tells you to speak to me, and you have done so. I take the blame on myself, whatever happens. My dear, you are not old enough to understand such matters, and you must leave this to me. The letter will be better in my keeping than in yours. Just consider, Esther; would you have behaved so?"

"No, father, I could not."

"There is the answer. The odd impression I spoke of was that I saw Ruth to-night in a hansom cab. I thought I was mistaken, but now I am convinced it was she. If I had known what I know now I should have followed her. As to Ruth never forgiving you, what will Mr. Cohen's feelings be towards you when he discovers that you have acted in a treacherous manner towards him and his wife? Ruth is very little older than yourself, and I am afraid cannot discriminate between right and wrong; she must not be allowed to drag us into a conspiracy against the peace of the family."

Esther was dismayed; she had not looked upon it in this light.

"Was Ruth alone?" she asked, in a faltering voice.

"No, she had a gentleman with her. It is a bad business--a bad business. I intended to return to Portsmouth to-morrow, but now I shall remain till the matter is cleared up."

"Shall you speak to Mr. Cohen to-night, father?"

"No. I shall do nothing till the morning; I must have time to consider how to act. Mr. Cohen will not be home till past midnight, and he will be completely tired out with the fatigues of the day. To think that it should turn out so! Good-night, my dear child. Get to bed, and try to sleep. Things may turn out better than we expect, after all."

But despite that hope Mr. Moss, when he left Aaron's house, could find nothing more cheerful to occupy his mind than the *Miserere* from "Il Trovatore," which he hummed dolefully as he trudged through the streets. There was very little sleep for his daughter on this night, and very little also for Aaron Cohen. The cloud that was gathering was too ominous for repose.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE HONOURABLE PERCY STORNDALE MAKES AN APPEAL TO AARON COHEN.

On the following morning Aaron had a great deal of work before him which could not be neglected. He had returned home late on the previous night, after an exhausting interview with the strikers, in which he had won the battle. It is to be doubted whether any other man in London could have exercised so commanding an influence over men who were convinced that they had right on their side, and many of whom were still inclined to hold out for better terms than Aaron was empowered to offer them; but his arguments prevailed in the end, and the men gave way. Neither the masters nor the strikers obtained all they desired; each side had to concede something; though, in the main, the advantage lay with the men, whose delegates, in generous words, acknowledged the services which Aaron had rendered to the cause they were fighting for. The newspapers, in recording that the strike was over, were no less generous in their acknowledgments. "It will be long remembered," said the editor of a leading journal, "that a grave danger has been averted chiefly through the influence and high character of one of the most esteemed of our Jewish citizens. To Mr. Aaron Cohen, and to him alone, may be said to be due the credit of terminating a strike which, had it been much longer continued, would have had a disastrous effect upon an important industry, and in the performance of a service which was as disinterested as it was arduous he has established his claim to be ranked among the public benefactors of the country. Masters may well take a lesson from this gentleman, who, in the building up of his own fortunes, has been consistently mindful of the interests and well-being of his workmen. Herein we see the value of character and its influence on the masses. Were capital generally to follow the example of Mr. Cohen in its dealings with labour there would be less room for discontent. In another column will be found an account of the proceedings which took place at this gentleman's house yesterday, upon which occasion a deserved honour was paid to him. If he deserved, as he certainly did, such a tribute yesterday, he deserves it tenfold to-day when the thanks of the nation are due to him for his successful efforts in the builders' strike." At any other time Aaron would have been proud to read these remarks, but now he put the newspaper aside with a heavy sigh. The higher the position the greater the fall. He alone knew that his fair reputation was in danger, and that the honourable edifice he had built for himself was tottering to the ground. From these matters, however, his attention was diverted by a visit from his wife's physician.

Dr. Roberts had not been quite ingenuous in his report of Rachel's condition: his ripe experience warned him that a crisis might occur, and that a few days must elapse before the extent of the danger, if any existed, could be ascertained. It was this that caused him to call early at the house to see Rachel, and when he left her he sought Aaron to confer with him. The moment the doctor entered the room Aaron's thoughts flew to his beloved, and he started up in alarm.

"Doctor!" he cried.

"Now what do you see in my face," said Dr. Roberts, with a smile, "to cause you to start up so suddenly? Sit down, sit down, and let me tell you at once that your wife is in no danger--only she requires a little care and attention. I have come to give you advice, if you will listen to it."

"Of course I will listen to it."

"Of course you will; and you will follow it."

"To the letter."

"That is right. My advice is that you send Mrs. Cohen at once to the seaside. She will be better out of London. I saw on her table a number of letters--begging letters, I was informed--which Miss Moss had been reading to her. Just now she is not equal to the strain. She must be free from the emotions created by these appeals, and from anything of an agitating nature. Perfect repose and rest--that is what she requires, with brighter sunshine and a balmier air, and in a week or two she will be well. I should recommend Bournemouth, and if you wish I will run down and see her there. Meanwhile, I will give you the name of a physician who will understand her case as well as I do. Let Miss Moss go with her; your wife is fond of her, and she is a cheerful companion, though she seems to be rather depressed this morning. I have been lecturing the young lady, and she tells me she has had a bad night. It will do them both good."

"I cannot accompany her to-day," said Aaron. "I have so many important matters to attend to. We will go down to-morrow."

"Send her to-day," urged the physician, "and you can follow on to-morrow, or later. It is good weather for travelling; in a few hours it may change. To-day, by all means. We doctors are autocrats, you know, and will not listen to argument. To-day."

Had the business he had to attend to been of less importance, Aaron would have put it aside, and travelled with his wife to the seaside; but it was business which imperatively demanded his personal attention, and he had no alternative but to send her with Esther and the ever faithful Prissy, in whom he had every confidence. He accompanied them as far as the railway station, and held Rachel's hand in his as they drove to Waterloo. It was not only that they were still lovers, but that he felt the need of the moral support which he derived from the tender hand-clasp.

"Do not be anxious about me, dear," said Rachel, "and do not come down till Friday. Then you can stop till Monday morning, and perhaps Joseph will be home by then, and he can come with you. He will not be able to keep away from Esther, and he has but a short time to remain in England. Nothing really ails me except a little weakness which I shall soon overcome. If Ruth is happy in Portsmouth let her remain there if she wishes. We are growing old, love, you and I, and we must not tie our children too closely to our sides. They will fly away as the young birds do, and make nests of their own. May their homes be as happy as ours has been--may their lives be as happy as you have made mine!"

In such-like tender converse the minutes flew by, and as the train steamed out of the station Rachel's face, with a bright smile upon it, was turned towards her husband.

On the road home Aaron telegraphed to Ruth in Portsmouth, addressing his telegram to Mr. Moss's house; he desired her to return to London to-day or to-morrow. He felt that he must speak to her with as little delay as possible respecting the disclosure which Mr. Dillworthy had made to him; it would be playing the coward's part, indeed, if he did not immediately ascertain the nature of her feelings for the Honourable Percy Storndale. Thus far the first step of his duty; what steps were to follow he had not yet determined upon.

Arriving at his house, he found Mr. Moss waiting to see him. Esther had left a letter for her father acquainting him with their departure for the seaside, and giving him their address in Bournemouth, which she was enabled to do because Aaron had made arrangements by telegraph for their reception in a Jewish house there. After a few words of explanation of the cause of Rachel and Esther leaving so suddenly, Aaron informed his friend that he had telegraphed to Ruth to come home at once. Mr. Moss started.

"You sent the telegram to my house?" he said.

"Certainly. I am sorry to break her visit, which she must have enjoyed, but there is a necessity for it. As my oldest friend you should not be kept in ignorance of this necessity, and we will agree that it is not to be spoken of outside ourselves without my consent."

Thereupon he related the part of his interview with Mr. Dillworthy that affected Ruth and the son of Lord Storndale.

"There is another matter," he said, "of great importance which was mentioned during the interview, and which we may speak of presently. You now know my reason for sending to Ruth to come home. I must learn the truth from her own lips."

"Strangely enough," said Mr. Moss, nervously, "I have come to say something about Ruth myself."

"Surely not in connection with this matter?" exclaimed Aaron.

"You must be the judge of that, Cohen. Did you notice whether Esther was looking well?"

"She looked tired. Dr. Roberts said she had passed a bad night, and that the change would do her good."

"A bad night. No wonder, poor child! I scarcely slept an hour with what is on my mind. You will be surprised at what I have to tell you. But first--Esther said nothing about Ruth?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You must not blame her; she acted by my directions, and her lips are sealed."

"Why should I blame her? She is a dear good child; I have implicit faith and confidence in her. You alarm me, Mr. Moss. Speak plainly, I beg of you."

"Yes, I will do so, but I would have liked to break it gradually. Cohen, Ruth is not in Portsmouth."

"Not in Portsmouth! Where, then?"

"If what she writes and my eyes are to be believed, she is in London, and has been there all the week, She remained with us two days, and then left, saying she was going to pay a visit to some other friends. We naturally thought, though we expected her to make a longer stay, that you were aware of it, and that the plan of her visit had been altered with your concurrence. Last night, as I passed through Regent Street, I saw a lady in a hansom in the company of a gentleman, and I could have sworn it was Ruth; but the cab was driving at a quick pace, and I thought I must have been deceived. I came on here to Esther, and the poor child was in deep

distress. She had received a letter from Ruth, which she gave me to read. I do not offer any excuse for taking the letter from her; she is but a child, and is quite unfit for a responsibility which, without her consent, was imposed upon her. Here is the letter; it explains itself."

Aaron read it with conflicting feelings. His first thought was that Ruth had taken her fate into her own hands. He had done his duty zealously by her in the past, whatever might be his duty in the present. If, as was his fervent hope, no dishonour to her was involved in her flight--for it was no less than flight, and desertion of the home in which she had been reared--if there had been a secret marriage, new contingencies of the future loomed dimly before him, contingencies in which the stern task it was his duty to perform was not so terrible in its import. The past could never be condoned, but in his consideration of the future one figure towered above all others, the figure of his wife. If for her the suffering could be made less--if the fact of Ruth taking her course without his prompting, even in defiance of the lessons he had endeavoured to inculcate, would mitigate the severity of the blow, was it not something to be grateful for? If, he argued mentally, she and the son of Lord Storndale were married, they had little to hope for from the Storndale family. Their dependence, then, rested upon him, and he resolved that he would not fail the rash couple. His hope of an honourable, though secret, marriage was based upon his knowledge of Ruth's character. She was not given to exaggerated sentiment, he had never known her to go into heroics, she possessed certain sterling qualities of strength and determination. Granted that she was led away by the glamour of wedding the son of a peer, he was convinced she would not so far forget herself as to bring shame upon herself and her connections. She was Christian born, and she had the right to marry a Christian; by her own unprompted act she had cut the Gordian knot. That the Honourable Percy Storndale had a double motive in pursuing her was likely enough; love, Aaron hoped, being one, the fact of her reputed father being a wealthy man the other. Well, he would fulfil the young man's expectations; there was nothing in the shape of worldly atonement which he was not ready and anxious to make.

In the midst of his musings a servant presented himself with a telegram and a card. The card bore the name of The Hon. Percy Storndale, the telegram was from Mrs. Moss in Portsmouth.

"Wait outside," Aaron said to the servant, who left the room.

The telegram was to the effect that Ruth was not in Portsmouth, and that Mrs. Moss, in her absence, had taken the liberty of reading the message, under the idea that it might contain something which required an immediate answer. "Is Ruth coming to us again?" Mrs. Moss asked.

Aaron passed the telegram and the card to Mr. Moss.

"Keep in the house," he said, "while I have an interview with this gentleman. Wait in the library, and tell the servant to show Mr. Storndale into this room."

In a few moments the young man was ushered in and Aaron motioned him to a seat.

It is a human failing to run into extremes. No man is quite so good or bad as he is represented to be by his admirers or detractors. In his anxiety to prejudice Aaron against Lord Storndale's son Mr. Dillworthy had done the young man an injustice. A scapegrace he was, without doubt, but he had been educated into his vices and extravagances--it may be said with truth carefully reared into them--and he was certainly no worse than hundreds of other men who are brought up with no definite aim in life, and are educated without any sensible and serious effort being made to impress them with life's responsibilities. He had, indeed, the advantage of many, for although he considered it perfectly excusable to get into debt with tradesmen and to borrow from moneylenders without an expectation of being able to pay either one or the other, he would not have descended so low as to pick a pocket or to cheat at cards. More of the pigeon than the gull, he looked always to his family to get him out of his scrapes; he believed it to be their duty; and it was upon him, not upon them, that injustice was inflicted when he was thrown entirely upon his own resources and he was given to understand that for the future he would have to settle his own liabilities.

He was fair-haired and blue-eyed, and passably good-looking; beyond this there was nothing remarkable in his appearance; but there was that air of good humour and careless ease about him which generally wins favour with women who do not look beneath the surface. Just now he was manifestly ill at ease, for he had never before been engaged upon a mission so awkward and embarrassing. That he was impressed by Aaron's dignified manner was evident; he had expected to meet a man of a different stamp. Each waited for the other to speak, and Aaron was not the first to break the silence.

"I have taken the liberty of visiting you upon a rather delicate matter," said the young gentleman, "and it is more difficult than I anticipated."

"Yes?" said Aaron, and said no more.

The monosyllable was uttered in the form of a question, and did not lessen the difficulties in the young man's way.

"Yes," he replied, and was at a loss how to continue; but again Aaron did not assist him.

"Upon my honour," he said at length, "I would not undertake to say whether I would rather be

in this room than out of it, or out of it than in it." He gave a weak laugh here, with a half idea that he had said something rather clever; but still he met with no encouragement from Aaron. "It is so difficult, you see," he added. "I do not suppose you know me."

"No," said Aaron; "I do not know you."

"I thought it possible that your daughter, Miss Cohen, you know, might have mentioned me to you."

"She has never done so."

"It was my fault entirely. I said, on no account; and naturally she gave in."

"Did she wish to mention you to me?"

"Oh yes; but I insisted. I don't exactly know why, but I did, and she gave in. I daresay I was a blockhead, but I hope you will find excuses for me."

"At present I can find none. We shall understand each other if you come to the point."

"I will try to do so, but it is not easy, I assure you Mr. Cohen, after the way I have behaved. Upon second thoughts I do not see, upon my honour I do not see, how you can be expected to find excuses for me. But it does happen sometimes that a fellow meets another fellow who helps a lame dog over the stile. I am the lame dog, you know."

"It may assist you," said Aaron, "if I ask you one question, and if you frankly answer it. Are you a married man?"

"Upon my soul, sir," exclaimed the Honourable Percy Storndale, "I cannot be sufficiently thankful to you. Yes, sir, I am a married man."

"Long married?"

"Four days, Mr. Cohen."

"Can you show me proof of it?"

"I thank you again, sir. But it wasn't my idea; it was my wife's. 'Take the marriage certificate with you,' she said. She has wonderful ideas."

"Let me see the certificate."

The young man instantly produced it, and Aaron, with a deep-drawn breath of relief, saw recorded there the marriage of Miss Ruth Cohen and the Honourable Percy Storndale.

"You married my--my daughter, I see," said Aaron, "in a registrar's office."

"I don't know how to apologise to you, sir," said the young man, as relieved by Aaron's calm attitude as Aaron was himself at this proof of an honourable union. "I can't conceive anything meaner; but what could I do? Ruth--Miss Cohen, you know--being a Jewess, could not well have been married in a church, and I, being a Christian, could not well have been married in a synagogue. It was a very delicate point; I am not acquainted with the law on the subject, but no fellow can deny that it was a delicate point. Then there was another difficulty. Bridesmaids, bridesmaids' presents, and general expenses, to say nothing of the publicity when the parties principally concerned wanted to get it over quietly and quickly. Ruth said you would never consent; I said my family would never consent; so what else was there for it? Pray forgive me if I am expressing myself clumsily."

"Your family did not encourage the match?"

"Dead against it; from the first dead against it. Bullied and threatened me. 'What!' they cried, 'marry a Jewess!' 'As good as any Christian,' I retorted. But did you ever know a Storndale listen to reason, Mr. Cohen?"

"You are a Storndale," said Aaron, quietly.

"Had me there," chuckled the young man. "'Gad, sir, you had me there. Well, sir, that is how it stands, and if you show me the door I'll not say I don't deserve it."

"I will not show you the door, but it is not correct to say that is how it stands, as if there were nothing more to explain. Mr. Storndale, if the lady you have married were a Christian, would your family have objected?" The young man laughed in a weak awkward way. "Answer me frankly, this and other questions it is my duty to put."

"My family would not have objected," said the Honourable Percy Storndale, "if there had been settlements. You see, sir, we are not exactly rolling in money, and I am a younger son. No expectations, sir. A poor gentleman."

"An imprudent marriage, Mr. Storndale."

"No denying it, sir; and it has only come home to me the last day or two. Marriage in such circumstances pulls a fellow up, you see, makes him reflect, you know. My wife's an angel, and that makes it cut deeper. A married fellow thinks of things. As a bachelor I never thought of to-morrow, I give you my word on it. So long as I had a five-pound note in my pocket I was happy. To-morrow! Hang to-morrow! That was the way of it. I've only just woke up to the fact that there is a to-morrow."

"Was it a love match, Mr. Storndale?"

"On both sides, sir. Without vanity--and I don't deny I've got my share of that--I may speak for her as well as for myself."

"From the first, a love match, Mr. Storndale? Did it never occur to you that I was a rich man?"

"You drive me hard, sir, but I'm not going to play fast and loose with you. 'Be prepared, Percy,' Ruth says to me. 'My father is a wise as well as a just and kind man, and I don't know whether he will ever forgive me; but you will make a sad mistake if you don't speak the honest truth to him.' The truth it shall be, as I am a gentleman. I did think of Ruth's father being a rich man, and seeing us through it. But after a little while I got so over head and heels that I thought only of her. I give you my word, sir, I never had the feelings for any woman that I have for Ruth, and that, I think, is why I'm rather scared when I think of to-morrow. If I hadn't been afraid of losing her I might have come straight to you before we went to the registrar, but I didn't care to run the risk. What would you do, sir, for a woman you loved?"

"Everything--anything."

"You would stake everything against nothing, with a certainty of losing, rather than give her up?"

"I would make any earthly sacrifice for her."

"Well, sir, you know how I feel. I don't set myself up as a good man; I've done foolish things, and I dare say shall do more foolish things, but not half nor quarter as many with a clever woman by my side to keep me straight. What some of us want, sir, is ballast; I never had it till now, and even now perhaps it's of no use to me. Until a week ago I had to think for one; now I have to think for two. But thinking won't help me through, I'm afraid."

Never before had the Honourable Percy Storndale expressed himself in so manly a fashion; it was as though contact with Aaron were bringing out his best qualities.

"Was it your intention, Mr. Storndale, to come to me so soon after your marriage?"

"I had no settled intention when to come, sir, but I have been forced to it sooner than I expected."

"What has forced you to it?"

"Writs. I give you my word they are flying about, and I am afraid I shall have to fly too. When needs must, you know, sir."

"Are you heavily in debt?"

"To the tune of three thousand, sir."

"When a question of this kind is asked, the answer is generally below the mark."

"True enough, sir, but I am pretty close to it this time. Ruth's an angel, but she's a sensible woman as well. She made me put everything down."

"If I settle the claims against you"--the young man looked up with a flush on his face--"you will get into debt again."

"I'll try not to, sir."

"Honestly, Mr. Storndale?"

"Honestly, Mr. Cohen. Ruth will keep me straight."

"Leave me your address. I will come and see you to-night at eight o'clock. Make out a clear and truthful list of your debts; omit nothing. Meanwhile----"

He wrote a cheque, and handed it to the young man, who received it in astonishment, which deepened when he saw the amount for which it was drawn. He was in no way prepared for such liberality and such a reception as he had met with.

"I don't know how to thank you, sir."

"Take care of Ruth. Be kind and considerate to her."

"I will do my best, sir."

He shook hands gratefully with Aaron, and with a light heart went to gladden his young wife with the good news.

CHAPTER XL.

A DUTY PERFORMED.

Before Mr. Moss rejoined him, Aaron had repented of his promise to call and see the young couple in the evening. This vacillation was a proof of the effect recent events had had upon his mind; it was really unbalanced; the prompt decision of all matters, whether great or small, which presented themselves for consideration, seemed to have deserted him. He felt that he could not depend upon himself in the promised interview with Ruth, and that he might precipitate a discovery, the proper time for which, he believed, had not yet arrived. That it would have to be made eventually was certain; truth and justice demanded it, and the claim should be met, but not to-day, not until other plans with respect to his future were settled. For there had already grown in his mind a conviction that he was not worthy of the position he held among his co-religionists, that it was his duty to retire into obscurity, and not presume to teach what should be done in important issues where he himself had so signally failed. He mentally asked why had he not recognised this earlier; and the answer that trod upon the heels of the question brought a pitiful smile of self-despisal to his lips. He had been living deliberately in an atmosphere of deceit, trusting to chance to avoid detection and exposure. He could lay blame upon no other shoulders than his own; he, and he alone, was responsible for the consequences of his acts. Well, he would not shrink from them, he would accept them humbly, and rest his hopes in the mercy of God. If, when the hour arrived for open confession--and arrive it must before many weeks were past--he could still retain the love of his wife, if she would forgive him for the deception he had practised, he would be content, he might even be happy again, fallen as he would be from his high estate. Meanwhile there lay upon him the obligation of lifting Ruth and her husband from poverty, of placing them in an honourable and independent position, and this task he would ask his friend Mr. Moss to undertake for him.

"All is explained," he said, when that gentleman re-entered the room. "Ruth has done what cannot be undone. She and Mr. Storndale are married."

"Married!" exclaimed Mr. Moss. He was startled at the news, but no less startled at the calm voice in which it was communicated to him. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Accept it," replied Aaron; "there is no alternative."

"It is an outrage. He should be made to suffer for it."

"He must not be made to suffer for it, nor must Ruth. Apart from the personal consideration of the matter so far as it affects myself, and from another consideration which doubtless is in your mind, Mr. Storndale has acted as honourably as we could expect from one in his position. There has been concealment and deception, but it is not for me to cast a stone against him. The young man is in difficulties, and I have resolved to clear him from them, and to provide for Ruth's future. They will expect to see me to-night; but I cannot trust myself. I wish you to undertake the task for me, and to carry the whole matter through. Mr. Moss, all through my life you have been my sincere friend, and I value your friendship; you will not fail me now?"

"No, Cohen, no; I will do whatever you wish me to do; but it is hardly what I expected of you."

"You are surprised that I do not show anger at this marriage, that I do not express resentment against Mr. Storndale?"

"I am."

"Before long," said Aaron, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder, "you will understand why I am so calm. I can trust you, and when I confess that there was in my life an hour when temptation assailed me and I fell before it, I feel that my confidence will be respected until the time arrives when all the world will know what is hidden in my breast, what has been hidden for the last twenty years."

"For the last twenty years! Cohen, that takes us back to the old Gosport days!"

"It does. But ask me no questions now, for I am not prepared to answer them. Great changes

are coming in my life, and I must arm myself to meet them. If only Rachel will forgive!"

He covered his eyes with his hand, and turned away.

"Cohen," said Mr. Moss presently, "I see that you are unstrung, that you are suffering. You are doing yourself an injustice; I am sure of it, I am sure of it. I do not pretend to understand what it is that distresses you, but I would like to say that you may depend upon me in any difficulty. You may turn against yourself, but you are not going to turn an old friend like me against you."

Aaron pressed Mr. Moss's hand, and then explained the task he wished performed. Mr. Moss was to call upon Ruth and her husband, and obtain from them an honest and faithful account of their position. This done, he was to pay every shilling the young man owed; after which a settlement of a thousand pounds a year was to be made upon Ruth as a marriage portion, the money to be absolutely at her own disposal.

"It is not a great deal," said Aaron, "for a gentleman, the son of a peer, to live upon; but his family in a little while, when they learn the truth about Ruth"--he paused, and Mr. Moss nodded gravely; a strange suspicion was beginning to haunt him--"may be disposed to forgive him, and through their influence he may obtain a lucrative appointment. From the way in which he spoke I am disposed to think that he may turn over a new leaf, and that an honourable future may lie before him and Ruth. Give her my love, and say that circumstances render it impossible for me to see her for a few days, and that when we meet I shall have something of great importance to disclose to her. Be patient with me, Mr. Moss. My words point to a mystery which will soon be public property. What you are about to do for me can scarcely be finished before the end of the week, but I cannot rest until it is finished. My own affairs will entirely occupy me, and I must run down to Bournemouth to see Rachel."

"I will not waste a moment," said Mr. Moss. "How about the money necessary for the settlement and the payment of Mr. Storndale's debts? Have you calculated how much it will cost you? A large sum, Cohen."

"It will be forthcoming; the means will be placed in your hands to-morrow. Do not return here tonight. Come and breakfast with me at nine in the morning."

Aaron sat up till long past midnight, making calculations, and arranging his affairs. He was quite resolved to retire from public life, and altogether from business; and to effect this there was much to do. He had uncompleted contracts in hand which he would transfer to employers of whose methods he approved, and he had just obtained another which a dozen contractors would be eager to take off his hands. He thought of Mr. Poynter, and shook his head. To such a man he could not entrust any of his responsibilities. Then he devoted himself to an examination of his private financial position.

After providing for Ruth he calculated that he could realise a sum of about ninety thousand pounds, in addition to which there were his house and furniture, which would realise another ten thousand. One third of this would be sufficient to provide for Ruth and her husband, one third should be divided among the Jewish charities, and one third should be invested for himself and Rachel. This would produce an income of between eight and nine hundred pounds, amply sufficient for the maintenance of a comfortable home either in London or the country.

"Rachel will be content," he thought; "and the years that are left to us shall be passed in peace, away from the turmoil and fever of life. If she will but forgive me--if she will but forgive!"

All depended upon that.

He held offices of honour in the synagogue which he would immediately resign; there and then he wrote his letters of resignation. There had been a time when he was called upon to support a movement in respect of these honourable offices. A man who had grown rich by usury and fraud had succeeded in getting himself nominated for a high position in the synagogue, and this had aroused the displeasure of the more respectable members of the community, who had enlisted Aaron on their side. His all-powerful influence had settled the question, and the usurer was taught a salutary lesson. From that time a strict watch was kept upon these dignities, which were conferred upon none whose past lives would not bear strict scrutiny. Aaron thought of this as he drew forth the address upon modern Judaism he had undertaken to deliver, hoping thereby to counteract the loose views of religious obligations which threatened to sap the foundations of the old faith. He read the powerful arguments he had written to this end, and sighed as he read.

"Not for me the task," he murmured. "Not for me. I am not worthy. It is for me to learn, not to teach."

He tore the manuscript and burned it; he had forfeited the right to show his brethren the path of duty.

At length he came to the end of his labours. Before he retired to rest he prayed long and fervently, and offered up supplications for forgiveness.

At nine o'clock in the morning Mr. Moss presented himself, and reported what he had done.

"Everything is in such straight order," he said, "that the whole business can be finished to-morrow."

"It will be a great weight off my mind," said Aaron, "when all the papers are signed. I have letters from Rachel and Esther." He passed the young girl's letter to Mr. Moss. "She says there is no change in Rachel, but that she thinks the air and change of scene are doing her good. If you write to Esther do not hint at any impending trouble, and do not mention Ruth's name, lest Rachel should suspect that something was wrong. I ought to tell you, Mr. Moss, that I have resolved to retire into private life; I shall be much happier, and I am sure Rachel will be. It is a sudden resolution, and I daresay my friends will be surprised; but I am fixed, nothing can induce me to change my mind."

"And your contracts, Cohen?" asked Mr. Moss, who was sufficiently familiar with Aaron's character to know that remonstrance at present would be thrown away.

"I shall transfer them. My earnest wish is that I shall be forgotten, and allowed to live in peace. I am growing old; let my place, which I unworthily hold, be occupied by a better man."

"That is hardly likely to come to pass," said Mr. Moss, gravely. "You are not old; you are in the prime of life, with very many years of usefulness before you. But I will not argue with you; when you have recovered from your depression, when Rachel is well again, you will think better of it. We need you; no other man can fill your place, and you will not be allowed to retire without remonstrance. But we will wait till Sunday, when you are to deliver your address upon 'Judaism, its Duties and Obligations.' After it is delivered it will be printed in pamphlet form, will it not?"

"No; it will be neither delivered nor printed."

"Cohen!" exclaimed Mr. Moss, amazed at this statement.

"It is as I say, Mr. Moss," said Aaron, firmly.

"But it is expected; it is looked forward to, and the best results are anticipated from it. You will not go from your word?"

"I must. The address is destroyed. I must bear whatever is said of me; I accept it as part of my punishment."

"Of your punishment! I do not understand you."

"You will by-and-by. Mr. Moss, the man who presumes to set down laws of right and wrong should be above reproach. Can a thief preach honesty? Can a liar lift his voice in praise of truth?"

"These are strange utterances, Cohen, from your lips."

"There is a sad foundation for them. To know yourself--that is the height of human wisdom; and I have learned too late. Pray do not continue the subject; you stand in the dark, I in the light."

"Well, well," said Mr. Moss, with a sigh, "we will speak of this another time. But I do not see what you can have to reproach yourself with."

"Let every man search his own heart," replied Aaron, and his voice was very mournful. "He will find the answer there. And now we will waste no more time in idle conversation. We must go to the lawyers and the bank. Have you a list of Mr. Storndale's debts? Ah, thank you." He looked at the total, and drew a cheque for the amount. "The payment of these claims will keep you busy during the day. I will give instructions to the lawyers to prepare the deed of settlement, and tomorrow it can be signed. You will be a trustee; I will call upon a gentleman who will be the other. I shall spend to-night at Bournemouth, and will come back by an early train in the morning."

"Will you not see Ruth before you leave?" asked Mr. Moss.

"No, not till everything is finished. How is she?"

"Well and happy, and overjoyed that you are not angry with her. Between ourselves, Cohen, it is not what she expected." Under his breath he added, "Nor what I expected, either."

"She has all the more reason for contentment," said Aaron. "I wish her to be happy."

They had a busy time with lawyers, stockbrokers, bank managers, and creditors, and Aaron just managed to catch the two-twenty train for Bournemouth. He passed a quiet evening with Rachel and Esther, and answered such questions put by his wife concerning Ruth in a manner which seemed to satisfy her, for she did not press him upon the subject. With Esther he had a private conversation, and cautioned her to preserve silence as to the letter she had received. On the following morning he took train for London, and arriving before noon, found everything prepared for a final settlement of his plans for Ruth's worldly future. When the deeds were signed, and the consols bought and deposited in the Bank of England, Aaron breathed more freely. He had made some small atonement to Ruth for the deception of which he had been guilty.

"We have had no honeymoon trip," said the Honourable Percy Storndale to him, "and I am thinking of taking Ruth to the Continent tomorrow."

"Yes," said Aaron, absently.

"But," added Mr. Storndale, "the trip will have no pleasure for her if she does not see you before we go."

"I will come with you now," said Aaron.

They met and parted without any warm expression of affection. Such a demonstration from Ruth towards one whom she believed to be her father, but for whom she had never entertained a strong love, would have been a new feature in her character, and grateful as she was for his generosity she was held back by the feeling that she had given him a poor return for his life-long kindness towards her, and by her fear that he was quietly angry with her; while Aaron was held back by the consciousness of his wrong-doing. And so the young couple went forth to commence their new life, and the secret of Ruth's birth was still unrevealed.

CHAPTER XLI.

THERE IS A PROVIDENCE THAT SHAPES OUR ENDS.

Two weeks had passed away. Joseph had come and gone. In the company of Esther and his parents he had spent three sad and happy days in Bournemouth, happy because he was in the society of those he loved, sad because he was so soon to part from them. Rachel's health was improved, and it touched Aaron deeply to observe how she clung to her son and Esther, as though she were seeking in them a recompense for what she was losing in Ruth. He exerted himself to be bright and cheerful, and flattered himself that he was succeeding; but, indeed, during these days he was not the only one who was playing a part. Rachel was also exerting herself to hide the cloud which was hanging over her spirits because of the prolonged absence of Ruth, as to whom both she and Aaron seemed now to have entered into a loving conspiracy of silence.

With Joseph Aaron was compelled to be more open, and to the young man and his affianced he imparted the news of Ruth's secret marriage.

"I have not yet broken it to your dear mother," said Aaron, "in consequence of the state of her health. But she is growing stronger every day, and when you are gone I will break it to her gently." He turned to Esther, and said, "You stand now in Ruth's place, and in you I also have gained a daughter. Do not let this news distress you. Be true to each other, be steadfast to the old faith, and all will be well. And be careful to say nothing to the dear mother. Leave that task to me."

The carrying out of his intention to retire into private life, and to entirely give up the important business transactions in which he had been engaged for so many years, rendered it necessary that he should be in London the greater part of these two weeks; and Mr. Moss, who was endeavouring to get his own affairs in order, was his constant companion during this time. The private distribution of so large a sum of money as Aaron had set apart for charity was no easy matter, and the officers of the institutions which were the richer for his benevolence used much persuasion to induce him to make his benefactions public; but on this point he was resolved. The other important matter which occupied him was the transference of his existing contracts. His great rival, Mr. Poynter, was especially anxious to obtain a share of this business, and with that object in view he called upon Aaron. But the two men could not agree; it was not a question of terms, but a question as to certain stipulations with respect to wages and hours of labour which Aaron insisted upon.

"Surely," protested Mr. Poynter, "you do not arrogate the right to dictate to other employers what they shall pay their workmen?"

"Not at all," Aaron replied, "where I am not concerned. But these contracts are mine; numbers of the workmen have been in my employ for years, and I must protect them."

"Protect them!" exclaimed Mr. Poynter, angrily. "Against me!"

"Against all," said Aaron, firmly, "who would pay workmen less than a fair living wage, and would put too severe a strain upon bone and muscle."

"Bone and muscle!" cried Mr. Poynter. "Bone and fiddlesticks! You are talking common cant, Mr. Cohen."

The interview grew stormy, and did not last much longer. When Mr. Poynter departed it was with a burning anger against Aaron, and with a burning desire for revenge. From that moment he looked about for the means of compassing this revenge. "If I could only bring him down!" he thought, "if I could only bring him down!"

At the end of the fortnight Aaron was in London, his labours over, and at this time his own fortune amounted to something over forty-five thousand pounds, a larger sum than he had anticipated would be left to him.

It must be mentioned that Ruth and her husband had just returned to London, as he was informed by letter, their honeymoon trip having come suddenly to an end in consequence of Ruth's indisposition It was she who wrote to him, and she was so earnest in the expression of her wish that he would come and see her, that he had sent her a telegram saying that he would call at eight or nine o'clock, by which time he expected to be free. He would have called earlier, but he had an appointment with Mr. Moss at six, his intention being to make to his old friend a full disclosure of his secret respecting Ruth. On the following day Rachel and Esther were coming back to London, as Rachel did not wish to remain longer in Bournemouth.

Aaron was waiting now in his study for Mr. Moss. The cares and sorrows of the past few months had left their mark upon him. The grey hairs had multiplied fast, the lines in his face had deepened, and in the kind eyes and benevolent countenance there was a touch of childlike pathos, as though the strong man had suddenly grown weak, and was mutely appealing for mercy.

Mr. Moss's face was flushed with excitement as he entered the room with an evening paper in his hand.

"Have you heard the rumour, Cohen?" he asked, excitedly.

"What rumour?" inquired Aaron, rising to meet his friend.

"About your bank, the Colonial Alliance?"

"No, I have heard nothing. I have not been out of the house since the morning."

"It came on me like a thunderclap, but it cannot be true."

"What cannot be true, Mr. Moss?" Aaron spoke quite calmly.

"Well, there's nothing definite, but you know there has been something like a panic in the City."

"I am aware of it, but it cannot affect me. I have no investments now, with the solitary exception of my bank shares. All my affairs are settled, and what is left of my fortune is in the bank until I decide how to invest it."

Mr. Moss groaned "I wish you had it safely tied up in consols. Is all your money there?"

"Every shilling. The only investments I have not realised are the shares I hold in the bank."

"That makes it all the worse. The shareholders are liable to the depositors?"

"Certainly--to the extent of the unpaid portion of their shares. Perhaps beyond that--I am not quite sure."

The flush had died out of Mr. Moss's face, which was now white with apprehension. "They're calling it out in the streets; but here's the paper."

He pointed to a paragraph, which stated that one of the largest banks in the City had closed its doors half an hour before its time, and that the panic had in consequence reached an alarming height.

"There is no name mentioned, Mr. Moss."

"No, Cohen, no; but I passed through the City on my way here, and the name of the bank was on every one's lips. If your bank stops payment tomorrow how will you stand?"

"If it stops payment for sufficient cause," said Aaron, in a steady voice, "I shall be a ruined man."

"Good heavens! And you can speak of it so calmly!"

"Why not? To work myself into a frenzy will not help me. There are worse misfortunes."

"I cannot imagine them, Cohen. Ruined? Absolutely ruined?"

"Absolutely ruined," answered Aaron, with a smile.

"And it is only yesterday that you were----" He could not continue, and Aaron took up his words.

"It is only yesterday that I was on the top of the tree. A dangerous height, Mr. Moss, but I must bear the fall. If, when they climb the ladder of fortune, men would but be careful to make the lower rungs secure! But prosperity makes them reckless. Do not look so mournful. Happiness is as easily found in poverty as in riches."

"It may be, after all, a false alarm," groaned Mr. Moss.

"Let us hope so; though there is no smoke without a fire. We will wait till to-morrow."

"Will you not come with me to the City now to ascertain whether it is true or false?"

"No. It will only trouble me, and it will not affect the result. I will wait till to-morrow."

So marked was the contrast between his cheerful and Mr. Moss's despondent mood that it really seemed as if it were his friend's fortune that was imperilled instead of his own. He was standing by the door, and hearing a knock he opened it.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the servant, "but this gentleman is below, and wants to see Mr. Moss."

Aaron took the card without looking at it, and handed it to Mr. Moss, who exclaimed,--

"Dr. Spenlove! What can he want here?"

"Show the gentleman up," said Aaron to the servant, after a moment's consideration.

"Had I not better see him alone?" asked Mr. Moss.

"If you have no objection," replied Aaron, "I should prefer that you receive him here in my presence."

They both seemed to scent a coming danger, but Aaron appeared to hail it gladly, while Mr. Moss would rather have avoided it.

"A thousand apologies," said Dr. Spenlove to Aaron upon his entrance, "for intruding upon you; but hearing that Mr. Moss had come to your house I took the liberty of following him. My errand is an urgent one."

"I am happy to see you, Dr. Spenlove," Aaron responded; "if your business with Mr. Moss is not quite private you can speak freely before me."

"I think," said Dr. Spenlove, half hesitating, "that it is quite private."

"I have a distinct reason," continued Aaron, as though Dr. Spenlove had not spoken, "for making the suggestion; it is more than likely that I have a distinct connection with your business, and this must be my excuse for wishing to be present. If it is of an incident in the past you wish to speak, when you and Mr. Moss were acquainted in Portsmouth----"

"How singular that you should have guessed it!" exclaimed Dr. Spenlove. "It is such an incident that brings me here."

"The time was winter," pursued Aaron, "the season an inclement one. I remember it well. For some days the snow had been falling----"

"Yes, yes. It was a terrible season for the poor."

"For one especially, a lady driven into misfortune, and who had no friend but a stern and honourable gentleman who would only lift her from the depths into which she had fallen on the condition that she submitted to a cruel sacrifice. His demand was that she should give her infant into the care of strangers, and that only in the event of his death should she be free to seek to know its fate. Is that the incident, Dr. Spenlove?"

"It is. I see you know all, and with Mr. Moss's consent I will speak openly." Mr. Moss looked at Aaron, who nodded, and Dr. Spenlove continued. "There is no need to recall all the particulars of that bitter night when you so kindly assisted me in the search for the unhappy mother and her child."

"None at all," said Mr. Moss; "they are very vivid in my memory."

"And in mine. Your kindness has not been forgotten either by me or by the lady whose life, and whose child's life, were saved by you. He shakes his head in deprecation, Mr. Cohen, but what I say is true. Had he not, out of the kindness of his heart, accompanied me, these two hapless human beings would have perished in the snow. I had a motive to serve; he had none. On the night we parted in Portsmouth, Mr. Moss, you were on the point of seeking a home for the poor

babe, for whom"--he turned to Aaron--"a liberal provision was made."

"I am acquainted with every detail of the strange story," said Aaron. "I was residing in Gosport at the time."

Dr. Spenlove gave him a startled look. "It was in Gosport he hoped to find this home, with a friend of whom he spoke in the highest terms. The commission entrusted to me by Mr. Gordon--I perceive you are familiar with the name--ended on that night, and what remained to be done was in the hands of Mr. Moss and Mr. Gordon's lawyers. The following morning I came to London, where I have resided ever since. From that day until two or three weeks ago Mr. Moss and I have not met. It was here in your house, Mr. Cohen, that, seeing him for the first time after so long an interval, I made inquiries concerning the infant entrusted to him. He informed me that she died very shortly, as I understood, after she entered her new home. I was not surprised to hear it; the exposure on that bitter night was sufficiently severe to kill a child much older. In order that my visit to Mr. Moss to-night may be properly understood I will relate in a few words the subsequent history of the mother. She married Mr. Gordon, and accompanied him to Australia, where she has resided for twenty years. She has had no children by him, and is now a widow, and very wealthy. Unknown to Mr. Gordon she, in her last interview with me, entrusted to me a small iron casket--it was one I gave her, and I can identify it--in which she deposited some articles, of the nature of which I was ignorant. She entreated me to take steps that this box should be delivered to the people who received her child into their home, and to obtain from them a promise that if the child lived till she was twenty-one years of age it was to be handed over to her, or, in the event of her child dying or of herself claiming the box at any future time, to be handed over to her. I informed Mr. Moss of the mother's desire, and he promised that it should be attended to. I have looked over some old papers, and I find that, had the child lived, she would be twenty-one in the course of a couple of months. But the child is dead, and the mother has appealed to me to obtain the box which she delivered into my charge."

"The mother has appealed to you!" exclaimed Aaron. "In person?"

"In person," replied Dr. Spenlove. "She has returned to England, and is at this moment awaiting me in my carriage below. It is not the only appeal she has made to me. She is overwhelmed with grief at the news of her child's death, and I have the sincerest pity for her. She desires to know where her child is buried. Mr. Gordon's lawyers, it appears, were so bound to secrecy by their client that they do not feel warranted in giving her any information or assistance. She has communicated with another firm of lawyers in London, who are unable to assist her. As a last resource she has come to me to entreat my aid, which, in the circumstances, I cannot refuse to give her. My errand is now fully explained. Mr. Moss, will you see the poor lady, and give her the information she has a right to demand?"

"I will reply for my friend," said Aaron. "Dr. Spenlove, I was the person to whose care the child was entrusted. The casket is in this house, and it is for me to satisfy her. Will you step down and ask her to come up, or shall I send a servant to her?"

"It will be best for me to go," said Dr. Spenlove. "How strangely things turn out! It is fortunate that I came here to seek Mr. Moss."

"I must speak to Mrs. Gordon alone, without witnesses," said Aaron. "You and Mr. Moss will not mind waiting in the adjoining room for a few minutes? The poet's words are true: 'There is a Providence that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will.' The mother may have cause to bless this night."

He bent his head humbly and solemnly as Dr. Spenlove and Mr. Moss left the room together.

CHAPTER XLII.

A MOTHER'S JOY.

For the first time in their lives these two beings, whose fates were so strangely linked together, faced each other--the mother who believed her child to be dead, the father who had brought up that child in ignorance of her birthright. It was a solemn moment, as trying to the man who had erred as to the woman who had fallen. To him the truth was as clear as though it were proclaimed with a tongue of fire, to her it had yet to be revealed. How feeble was the human act when brought into juxtaposition with destiny's decree!

Aaron's sin had been ever before him; the handwriting had been ever on the wall. Scarcely for

one day during the last twenty years had the voice of conscience been stilled, and it had been part of his punishment that the inherited instincts of the child had worked inexorably against all his efforts; her silent resistance to the lessons he would have inculcated had been too powerful for him; and in the end she had turned resolutely from the path into which, with inward reproaches, he had endeavoured to lead her, and had obeyed the promptings of her nature in mapping out her own future.

Keen as were Aaron's sufferings, he experienced a sense of relief that the bolt had fallen, and that the hour of retribution had arrived; the agony of suspense had been almost unbearable, and he accepted with mournful resignation the decree which ordained that he should pass judgment upon himself.

A difficult task lay before him; the revelation he had to make must be made with tact and delicacy, in consideration for the mother's feelings. Joy, as well as sorrow, has its fears.

Forgetful for the moment of his own domestic grief, a sympathetic pity for the bereaved woman stirred Aaron's heart. Her tribulation was expressed in her face, which was pale with woe; her eyes were suffused with tears; her limbs trembled as she sank into the chair which he placed for her. It was not he alone who was experiencing the tortures of remorse.

Mrs. Gordon was in mourning, and Aaron knew it was as much for her child as for her husband. Except that time had told its tale there was little change in her, and few persons who had known her in her springtime would have failed to recognise her in her middle age. Her union with Mr. Gordon had not been entirely unhappy; he had performed his duty towards her, as she had done towards him, and though he had a suspicion that through all the long years she never lost sight of her secret sorrow, he made no reference to it, and she, on her part, did not intrude it upon him. Only on his deathbed had he spoken of her child, and had given her an imperfect clue, which she was now following up. Bitter was the knowledge she had gained. Her child was dead. Free, and in possession of great wealth, she was alone, without a tie in the world. All her bright dreams had faded. She had indulged the hope that her child still lived, and as she travelled back to England had raised up mental pictures of her daughter which filled her with joy. The presumption was that the young girl was living in a poor home, and was perhaps working for a livelihood. To lift her from poverty to wealth, to make a lady of her, to load her with gifts, to educate her for the new and higher station in life in which she was now to move, to love and caress her, to travel with her through the pleasure grounds of Europe--these were the dreams in which she had indulged. Innumerable were the pictures she had raised on her voyage home of the joy and delight of her daughter, and of the happy days in store for them. The information she received from Dr. Spenlove had killed these hopes, and her yearning desire now was to visit the grave of the babe she had deserted, and to weep over it tears of bitter repentance. It was not so much to reclaim the iron box containing the clue to a shameful episode in her youthful life, as to learn where her babe was buried, that she wished to learn into whose care her child had been given. There was a time when she nursed a fierce desire for revenge upon the man who had betrayed her, but this desire had burnt itself away, and she would be content that the melancholy memories of the past should be buried in oblivion. No good result would accrue from rekindling the smouldering ashes of an experience so mournful. She had lived down the shame; no word of reproach had been uttered against her; let the dead past bury its dead.

For a few moments there was silence between her and Aaron, and she was the first to speak.

"Dr. Spenlove has told me all," she said.

"He has told you what he knows," said Aaron, "but you have something more to hear. Mrs. Gordon, it was I who undertook the charge of your child. Mr. Moss brought her to me in Gosport, and delivered to me also the casket which you entrusted to Dr. Spenlove. I return it to you now, in the same condition as it was handed to me. You will oblige me by convincing yourself that it has not been tampered with."

She unlocked the box with a key she carried in her purse, and taking from it the letters she had deposited therein, glanced over them with a bitter smile, then replaced them in their hiding-place, and relocked the casket.

"There was nothing else in it?" asked Aaron.

"Nothing else," she replied; "it is as I delivered it to Dr. Spenlove. Tell me about my child. Did she live long? Was she buried in Gosport? You will tell me the truth; you will conceal nothing from me?"

"I will tell you the truth; I will conceal nothing from you; but what I have to say must be said in my own way. Prepare yourself for a strange story, but have no fear. You are the first person to whom it will be revealed. When Mr. Moss left your child with me there were two babes in my house of the same age, and we were in deep poverty and distress. My wife--my beloved wife lay at the point of death"--he covered his eyes with his hands. "Bear with me; these recollections overcome me." Presently he resumed. "But a short time before her confinement she had been stricken with blindness. Her own child, whose face she had never seen, lay quiet and still in her arms. The doctor who attended her feared the worst, and said that her life depended upon the life of her babe. If our child died on the morrow the mother would die; if our child lived, the

mother would live. Temptation assailed me, and to save the life of my beloved wife I yielded to it. How can I expect you to forgive me for what I did in the agony of my heart?"

Again he paused, and tears gushed from his eyes. Mrs. Gordon sank back in her chair; there was not a vestige of colour in her face.

"My God! My God!" she murmured. "Have I not suffered enough?"

The words recalled him to himself. He begged her to have courage, to be strong; there was no new suffering in store for her, he said; what he had to relate would bring joy into her life. He gave her wine, and when she had recovered he proceeded with his story, and gradually and tenderly revealed to her the truth. As he proceeded her face shone with incredulous joy, her heart beat tumultuously with the prospect of this unexpected happiness; and when his story was finished, and he sat before her with bowed head, there was a long, long silence in the room. He dared utter no further words; in silent dread he waited for his condemnation.

He felt a hand upon his knee, and looking down he saw her kneeling at his feet. She was transfigured; the spirit of youth shone in her countenance, and she took his hand, and kissed it again and again, bedewing it with happy tears. He gazed at her in wonder. He had expected revilings, and she was all tenderness.

"Is it true?" she murmured. "Oh! is it true? At such a time as this you would not deceive me!"

"Heaven forbid!" he answered. "What I have related is the solemn truth."

"And my child lives?"

"She lives."

"God in heaven bless you! She lives--my daughter lives!"

"And you do not blame me--you do not reproach me?"

"I shall bless you to my dying day! Oh, my heart, my heart! It will burst with happiness!"

He entreated her to be composed, and in a little while she was calmer. Then for the first time he wrested himself from the environment of his own selfish sorrows; he put himself in her place, and understood the sacred joy which animated her. She was all eagerness to see her child, but Aaron bade her restrain her impatience; he had much more to relate which it was necessary she should hear.

"But I must see her to-night!" she cried.

"You shall see her to-night. I will take you to her."

She was fain to be satisfied with this assurance, but she would not be content till she saw a portrait of Ruth. He gave her a cabinet photograph, and she gazed at it longingly, yearningly.

"She is beautiful, beautiful!"

"Yes, she is a beautiful girl," said Aaron; and then proceeded with the story, saying nothing, however, of what he had done for the young couple. At first she was grieved to hear that Ruth was married, but she found some consolation in the reflection that she had married into an honourable family. When Aaron related the particulars of the lawyer's visit to him, commissioned by Lord Storndale because of his stern objection to his son marrying a Jewess, she exclaimed,--

"But Ruth is not a Jewess!" and was appalled by the thought that her daughter was not born in wedlock. A child of shame! How would she be received? It was her turn now to fear, and Aaron, whose native shrewdness had returned to him, divined her fear; but it was not for him to moot the subject.

"My child," she said, with hot blushes on her face, "believes herself to be your daughter?"

"She does. It was my intention to undeceive her to-night."

"You know my story?"

"It was imparted to me," he replied, with averted head, "when I was asked to receive your child."

"Who knows the truth," she asked, trembling and hesitating, "about me?"

"I, Mr. Moss, Dr. Spenlove, and your husband's lawyers."

"No other persons?"

"No other persons." He took her hand. "Dear lady, from my heart I pity and sympathise with you. If I can assist you in any way----"

"You can--you can!" she cried. "For God's sake do not destroy the happiness that may be mine!"

"As Heaven is my judge, no word shall pass my lips. Be comforted, be comforted. The lawyers' lips are sealed, as you have already learned, and I will answer for Mr. Moss and Dr. Spenlove. Say to her and to her husband's family what you will--it will be justified. Your secret is safe."

She thanked him humbly and gratefully; it was she who was abashed; it was she who had to implore for mercy; and it was due to his wisdom that her aching heart was eased.

"If I can repay you--if I can repay you!" she murmured.

"You can repay me by saying you forgive me for the sin I committed."

"Your sin!" she cried, in amazement. "You, who have brought up my child in virtue and honour! At my door lies the sin, not at yours."

"You forget," he groaned; "I have sinned against my wife, whom I love with a love dearer than life itself, and she has yet to receive the confession I have made to you. It was my love for her that led me into the error."

"An error," said Mrs. Gordon, in tender accents, "that has saved a daughter from regarding her mother with abhorrence. Dear friend, God sees and judges, and surely He will approve what you have done. A grateful mother blesses you!"

"Remain here," said Aaron. "I will speak to my friends and yours, and then I will conduct you to your daughter."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A PANIC IN THE CITY.

On the following morning Aaron was up earlier than usual, and in the daily papers he read the confirmation of the intelligence which Mr. Moss had imparted to him. The panic on the Stock Exchange had grown to fever heat, and fortunes were already being won and lost. The bank in which his money was deposited, and in which he held a large number of shares, was tottering, and he knew that he was ruined if it could not weather the storm.

Mr. Moss found him reading the news over his breakfast-table. Business, as we know, had not prospered with Mr. Moss of late years; his investments had turned out badly, and he was in low water himself. He had placed his dependence upon Aaron to pull him through, and the rock he had depended upon was crumbling away.

"You are also in trouble, Mr. Moss," said Aaron, as his friend made his appearance.

"I have brought the second edition of the morning papers," replied Mr. Moss, with a white face. "The Stock Exchange is in a blaze, and the world is coming to an end."

"There will be misery in many homes," said Aaron. "It is the innocent who will chiefly suffer. I pity them sincerely."

"Everything is going to the dogs," groaned Mr. Moss.

"Have you breakfasted?"

"Had breakfast at seven o'clock. Couldn't sleep a wink all night, and could hardly eat a mouthful!"

"Why?"

"Why?" exclaimed Mr. Moss. "What a question to ask when ruin stares a man in the face!"

"I hope," said Aaron, gravely, "that you are not deeply involved."

"I am up to my neck. But what is my position compared with yours? Cohen, you are a mystery."

"Because I accept the inevitable? Can you show me how I can improve matters?"

"No, I can't," answered Mr. Moss, with a deep groan; "only if I had capital I could make a fortune."

"In what way?"

"By joining the bears. Cohen, you have a grand chance before you. Your credit is good. There is nothing for it but a plunge. It will set you right. Luck has been with you all your life; it will be with you now."

"How if it goes the other way, Mr. Moss?"

"What if it does? You will be no worse off than a thousand men who are plunging."

"The majority of whom, before another sun rises, will find themselves disgraced. No, Mr. Moss, no. I have never dabbled in stocks and shares at the risk of my good name, and I never will. There is but one way to meet misfortune, and that is the straight way. We will go to the City and ascertain, if we can, exactly how matters stand. Rachel and Esther do not return from Bournemouth till the afternoon."

In the City they learned the worst, and Aaron realised that he was beggared.

"Can you save nothing from the wreck?" asked Mr. Moss.

"Nothing," replied Aaron. "It may be that all I possess will not be sufficient to clear me. I think you had better take Esther back with you to Portsmouth; you have been absent from your business too long."

"I must go this evening," said Mr. Moss; "but Esther can stay. She will be a comfort to Mrs. Cohen."

"No, take her with you. In this crisis Rachel, I know, would prefer to be alone with me. Besides," he added, with a sad smile, "I have to provide another home, and I must be careful of my shillings."

"Another home, Cohen! What do you mean?"

"With certain ruin staring me in the face, and with claims coming upon me which I may not be able to meet, I must begin immediately to retrench. Our establishment is an expensive one, and I dare not carry it on a day longer than is necessary. Rachel and I will sleep in the house to-night for the last time. To-morrow I will pay off the servants, and we shall move into humbler quarters. So tumble down all our grand castles. Well, it has happened to better men, who, after many years of toil, have to begin life all over again. Rachel will not mind; we have faced poverty before to-day, and will face it again cheerfully."

"It drives me wild to hear you speak like that," exclaimed Mr. Moss. "You are looking only on the black side. If you had the money you have got rid of the last two or three weeks----"

"Hush, Mr. Moss, hush!" said Aaron, interrupting him. "It is a consolation to me to know that the greater part of my legitimately earned fortune has been so well bestowed. I am glad I did not wait to make reparation for the great error of my life. Rachel has yet to hear my confession. If I obtain her forgiveness I can face the future bravely and cheerfully."

Under the seal of confidence Aaron had made Mr. Moss and Dr. Spenlove acquainted with the particulars of the story of the two babes, and of the deception he had practised in his home in Gosport. Mr. Moss was not greatly astonished, for the hints lately dropped by his friend had prepared him for some disclosure of a strange nature. "Besides," he said inwardly to himself, "Ruth bears no likeness to either Mr. or Mrs. Cohen. It is a mercy she fell in love with that Storndale fellow; it would never have done for her to marry a Jew. Cohen would not have permitted it. But how blind we have all been!" In his weak moments Mr. Moss was rather inclined to be wise after the event. Both he and Dr. Spenlove had pledged themselves to secrecy, but when they proceeded to commend Aaron for the act and to find justification for it he stopped them. "It is a matter between me and my conscience," he said, and added mentally, "and between me and my beloved."

On this disastrous morning, as they walked from the City, Mr. Moss asked Aaron when he intended to reveal the secret to his wife.

"As soon as I can summon courage to speak," Aaron answered. "She has first to hear that we are beggared; it will be as much, perhaps, as she can bear in one day, but in any case I must not delay too long."

"If I were in your place," said Mr. Moss, "I should not delay at all. There are women who become strong through misfortune, and Mrs. Cohen is one. I wish Mrs. Moss were like her--don't think I am complaining of her. She is the best wife in the world, but she breaks down under reverses. If only I could be of some assistance to you, Cohen----"

"Your friendship counts for much, Mr. Moss," responded Aaron, pressing his companion's hand, "but every man must fight his own battle. I am not without hope, hard as is the trial

through which I am passing. It is kind of you to be so solicitous about my affairs when you have such heavy troubles of your own to contend with. Are things very bad with you?"

"Oh, I shall weather the storm, but it will leave me rather crippled. What matters? *Nil desperandum*. And there is just one ray which may become a perfect sunbeam."

"Ah, I am glad to hear that."

"My eldest boy has started in business as a dentist, and has commenced well. Once a dentist makes his name the money rolls in. It is a favourite business with our people."

"Yes," said Aaron, somewhat absently, "I have observed it."

"It is a kind of revenge, Cohen."

"A kind of revenge!" echoed Aaron. "How so?"

"Well, you know, in old times the Christians used to extract our teeth to get our money from us, and now it's our turn. We extract theirs at a guinea a tooth. See?"

Aaron could not help smiling at the joke, and the friends parted with mutual expressions of goodwill.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE CONFESSION.

On the evening of the same day Aaron and Rachel were alone in their house in Prince's Gate, which was soon to know them no more. Esther had taken an affectionate leave of them, and she and her father were travelling to Portsmouth. Esther was bright and cheerful, but Mr. Moss's heart was heavy; he was older than Aaron, and confident as he was in speech he was not inwardly so courageous in the hour of adversity. Ordinarily, when he and his daughter were travelling together, his blithe spirits found vent in song; on this occasion, however, he was moody and silent. Esther looked at him in surprise, and asked what made him so melancholy.

"When you reach my age," he replied, "I hope you will not discover that life is a dream."

The remark seemed to him rather fine and philosophical, and afforded him some kind of melancholy satisfaction; but had he been asked to explain its precise meaning he would have found it difficult to do so.

"I hope I shall, father," said Esther, as she leant back and thought of her lover; "a happy dream."

"I am glad to get back to you and to our dear home," Rachel was saying to her husband at the same moment. "You must not send me away again. Indeed, dear Aaron, if you ever have such an intention I shall for once in my life be rebellious, and shall refuse to go. I am happiest by your side."

She spoke tenderly and playfully, and held his hand in hers, as in the olden days.

"Nevertheless, my love, your short visit to the seaside has done you good."

"Yes, dear, I am almost well; I feel much stronger."

"There is the justification," said Aaron. "Neither am I happy away from you, but there are occasions when it is our duty to make sacrifices. This is the longest separation there has been between us in the twenty-six years of our married life."

"How time has flown!" she mused. "Twenty-six years of peace and joy. It has always been the same, dear husband, whether we were poor or rich. I cannot recall a day in the past without its flower of dear remembrance which money could not purchase."

"You make my task easier, Rachel," said Aaron. "I have something to disclose to you."

"And it is not good news, love," she said, in a tone of much sweetness.

"It is not good news, Rachel. By what means have you divined that?"

"I see without eyes. In the early days of my blindness I used to tell you that I was acquiring new senses. It is true. Some accent in your voice, the touch of your hand, conveys the message to my mind, and I wait in patience, as I am waiting now. Aaron, my dear husband, I have known for some time past that you have a sorrow which one day you would ask me to share. How have I known it? I cannot tell, but it is clear to me. You have not had a joy in your life apart from me. It is my right, is it not, to share your sorrows?"

"It is your right, Rachel, and you shall share them. I have not been without my errors; once in the past my footsteps strayed, but in the straying I inflicted suffering upon no human being."

"Of that I am sure, my love. It is human to err, but it is not in your nature to inflict suffering or commit an injustice. I am not pressing you to confide in me before in your judgment the proper time arrives. Nothing can shake my faith and trust in you."

He regarded her in silence awhile. The turn the conversation had taken favoured the disclosure of his secret respecting Ruth, but he still feared to speak of that and of his ruin in the same hour. The latter was the more imperative, because it demanded immediate action, and he nerved himself to the task.

"Your loving instinct, Rachel, has not misled you. For many years I have had a secret which I have concealed from you."

"Fearing to give me pain, dear husband?"

"Yes; and fearing that it would disturb the faith you have in me. I place so high a value upon it that my life would be dark indeed were I to lose it."

"That is impossible, dear. Banish the fear from your mind. Were the hands of all men raised against you I would stand before you as your shield, and they would not dare to strike. So long as we are together I am happy and content."

"Dear life of my life, you inspire me with hope. But it is not of this secret I must speak first. There is another trouble which has come upon me quite suddenly, and which demands immediate action. Rachel, for twenty years Heaven has showered prosperity upon me; not a venture I have made has failed, and many of my undertakings have succeeded far beyond my expectations. I have heard it said, 'Everything Aaron Cohen touches turns to gold.' It really has been so. I accumulated a large fortune, and--with humbleness I say it--no man, however high or low his station, was the loser by it. But a breath may destroy what the labours of a lifetime have created. If such a reverse has come to me, Rachel, how would you accept it?"

"Without murmuring, love," she said, drawing him close to her, and kissing his lips. "I should have but one regret--that I could not work for you as you have worked for me. But that, also, was God's will, and I have never repined. Who would presume to question His wisdom? His name be praised for ever and ever!"

"Amen. In our old home in Gosport you were happy."

"I have never been happier, Aaron. I have sometimes felt pride in your successes, but surely that is pardonable. Many and many a time have I thought of our early life and struggles with gratitude, because of the love which sustained us and gave us strength. It is the most precious gift that life can bestow. All else is nought. It is our soul-life, and dies not with the body."

"You do not value money, Rachel?"

"For the good it may do to others, not for the good it can do to the possessor; for the suffering it may be made the means of relieving, for the blessings it may bring into the lives of the afflicted and unfortunate. Then it becomes God-like, and when so used the angels smile approval."

"Dear love, you lighten my burden. When I won you my life was blessed. Listen, Rachel. This is a dark day for many men who find themselves fallen from their high estate. Despair sits in many homes at this hour."

"But not in ours, Aaron, whatever has happened."

"Thank God! It is my happy belief that this hour is not dark for us. It was my intention, Rachel, to retire altogether from business and public life, and to that end I took advantage of your absence from London to settle my affairs. My resolution was prompted by the secret, the burden of which, although I have not yet disclosed it to you, you have made lighter for me to reveal. Brought to public knowledge, which I fear its peculiar nature will render inevitable, it will be immediately said that I am unfitted to retain my position as a leader and teacher. To tarry until that judgment was pronounced upon me would be to aggravate the disaster, and I resolved to anticipate the verdict by resigning the honours which have been conferred upon me. I have done so, and I have withstood the pressure that has been put upon me to withdraw my resignation. An examination of my worldly affairs resulted in my finding myself in possession of nearly a hundred thousand pounds. I divided this into three portions, one of which I intended to retain in order that we might pass what years of life remained to us in comfort; the second portion I devoted to charity, and it has thus been distributed; the third portion was devoted to repairing to some

extent the error of which I have been guilty."

He looked at Rachel after he uttered these words, which he had spoken with averted head. There was no change in her. Sweetness and sympathy were expressed in her beautiful face, and it seemed as if her soul's light dwelt thereon.

"Do you approve, Rachel?"

"Entirely, love. Let me hold your hand."

He continued. "The money I intended for our private use was lodged in a City bank, and in this bank I hold shares for which I am liable to the depositors. Yesterday Mr. Moss brought me news of a commercial crisis in which I discerned----"

"Go on, dear husband. I am prepared for the worst."

"In which I discerned my ruin. This morning I convinced myself that the news was true."

"And we are poor again," said Rachel, in a gentle voice.

"And we are poor again. Everything is lost. I do not know the extent of my liabilities upon the shares I hold in the bank, but it is certain that my property--even down to the smallest possession--will scarcely be sufficient to meet them. I have nothing more to tell of my worldly trouble, Rachel."

"Dear love," said Rachel, sweetly, with her arms around him, "it is a small trouble, and we will meet it bravely. With all my heart and strength I will help you to meet it, and it will not make the future less happy. We cannot remain in this house; the expenses are too great."

"You echo my thought, Rachel. I have already discharged the servants, and have paid what is due to them. They expressed their sorrow, for I think they have an affection for us, but the separation is unavoidable. To-morrow they take their departure, and to-morrow, dear love, we must move into humbler quarters."

"I am content," said Rachel, "I am happy. We have each other. Do all the servants go--all?"

"No; one insists upon remaining. I could not convince her that it would be for her good to leave us."

"Prissy!" cried Rachel.

"Yes, Prissy, the foolish woman. With or without my consent she insists upon sharing our poverty."

"Dear, faithful Prissy! Do you remember the first night she came to us in Gosport? What changes there have been since that time! Let it be as she wishes, love; I know her constant, devoted nature. She will be a comfort to both of us."

"It shall be as you say, Rachel; a faithful heart like hers is a treasure."

Rachel paused before she spoke again, and Aaron, gazing upon her, held his breath, for he divined what was coming. She took his hand, and held it between her own.

"Kiss me, love," she said, her voice trembling from emotion. He pressed his lips to hers in silence. "I have been a great trouble to you, dear."

"You have been the blessing of my life, Rachel," he said in a low tone.

"Not only your love, dear, but the thought that you believed me worthy of your confidence, has brought great sweetness into mine. You have made me truly happy; and yet, dear husband, my heart is aching--not for myself, not because we are poor again, but for you, for you; for your heart, also, is charged with sorrow. We commence a new life to-morrow, and it affects not ourselves alone, but those who are dear to us. Let this night end your sorrows, and let me share them now, before I sleep. Aaron, not once have you mentioned the name of Ruth. Is it the thought of her that oppresses you? It oppresses me, too, and it is no new grief. For a long time past I have felt as if something had come between us, weakening the tie which should unite mother and child. If anything has been hidden from me which I should know, let it be hidden no longer. I am well, I am strong. Give me all your confidence. There is nothing I cannot bear for your dear sake."

He could not resist the appeal. In a voice as tremulous as her own he related the story of his sin. He recalled all the incidents of their life in Gosport, of the calamities which had trodden upon each others' heels, of the desperate state of poverty he was in when the fire occurred which deprived her of sight, of the birth of their child, of the doctor's words that Rachel's life depended upon the life of her babe and upon his taking her away to a warmer clime, of his giving her the sleeping draught and leaving her, wrapt in slumber, to admit Mr. Moss who had come from Portsmouth charged with a startling commission, the acceptance of which would be the saving of Rachel, of his reluctance to accept the guardianship of a strange child, and of his requesting time to consider it. Here he faltered; he stood, as it were, upon the threshold of his sin, and but for

Rachel's tender urging he would have been unable to proceed.

"Dear love, dear love," she said, "my heart bleeds for you! Ah, how you must have suffered! Be strong, dear husband, and tell me all. I am prepared--indeed, indeed I am!"

In hushed and solemn tones he told her of the death of their offspring, of the desperate temptation that assailed him, of his yielding to it, of the transposition of the babes, and of his agony and joy as he watched her when she awoke and pressed the stranger to her breast.

"By my sin you were saved," he said.

"By your agony was I saved," she murmured, and still retained and fondled his hand while the tears ran down her face. But love was there in its divinest aspect, and tenderest pity; and thus fortified, he continued to the end, and waited for the verdict that was to mar or make his future. He had not long to wait. Rachel held him close in her embrace, and mingled her tears with his.

"Can you forgive me, Rachel?"

"It is for me to bless, not to forgive," she sobbed. "For me you strayed, for me you have suffered. Comfort his bruised heart, O all-merciful God, who sees and judges! And, Aaron, dear and honoured husband, we have still a son to bless our days!"

CHAPTER XLV.

A POISONED ARROW.

Had it not been that public attention was directed mainly to events of greater importance Aaron Cohen's affairs would have furnished a liberal theme for the busy hunters of sensational and personal journalism, but to a certain extent he was protected by the fever of the financial panic in which numbers of unfortunate families were caught and ruined, and the fortunes of famous historic houses imperilled. He would have been grateful to slip into obscurity unnoticed, but this could scarcely be expected. He had occupied too high a station to be passed over in complete silence, and he had one bitter enemy, Mr. Poynter, who rejoiced in his downfall and neglected no opportunity to wing a poisoned arrow against his old rival. This man was furious with disappointment at having been unable to secure his rival's contracts, and when the excitement of the panic was over these arrows became more numerous, and Aaron's name was frequently mentioned in a slighting manner in those second- and third-class journals whose columns are too freely open to personal spite and malice. He saw but few of the paragraphs in which he was attacked, and those he read did not wound him; they made his friends angry (for he was not deserted by all), and they urged him to reply to them; but he shook his head, and said, "I shall not assist my enemies to stir up muddy waters. To every word I wrote they would reply with twelve. Let them do their worst." He was, however, greatly concerned lest the slanders should reach Rachel's knowledge; and here her blindness aided him. Either he or the faithful Prissy was ever by her side, and if his traducers hoped to make him suffer through the being whose love was the most precious jewel in his life, they were doomed to disappointment. Perhaps Aaron had never been happier than he was during these dark days of adversity. Now that the weight of a secret sin was lifted from his heart he had no fears of poverty. He had full confidence in his being able to obtain some employment which would keep the wolf from the door; however lowly it might be he was ready to accept it thankfully. He was not immediately free to enter a situation, for the whole of his time was occupied in settling his affairs. He had left his home in Prince's Gate, and was living in lodgings in Brixton. Everything he had in the world was given up to the creditors of the bank, and when he quitted the house, neither he nor Rachel had taken from it a single article of the slightest value. Small personal gifts which had been given by one to the other, articles of dress which they might legitimately have retained, mementos of little value, endeared to them by some affectionate association, even the old silver-mounted pipe in its jeweled case--all were left behind. Simply dressed, without a piece of jewellery about them, they turned their faces towards the new home and the new life without a murmur, and, hand in hand, walked to their humble rooms with contented hearts.

Prissy, who had gone before to get the place ready, received them with a smiling face. Grandeur was nothing to Prissy, so long as she could be with those whom she loved to serve. As happy in a cottage as in a palace, she proved herself to be a true philosopher, accepting fortune's rubs with equanimity, and making the best of them with a cheerful willingness it were well for loftier folk to emulate. Bird never trilled more happily than Prissy as she moved hither and thither, upstairs and down, setting things to rights, shifting the furniture and studying each new arrangement with a critical eye, interrupting herself every minute by running to the window to

see if her master and mistress were coming. The rooms were sweet and clean, there were flowers about, and blooming flowers in pots on the window-sill. The fragrance of the flowers greeted Rachel as she entered, and her bright face was Prissy's reward.

"Where did the flowers come from, Prissy?" asked Aaron, when Rachel was out of hearing.

"From the flower-man, sir," she answered.

"Surely not a gift?"

"Yes, sir," said the unblushing Prissy; "wasn't it good of him?"

"Prissy!" said Aaron, with warning finger uplifted.

"Well, sir, they cost next to nothing, and they're paid for."

"But, Prissy----"

"Please don't, sir," she interrupted, and there were tears in her eyes and a pleading rebellion in her voice. "I know what you're going to say, Mr. Cohen, but please don't. You'd like me to keep good, wouldn't you, sir?"

"Why, of course, Prissy," said Aaron, astonished at the question.

"Well, sir, I can't, if you blow me up now you're in misfortune; I can't keep good if you don't let me have my way in little things. I'll be very careful, I will, indeed, Mr. Cohen. It's almost the first time in my life I've bought any flowers at all for any one else, and it ain't in you, sir, to take away pleasure from anybody--and did you see, sir, how happy missis looked when she came in?"

Thus inconsequentially Prissy, mixing her arguments in the strangest manner.

"But, my good girl," said Aaron, kindly, "you have no business to waste your money; you must think of your future."

"It's what I am thinking of, sir; I don't want to grow wicked, and flowers are the only things that will prevent me. It's the honest truth, sir; they make me feel good. Mr. Cohen, if it hadn't been for you, where should I have been? In the gutter, I daresay. You took me out of it, sir. I don't forget the first night I come to you with Victoria Regina in Gosport; if I lived to be as old as Methusalem I couldn't never forget it. And then when missis got me the gillard water to bathe my eyes--I should be the ungratefullest woman that ever drew breath if I could forget those things. Do, please, sir, let me have my way. You've paid me a lot more wages than I was worth, and all my money is in the post office savings bank, and it ain't mine at all, it's yours----"

"My good Prissy," said Aaron, much affected, for Prissy could not continue, her voice was so full of tears, "do as you wish, but be very careful, as you have promised. Perhaps fortune will turn again, and then----"

"And then, sir," said Prissy, taking up his words, "you shall give it all back to me--and I'll take it then, sir, you see if I don't. It will turn, if there's any fairness anywhere. And now, if you'll forgive me, sir, I must go and look after the dinner."

Aaron was very busy for several days after this making a careful inventory of his possessions in the house in Prince's Gate, which he sent to the appointed liquidators of the bankrupt bank. Of all the debtors he was the only one who did not wait for the law's decree to give up his fortune to the last farthing, and perhaps he was the only one whose conscience was free of the intention of wrong.

He had his gleams of sunshine. First, the sweet contentment and happiness of his beloved wife. The affection she lavished upon him was of so tender and exalted a nature that it made their humble home a paradise. She listened for his footstep, she stood at the door to meet him, she drew him to her side, as a young maiden in the springtime of life might have done to the lover she adored. Spiritual flowers grew about her feet, and everything and every one was made purer and better by contact with her. Then, as ill news travels fast, his son Joseph, when his ship stopped at a not-distant port to take in cargo, was made acquainted through the public journals with the condition of affairs; and, divining that his father was in need of money, he cabled home advices which assisted Aaron in his extreme need. The young man had saved some money, and he placed it all at the disposal of his parents, who derived an exquisite pleasure from this proof of affection. As in Gosport twenty years before, Rachel did not know the stress to which her husband was put; he kept from her knowledge everything of a distressing nature, and in this loving task he was silently assisted by Prissy, whose thoughtfulness and devotion were not to be excelled. She watched her mistress's every movement, and anticipated her lightest wish. The dishes she liked best were always on the table, and everything she wanted was ready to her hand. Prissy was no less attentive to her master, brushing his clothes, and polishing his boots till she could see her face in them.

"What should we do without you, Prissy?" said Rachel.

"I hope you'll never want to do without me, ma'am," answered Prissy.

Another gleam of sunshine came to him in the offer of a situation from a merchant who had known him in his days of prosperity. He was not asked to occupy a position of responsibility, and the offer was conveyed to him in apologetic terms.

"I cannot displace men who have been long in my employ," the merchant said, "but a desk is vacant which you can have if you think it worthy of you."

Aaron accepted it gladly, and expressed his thanks.

"Fortune has not deserted us," he said to his wife. "I shall not only be able to pay our expenses, but I shall even be able to save a little. The hours are short, the labour is light; and in time I may rise to something better."

So, like a young man commencing life, he went every morning to his new duties, and returned in the evening to a peaceful and happy home.

During all this time he had heard no word of Ruth or Mrs. Gordon, and the sin of which he had been guilty had not reached the public ear. His house and furniture still remained unsold, law's process being proverbially slow and tedious. At length, passing his house one evening, he saw bills up, announcing that the mansion and its contents were to be sold by auction in the course of the following week. He was not a stoic, and it gave him a pang, but the pain soon passed away. "What have I to repine at," he thought, "with heavenly love awaiting me at home?" It was his intention to attend the auction for the purpose of purchasing two or three small mementos, towards which he had saved a few pounds. The sale was to take place on Thursday, and on Wednesday night he was looking through the catalogue, and talking with Rachel about his intended purchases.

"There are dumb memorials," he said, "which from long association become like living friends. Something of our spirit seems to pass into them, imbuing them with life. I shall not be quite happy till I get back my silver-mounted pipe; of all my possessions it was my dearest. Tobacco has lost its flavour since I left it behind me; but I had no right to bring away anything of value, and I have always looked forward to possessing it again. Great misfortunes are really easy to bear in comparison with such-like trifles."

Aaron seldom indulged now in those touches of humour to which Rachel in the old days loved to listen. The Aaron of to-day and the Aaron of yesterday were the same in everything but that; the tender gaiety was replaced by a tender sadness, and Rachel often thought with regret of the play of fancy which used to stir her to mirth.

On this night they expected a visit from Mr. Moss, who was coming to London on business; and at about nine o'clock he made his appearance. An hour afterwards Rachel retired to bed, and left the friends together. Aaron had observed that Mr. Moss looked anxious and uneasy, but he was careful not to refer to it in the presence of his wife.

"You have something on your mind," he now said. "No new misfortune, I hope?"

"Not to me personally," replied Mr. Moss, with a reluctant air.

"To none of your family, I trust."

"No; they are all quite well. My dentist son is getting along famously; I saw him before I came here, and he told me that he had pulled out three Christian teeth to-day. Isaac of York is avenged!"

Dolefully as he spoke, Aaron could not help smiling. "But what is it?" he asked.

"I am the harbinger of trouble, it seems," groaned Mr. Moss, "and to my best friend. I was the first to bring you the news of the panic, and now----"

"Yes," said Aaron, gently, "and now? Speak low, or Rachel may overhear us."

"You do not see many papers, Cohen?"

"Not many."

"I hardly like to tell you," said Mr. Moss, "but you will be sure to hear of it to-morrow. They never spare a man who is down, For God's sake, Cohen, don't blame me! I've never opened my lips--I'd have cut my tongue out first."

"Let me know the worst," said Aaron. "It relates to me, I see. As for blaming you, set your mind at ease. You have been too good a friend to me to do anything to distress me. Come, shake hands. Whatever it is, I can bear it like a man, I hope. I have passed through the fire, and it has left me humble and patient."

In silence Mr. Moss took a newspaper from his pocket, and handed it to Aaron. It was folded in a particular place, and there Aaron read an article headed "A Strange Revelation," in which the whole story of his sin was circumstantially detailed. He was not referred to by name, nor was Ruth's name or Mrs. Gordon's mentioned; but the name of the place in which the incident

occurred and the year of the occurrence were accurately set down, and certain allusions to himself could not be mistaken. He was spoken of as a Jew who, until lately, had occupied an eminent position in society, who had posed as a friend of the working man, and had been instrumental in putting an end to the late great strike in the building trade.

"Ostensibly this may be said to have been of service to society, but in our judgment of a man's character the public issue must be set aside. The question of private motive has to be considered: if it be worthy it reflects credit upon him; if unworthy, it passes to his dishonour."

From this argument was drawn the conclusion that there was not a public act performed by "the eminent Jew" that was not undertaken with a view to self-interest and self-aggrandisement. He was a dealer in fine phrases, which, with a stock of empty professions and mock moralities which he kept always on hand, had helped to set him on the pedestal from which he had toppled down. For years he had been successful in throwing dust into the eyes of the multitude whom he had cajoled into sounding his praises; but at length the sword had fallen, and the life of duplicity he had led both publicly and privately was laid bare to view. His charities were so many advertisements, and were undoubtedly turned to profit; his religious professions, unceasingly paraded, served as a cloak for his greed and self-seeking.

"This man's life of hypocrisy points a moral. He was in affluence, he is in want; he was a leader, he has become a drudge. He has been justly served, and we hold him up as a warning and an example to all pretenders of his class and creed."

Then followed a promise of further revelations to be furnished by a competent authority, and probably by the publication of the delinquent's name, for the benefit of society at large.

As Aaron read this scandalous article the colour deserted his cheeks, his hands and mouth trembled, his heart sank within him. What could he say in his defence? Nothing. The deductions and conclusions were false, but the story was true. There was but one answer to the question whether he had perpetrated a domestic fraud, and had brought up as a Jewess a child whom he had allowed to grow to womanhood in ignorance of her parentage and rightful faith. This answer would be fatal, and would give the impress of truth to the entire article. How could he show himself in public after such an exposure? His intended appearance at the sale to-morrow must be relinquished: he would be pointed at with scorn and contempt. Not for him the open paths where he would meet his fellowman face to face; he must creep through the byways, close to the wall. It seemed to him as if his life were over. His head drooped, his arms sank listlessly down, his whole appearance was that of a man who had received a mortal stroke.

"It is abominable, abominable!" cried Mr. Moss. "Is there no law to punish such a slander? Is there no protection for such a man as you?"

"For such a man as I?" echoed Aaron, sadly. "Ah, my friend, you forget. There is no grave deep enough for sin and wrong-doing; you may bury it fathoms deep, but the hour will arrive when the ghost rises and points at you with accusing hand. The punishment meted out to me is just."

"It is not--it is not!"

"Hush! You will disturb Rachel."

He stepped softly into the bedroom; Rachel was slumbering, with a smile on her lips. As he stood by her side, contemplating her sweet and beautiful face, she awoke.

"Aaron!"

"Yes, my life!"

"Is it late? Has Mr. Moss gone?"

"He is still here, Rachel. It is quite early."

She encircled his neck with her arms, and drew him to her. "I have had such happy dreams, dear love! Some good fortune is going to happen to us."

"What would life be without its delusions?" he said, in a sad tone.

"Do not speak sadly, dear. You have borne up so bravely; you must not break down now. Come, come--for my sake, love!"

"For your sake, beloved," he said; and as he spoke the tormenting demon which had been torturing him lost its power.

"What made you sad, love?" said Rachel. "Surely not because we are poor?"

"No, love; it was not that. But if your dreams should not come true"

"Why, then," she answered, and her voice was like music in his ears, "we have faced trouble before, and can face it again. It will make no difference so long as we are together. Aaron, with you by my side I would walk barefoot through the world, and bless the gracious Lord that made

me. He is all-merciful and all-powerful, and in Him I put my trust. To the last, to the last, dear and honoured husband, we will not lose our trust in Him! Do not be sad again. All will come right--I feel it will. It is as if a Divine voice is whispering to me."

When Aaron rejoined his friend the colour had returned to his face, his step was firmer, his eye brighter.

"There is an angel in my home," he said. "Let my enemies do their worst. I am armed against them. Does this article make any change in our friendship?"

"It binds me closer to you, Cohen."

Aaron pressed Mr. Moss's hand.

"Love and friendship are mine," he said simply. "What more can I desire?"

CHAPTER XLVI.

RETRIBUTION.

The following morning Aaron went to the office as usual, and quickly discovered that the poisoned arrow had found its mark. He was received with coldness, and the principals of the firm passed his desk without speaking to him. He observed the older employes whispering together, and looking at him furtively, avoiding his eye when he returned their gaze. His mind was soon made up; sending in his name to his employers he requested an interview with them. Upon entering the private room he saw upon the table a copy of the paper containing the scandalous attack; he did not change colour, he thought of Rachel's love, and his voice was firm and resigned.

"You have read this article, Mr. Cohen?" said the principal member of the firm.

"Yes, sir; I read it last night."

"And you have come to explain----"

He interrupted his employer mildly.

"No, sir; I have not come to explain anything. I am here to tender my resignation."

"You save us from a difficulty, Mr. Cohen. It was our intention to speak to you before the day was over. But still, if the story we have seen in the paper is not true--if it does not, after all, refer to you----"

"The story is true," he said, "and it refers to me."

"In that case," was the reply, "there is nothing more to be said. We regret the necessity, but it appears unavoidable. The cashier will pay you a month's salary in lieu of notice."

"I can accept only what is due to me," said Aaron; and shortly afterwards he left the office.

Not one of his fellow-clerks offered to shake hands with him as he went away; but the pang he felt was momentary.

"Patience, patience," he murmured, raising his eyes to heaven. "To Thy decree, O God, I humbly submit. My punishment is just."

He did not return home until evening, and then he said nothing to Rachel of his dismissal. The next day he went out and wandered aimlessly about the streets, choosing the thoroughfares where he would be least likely to be recognised. So the days passed, and still he had not the courage to speak to Rachel.

"Perhaps in another country," he thought, "I may find rest, and Rachel and I will be allowed to pass the remainder of our life in peace."

On Tuesday, in the ensuing week, he went forth, and with bowed head was walking sadly on, when, with a sudden impulse, he wheeled round in the direction of his home. The feeling that impelled him to do this was, that he was behaving treacherously to Rachel in keeping the secret from her. He would make her acquainted with his disgrace and dismissal, and never again in his

life would he conceal anything from her knowledge. This resolution gave him the courage he had lacked.

"It is as if I were losing faith in her," he murmured. "Love has made me weak where it should have made me strong."

He hastened his steps, and soon reached his home. As he stood for a moment at the door of the sitting-room he heard a voice within which he recognised as that of his old rival, Mr. Poynter, and upon his entrance he found that gentleman and his wife together.

Rachel was standing in a dignified attitude, as though in the presence of an enemy; her face was pale and scornful, and Mr. Poynter was manifestly ill at ease. Hearing her husband's footsteps she extended her hand, and taking his, pressed it to her lips. In this position they must be left for a brief space while an explanation is given of another incident which was to bear directly upon the scene, and to bring into it a startling colour.

Prissy had conducted Mr. Poynter into the presence of her mistress, and had scarcely done so when she was called down to a lady, who had inquired for Mr. and Mrs. Cohen.

"Mr. Cohen is out," said Prissy, "and Mrs. Cohen is engaged."

"I wish to see them particularly," said the lady, giving Prissy a card, upon which the name of Mrs. Gordon was engraved. "Are you Prissy?"

"Yes, ma'am," Prissy answered in wonder; "but I don't remember ever having seen you."

"You have never seen me before," said Mrs. Gordon with a smile, "but I have heard of you. Can I wait until your mistress's visitor is gone? I bring good news."

"You can sit in my room, if you don't mind, ma'am," said Prissy, who was greatly excited at the promise of good news.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Gordon; and she followed the servant upstairs to a room next to that in which Mr. Poynter and Rachel were conversing, and where, the wall being thin, she could hear every word that was being spoken in the adjoining apartment.

"This gentleman," said Rachel to her husband, pointing in the direction of Mr. Poynter, "has called to see you on business, and has taken advantage of your absence to offer me a bribe."

"One moment, Rachel," said Aaron; "let me first hear the nature of Mr. Poynter's business."

"I will explain it," said Mr. Poynter. "I have not been fortunate enough to win Mrs. Cohen's favour, but ladies are not accustomed to discuss business matters."

"Did you come here to discuss a business matter with my wife?" inquired Aaron, calmly.

"Well, hardly; but as you were absent I thought I might mention the matter to her."

"What matter?"

"The business I came upon," said Mr. Poynter, irritated by Aaron's composure. "I am ready to hear it, sir."

"Very well. We will not beat about the bush, but will come straight to the point. You are down in the world, Mr. Cohen?"

"Yes, sir; I am, as you say, down in the world."

"The newspapers," continued Mr. Poynter, "have been saying uncomplimentary things of you, and I have heard a threat of further revelations. I considered it my duty--in the interests of truth, Mr. Cohen--to make your wife acquainted with these public disclosures."

Rachel pressed her lips again upon Aaron's hand, which she held in a firm and loving grasp. His face brightened.

"You have rendered me a service," he said. "Possibly I have you to thank, also, for the statements which have been made in the papers concerning me."

"Possibly," said Mr. Poynter.

"Nay," said Aaron, "you suggested just now the advisability of not beating about the bush, and you proclaim that you are here in the interests of truth. Have I, or have I not, to thank you for this unfavourable publicity?"

"I have never shrunk from the truth," replied Mr. Poynter, with a lofty air, "nor from a duty, however distressing the truth or the duty might be. Society has to be considered, and we must ignore the feeling of the individual. I became possessed of certain information, and I considered it my imperative duty not to withhold it from the public ear."

"I thank you. Without further circumlocution I must ask you to come straight to the business which brings you here."

"It is very simple, and will put money in your pocket, of which, it seems to me, you stand in need."

"I do stand in need of money."

"Then the matter can be arranged. Some little while since we had a conversation concerning certain contracts which you were not in a position to complete."

"You solicited a transference of those contracts to your firm," said Aaron, "and I declined to grant your request."

"You use high-sounding words for one in your position," said Mr. Poynter, with a frown, "but I will not quarrel with you. You gave the worst of all bad reasons for your refusal."

"Whether my reasons were good or bad, you have taken your revenge."

"God-fearing men do not seek revenge, but justice. To continue. The firm to which you transferred the most important of these contracts happens at the present time to need some assistance, and hearing of it, I offer what it needs. But it appears that you have hampered them, and that in the deed of transference you expressly stipulate that no part of the contracts shall be executed by me unless I bind myself to a scale of wages and hours which you have tabulated."

"I considered it fair to the men," said Aaron, "and it is as you have stated."

"It is my belief," pursued Mr. Poynter, "that the firm will accept my aid if I adhere to the scale, which I decline to do. I know what is right, and I will not be dictated to. My business here is to make you the offer of a sum of money--I will go as far as a hundred pounds--if you will cancel this stipulation by which my friends are bound. A hundred pounds is a large sum, Mr. Cohen; it would come in useful to you just now."

"It would. It is likely you would increase the sum."

"Oh, you Jews, you Jews!" exclaimed Mr. Poynter, jocosely, thinking he had gained his point. "Always on the look-out for the main chance--always screwing out the last penny. Well, I am not a mean man, Mr. Cohen. We will say a hundred and twenty."

Aaron turned to Rachel, and asked, "Is this the bribe you spoke of?"

"It is not," she replied. "Mr. Poynter will explain it to you in his own words."

"I haven't the smallest objection," said Mr. Poynter. "You see, Mr. Cohen, it is sometimes necessary to put the screw on. Who knows that better than you? There is a material screw, and a moral screw, in this particular case. The material screw is money; the moral screw is an iron safe, of which, as yet, no mention has been made in the newspapers."

"Ah!" said Aaron.

"It is almost a waste of words to speak of it to you, who are so familiar with the circumstances. This iron safe, it appears, was given into your charge when you received the infant into your house in Gosport. You were a pauper at the time, and from that day you prospered. In a manner of speaking you became suddenly rich. Well, well, the temptation was too strong for you. You could not resist opening the safe, and appropriating what it contained--undoubtedly treasure of some sort in money or jewels. But, Mr. Cohen, there is an all-seeing Eye."

"I acknowledge it In the event of my refusing your money, you threaten to accuse me through the columns of the press of breaking open the safe and stealing the contents."

"You have expressed it clearly, Mr. Cohen. The moral screw, you know."

"And of further blackening my character."

"It can scarcely be made worse than it is. In the event of your refusal I shall certainly do my duty."

"Mr. Poynter," said Aaron, with dignity, "I refuse your offer."

"It is not enough?"

"Were you to multiply it a hundred times, it would not be enough."

Through Aaron's veins ran the sweet approval conveyed in Rachel's close clasp upon his hand. "You beggar!" exclaimed Mr. Poynter. "You hypocrite! You defy me?"

"I do not defy you; I simply tell you to do your worst."

"It shall be done!" cried Mr. Poynter, furiously. "You are ruined; I will ruin you still more; I will

bring you to your knees; you shall lie in the gutter and beg for mercy! You paragon of sanctity, all the world shall know you for what you are!"

"You can use no harsher words," said Aaron. "Relieve me now of your presence."

As he said this the communicating door between the rooms opened, and Mrs. Gordon appeared on the threshold.

"Yes, I will go," said Mr. Poynter, but fell back when Mrs. Gordon advanced.

"Not yet," she said, and turned to Aaron. "I have a word to say to this gentleman. Your servant admitted me, and allowed me to wait in the adjoining apartment till you were disengaged. I have heard all that has passed between you, and I am thankful for the chance that enabled me to do so. Mr. Cohen, look upon that man, and mark how changed he is from braggart to coward. It is not the infamous falsehoods he has spoken, it is not the cowardly threats to which he has dared to give utterance in the presence of a lady, that cause him to shrink, that blanch his face, and bring terror into his eyes. It is because he sees me stand before him, the woman he betrayed and deserted long years ago. He believed me dead, driven to death by his treachery and baseness; he beholds me living, to cover him, if I wish, with shame and ignominy. Heaven knows I had no desire to seek him, but Heaven directed me here in a just moment to expose and baffle him. It is my turn now to threaten, it is my turn to dictate. You unutterable villain, you shall make some sort of retribution for the infamy of the past!"

"Psha!" said Mr. Poynter, with white lips. "Who will believe you? You have no proofs."

"I have. God's justice has turned your weapon against yourself. The safe entrusted to this noble gentleman, and which he delivered to me intact, untampered with, when I came to claim it, contained no treasure in money or jewels. When I parted with my child--and yours--I was too poor to deposit even one silver coin in it, but in its stead I placed there the letters you wrote to me, in your own hand, signed in your own name, the name by which you are known. These letters are now in my possession. How would you stand in the eyes of the world if I published them, you God-fearing man, with the story attaching to them? I will do it, as Heaven is my judge, if you do not repair the injury you have done this gentleman, whom, with all my heart and soul, I honour and revere. It is him you have to thank that your child has been reared in honour and virtue. Go! I never wish to look upon your face again; but as you are a living man I will bring the good name you falsely bear to the dust if you do not make reparation!"

As he slunk past her, uttering no word, she held her dress so that it should not come in contact with him. His power for evil was at an end, and Aaron had nothing more to fear from his malice.

Then, after Aaron had introduced her to Rachel, she poured glad tidings into their ears. She had not sought them earlier, she said, because she wished first to execute a plan which was in her head respecting them, and she had also to reconcile Lord Storndale to his son's marriage with Ruth. Her great wealth had enabled her, after much labour, to succeed in this endeavour, and Ruth was recognised by her husband's family. The fortune which Aaron had settled upon Ruth had not been used in the carrying out of her desire; it was deposited in the bank, where only Aaron's signature was needed to prove his right to it. And now she begged them to accompany her; she wished to show them something, and her carriage was at the door. It conveyed them to a handsome house in a good neighbourhood, which they supposed to be Mrs. Gordon's residence. A neatly dressed maid answered the bell, and to their surprise Mrs. Gordon immediately left them, and saying she would call on the morrow, drove away before they could reply. The maid, holding the door open to allow them to enter, handed Aaron a letter and a packet, both addressed to him. The letter was from Mrs. Gordon, and upon reading it the mystery was explained. The house had been purchased by her in the name of Aaron Cohen, and the packet contained the deeds. "In furnishing the house," Mrs. Gordon wrote, "Ruth has been the guiding spirit; she knew what was most precious to you and your dear wife." Aaron's heart throbbed with gratitude as he and Rachel walked through the rooms, and he saw all the memorials of their old home which they held most dear. On the walls were the portrait of himself and the picture of Rachel in the garden in France, which had been presented to him on the day when all his friends had assembled to do him honour. Joyful tears ran down Rachel's face as he described these treasures to her; the love she had lavished on Ruth met now with its return. In the study Aaron paused, and lifting something from the table, placed it in Rachel's hands.

"Your silver-mounted pipe!" she exclaimed.

"My silver-mounted pipe," he answered. "My life, with this pipe, and the dear picture of you sitting under the cherry tree, and holding your dear hand, I can pass my days in perfect happiness and content."

"O Lord of the Universe," said Rachel, clasping her hands, and raising her lovely face, "I thank Thee humbly for all Thy goodness to me and mine!"

THE END

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