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(of 3), by Dinah Maria Mulock Craik**

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Title: A Life for a Life, Volume 2 (of 3)

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Release date: March 13, 2015 [EBook #48482]
Most recently updated: February 21, 2021

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LIFE FOR A LIFE, VOLUME 2 (OF 3) ***

A LIFE FOR A LIFE

By Dinah Maria Craik

**The Author Of "John Halifax, Gentleman," "A Woman's Thoughts
About Women," &c., &c.**

In Three Volumes. Vol. II.

London: Hurst And Blackett, Publishers,

1859

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CHAPTER I. HIS STORY.

I ended the last page with "I shall write no more here." It used to be my pride never to have broken a promise nor changed a resolution. Pride! What have I to do with pride?

And resolutions, forsooth! What,—are we omnipotent and omniscient, that against all changes of circumstances, feelings, or events, we should set up our paltry resolutions, urge them and hold to them, in spite of reason and conviction, with a tenacity that we suppose heroic, god-like, yet which may be merely the blind obstinacy of a brute?

I will never make a resolution again. I will never again say to myself, "You, Max Urquhart, in order to keep up that character for virtue, honour, and steadfastness, which heaven only knows whether or no you deserve, ought to do so and so; and, come what will, you must do it." Out upon me and my doings! Was I singled out to be the scapegoat of the world?

It is my intention here, regularly to set down, for certain reasons, which I may, or may not, afterwards allude to, certain events, which have happened without any act of mine, almost without my volition, if a man can be so led on by force of circumstances, that there seems only one course of conduct open to him to pursue. Whither these circumstances may lead, I am at this moment as utterly ignorant as on the day I was born, and almost as powerless. I make no determinations, attempt no previsions, follow no set line of conduct; doing only from day to day, what is expected of me, and leaving all the rest to—is it? it must be—to God.

The sole thing in which I may be said to exercise any absolute volition, is in writing down what I mean to write here, the only record that will exist of the veritable me—Max Urquhart,—as he might have been known, not to people in general, but to—any one who looked into his deepest heart, and was his friend, his beloved, his very own.

The form of Imaginary Correspondent I henceforward throw aside. I am perfectly aware to whom and for whom I write: yet who, in all human probability, will never read a single line.

Once, an officer in the Crimea, believing himself dying, gave me a packet of letters to burn. He had written them, year by year, under every change of fortune, to a friend he had, to whom he occasionally wrote other letters, *not* like these; which were never sent nor meant to be sent, during his life-time—though sometimes I fancy he dreamed of *giving* them, and of their being read, smiling, by two together. He was mistaken. Circumstances which happen not rarely to dreamers like him, made it unnecessary, nay, impossible, for them to be delivered at all. He bade me burn them—at once—in case he died. In so doing there started out of the embers, clear and plain, *the name*. But the fire and I told no tales; I took the poker and buried it. Poor fellow! He did not die, and I meet him still; but we have never referred to those burnt letters.

These letters of mine I also may one day burn. In the meantime, there shall be no name or superscription on them—no beginning or ending, nor, if I can avoid it, anything which could particularise the person to whom they are written. For all others, they will take the form of a mere statement—nothing more.

To begin. I was sitting about eleven at night, over the fire, in my hut. I had been busy all day, and had had little rest the night before.

It was not my intention to attend our camp concert; but I was in a manner compelled to do so. Ill news from home reached poor young Ansdell of ours—and his colonel sent me to break it to him. I then had to wait about, in order to see the good colonel as he came out from the concert-room. It was, therefore, purely by accident that I met those friends whom I afterwards did not leave for several minutes.

The reason of this delay in their company may be told. It was a sudden agony about the uncertainty of life—young life; fresh and hopeful as pretty Laura Ansdell's—whom I had chanced to see riding through the North Camp, not two weeks ago—and now she was dead. Accustomed as I am to almost every form of mortality, I had never faced the grim fear exactly in this shape before. It put me out of myself for a little time.

I did not go near Granton the following day, but received from him a message and my plaid. She—the lady to whom I had lent it—was "quite well." No more: how could I possibly expect any more?

I was, as I say, sitting over my hut-fire, with the strangest medley in my mind—rosy Laura Ansdell—now galloping across the moor—now lying still and colourless in her coffin; and another face, about the same age, though I suppose it would not be considered nearly as pretty, with the scarlet hood drawn over it; pallid with cold, yet with such a soft light in the eyes, such a trembling sweetness about the mouth! She must be a very happy-minded creature. I hardly ever saw her, or was with her any length of time, that she did not look the picture of content and repose. She always puts me in mind of Dallas's pet song, when we were boys—"Jessie, the Flower o' Dunblane."

"She's modest as ony, and blithe as she's bonnie,
And guileless simplicity marks her its ain,
And far be the villain, divested o' feelin',
Wha'd blight in its bud the sweet Flower o' Dunblane."

I say amen to that.

It was—to return, for the third time, to simple narrative—somewhere about eleven o'clock, when a man on horseback stopped at my hut-door. I thought it might be a summons to the Ansdells, but it was not. It was the groom from Rockmount, bringing me a letter.

Her letter—her little letter! I ought to burn it—but, as yet, I cannot—and where it is kept, it will be quite safe. For reasons, I shall copy it here.

“Dear Sir,—

“My father has met with a severe accident. Dr. Black is from home, and there is no other doctor in the neighbourhood upon whom we can depend. Will you pardon the liberty I am taking, and come to us at once?

“Yours truly,

“Theodora Johnston.”

There it lies, brief and plain; a firm hand guided the shaking hand. Few things show character in a woman more than her handwriting: this, when steady, must be remarkably neat, delicate, and clear. I did well to put it by—I may never get another line.

In speaking to Jack, I learnt that his master and one of the young ladies had been out to dinner—that master had insisted on driving home himself, probably from Jack's incompetence, but he was sober enough now, poor lad!—that, coming through the fir-wood, one of the wheels got fixed in a deep rut, and the phaeton was overturned.

I asked, was any one hurt—besides Mr. Johnston?

“Miss Johnston was, a little.”

“Which Miss Johnston?”

“Miss Penelope, sir.”

“No one else?”

“No, sir.”

I had evidence enough of all this before, but just then, at that instant, it went out of my mind in a sudden oppression of fear. The facts of the case gained, I called Jack in to the fire, and went into my bed-room to settle with myself what was best to be done.

Indecision, as to the matter of going or not going, was of course impossible; but it was a sudden and startling position to be placed in. True, I could avoid it by pleading hospital business, and sending the assistant surgeon of our regiment, who is an exceedingly clever young man—but not a young man whom women would like in a sick house, in the midst of great distress or danger. And in that distress and danger, she had called upon *me*, trusted *me*.

I determined to go. The cost, whatever it might be, would be purely personal, and in that brief minute I counted it all. I state this, because I wish to make clear that no secondary motive, dream, or desire, prompted me to act as I have done.

On questioning Jack more closely, I found that Mr. Johnston had fallen, they believed, on a stone; that he had been picked up senseless, and had never spoken since.

This indicated at once on what a thread of chance the case hung. *The case*—simply that and no more; as to treat it at all, I must so consider it. I have saved lives, by God's blessing—this, then, must be regarded merely as one other life to be saved, if, through His mercy, it were granted me to do it.

I unlocked my desk, and put her letter in the secret drawer; wrote a line to our assistant-surgeon, with hospital orders, in case I should be absent part of the next day; took out any instruments I might want; then, with a glance round my room, and an involuntary wondering as to how and when I might return to it, I mounted Jack's horse and rode off to Rockmount. The whole had not occupied fifteen minutes, for I remember looking at my watch, which stood at a quarter-past eleven.

Hard-riding makes thinking impossible; and, indeed, my whole mind was bent upon not missing my road in the darkness. A *detour* of a mile or two, one lost half-hour, might, humanly speaking, have cost the old man's life; for, in similar cases, it is generally a question of time.

It is said, our profession is that, which, of all others, most inclines a man to materialism. I never found it so. The first time I ever was brought close to death—but that train of thought must be stopped. Since, death and I have walked so long together, that the mere vital principle, common to all breathing creatures, “the life of a beast which goeth downwards,” as the Bible has it, I never think of confounding with “the soul of a man which goeth upwards.” Quite distinct from the life, dwelling in blood or breath, or at that “vital point” which has been lately discovered, showing that in a spot the size of a pin's head, resides the principle of mortality—quite distinct, I say, from this something which perishes or vanishes so mysteriously from the dead friends we bury, the corpses we anatomize, seems to me the spirit, the ghost; which being able to conceive of and aspire to, must necessarily return to, the one Holy Ghost, the one Eternal Spirit, Himself once manifest in flesh, this very flesh of ours.

And it seemed on that strange, wild night, just such another winter's night as I remember, years and years ago,—as if this distinction between the life and the soul, grew clearer to me than ever before; as if, pardoning all that had happened to its mortal part, a ghost, which, were such visitations allowed, though I do not believe they are, might be supposed often to visit me—followed my ghost, harmlessly,—nay, pitifully, I

“Being a tiling immortal as itself,”

the whole way between the camp and Rockmount.

I dismounted under the ivy-bush which overhangs the garden-gate, which gate had been left open, so I was able to go, at once, up to the hall-door, where the fan-light flickered on the white stone-floor; the old man's stick was in the corner, and the young ladies' hats hung up on the branching stag's horns.

For the moment, I half-believed myself dreaming; and that I should wake as I have often done, after half an

hour's rest, with the salt morning breeze blowing on me, in the outside gallery of Scutari Hospital,—start up, take my lamp, and go round my wards.

But minutes were precious. I rang the bell; and, almost immediately, a figure slid down the staircase, and opened the door. I might not have thought it flesh and blood, but for the touch of its little cold hand.

“Ah! it is you, at last; I was sure you would come.”

“Certainly.”

Perhaps she thought me cold, “professional,” as if she had looked for a friend, and found only the doctor. Perhaps,—nay, it must be so, she never thought of me at all, except as “the doctor.”

“Where is your father?”

“Upstairs; we carried him at once to his room. Will you come?”

So I followed—I seemed to have nothing to do but to follow that light figure, with the voice so low, the manner so quiet,—quieter than I ever expected to see hers, or any woman's, under such an emergency. I? what did I ever know of women? What did I deserve to know, except that a woman bore me? It is an odd fancy, but I have never thought so much about my mother as within the last few months. And sometimes, turning over the sole relics I have of hers, a ribbon or two, and a curl of hair, and calling to mind the few things Dallas remembered about her, I have imagined my mother, in her youth, must have been something like this young girl.

She entered the bed-room first.

“You may come in now. You will not startle him; I think he knows nobody.”

I sat down beside my patient. He lay, just as he had been brought in from the road, with a blanket and counterpane thrown over him, breathing heavily, but quite unconscious.

“The light, please. Can you hold it for me? Is your hand steady?” And I held it a moment to judge. That weakness cost me too much; I took care not to risk it again.

When I finished my examination, and looked up, Miss Theodora was still standing by me. Her eyes only asked the question—which, thank God, I could answer as I did.

“Yes—it is a more hopeful case than I expected.”

At this shadow of hope—for it was only a shadow—the deadly quiet in which she had kept herself was stirred. She began to tremble exceedingly. I took the candle from her, and gave her a chair.

“Never mind me. It is only for a minute,” she said. One or two deep, hard sighs came, and then she recovered herself. “Now, what is to be done?”

I told her I would do all that was necessary, if she would bring me various things I mentioned.

“Can I help you? There is no one else. Penelope has hurt her foot, and cannot move, and the servants are mere girls. Shall I stay? If there is to be an operation, I am not afraid.”

For I had, unguardedly, taken out of my pocket the case of instruments which, after all, would not be needed. I told her so, adding that I had rather she left me alone with my patient.

“Very well. You will take care of him? You will not hurt him—poor papa!”

Not very likely. If he and I could have changed places,—he assuming my strength and life, I lying on that bed, with death before me, under such a look as his child left him with,—I think I should at that moment have done it.

When I had laid the old man comfortably in his bed, I sat with his wrist under my fingers, counting, beat by beat, the slow pulse, which was one of my slender hopes for his recovery. As the hand dropped over my knee, powerless, almost, as a dead hand, it recalled, I know not how or why, the helpless drop of *that*, the first dead hand I ever saw. Happily the fancy lasted only a moment; in seasons like this, when I am deeply occupied in the practice of my profession, all such phantasms are laid. And the present case was urgent enough to concentrate all my thoughts and faculties.

I had just made up my mind concerning it, when a gentle knock came to the door, and on my answering, she walked in; glided rather, for she had taken off her silk gown, and put on something soft and dark, which did not rustle. In her face, white as it was, there was a quiet preparedness, more touching than any wildness of grief—a quality which few women possess, but which heaven never seems to give except to women, compelling us men, as it were, to our knees, in recognition of something diviner than anything we have, or are, or were ever meant to be. I mention this, lest it might be thought of me, as is often thought of doctors, that I did not feel.

She asked me no questions, but stood silently beside me, with her eyes fixed on her father. His just opened, as they had done several times before, wandered vacantly over the bed-curtains, and closed again, with a moan.

She looked at me, frightened—the poor child.

I explained to her that this moaning was no additional cause of alarm, rather the contrary; that her father might lie in his present state for hours—days.

“And can you do nothing for him?”

If I could—at any cost which mortal man could pay!

Motioning her to the furthest corner of the room, I there, as is my habit, when the friends of the patient seem capable of listening and comprehending, gave her my opinion about the course of treatment I intended to adopt, and my reasons for the same. In this case, of all others, I wished not to leave the relatives in the dark, lest they might afterwards blame me for doing nothing; when, in truth, to do nothing was the only chance. I told her my belief that it would be safest to maintain perfect silence and repose, and leave benignant Nature to work in her own mysterious way—Nature, whom the longer one lives, the more one trusts in as the only true physician.

“Therefore,” I said, “will you understand that however little I do, I am acting as I believe to be best? Will

you trust me?"

She looked up searchingly, and then said, "Yes." After a few moments she asked me how long I could stay? if I were obliged to return to the camp immediately?

I told her "No; I did not intend to return till morning."

"Ah, that is well! Shall I order a room to be prepared for you?"

"Thank you, but I prefer sitting up."

"You are very kind. You will be a great comfort."

I, "a great comfort!" I—"kind."

My thoughts must needs return into their right channel. I believe the next thing she said was something about my going to see "Penelope:" at least I found myself with my hand on the door, all but touching hers, as she was showing me how to open it.

"There: the second room to the left. Shall I go with you? No! I will stay here then, till you return."

So, after she had closed the door, I remained alone in the dim passage for a few moments. It was well. No man can be his own master at all times.

Miss Johnston was a good deal more hurt than she had confessed. As she lay on the bed, still in her gay dress, with artificial flowers in her hair—her face, pallid and drawn with pain, looked almost like that of an old woman. She seemed annoyed at my coming—she dislikes me, I know: but anxiety about her father, and her own suffering, kept her aversion within bounds. She listened to my medical report from the next room, and submitted to my orders concerning herself, until she learnt that at least a week's confinement, to rest her foot, would be necessary. Then she rebelled.

"That is impossible. I must be up and about. There is nobody to do anything but me."

"Your sister?"

"Lisabel is married. Oh, you meant Dora?—We never expect any useful thing from Dora."

This speech did not surprise me. It merely confirmed a good deal which I had already noticed in this family. Also, it might in degree be true. I think, so far from being blind to them, I see clearer than most people every fault she has.

Neither contradicting nor arguing, I repeated to Miss Johnston the imperative necessity for her attending to my orders: adding that I had known more than one case of a person being made a cripple for life by neglecting such an injury as hers.

"A cripple for life!" She started—her color came and went—her eye wandered to the chair beside her, on which was her little writing-case; I conclude that in the intervals of her pain she had been trying to send these ill news, or to apply for help to some one.

"You will be lame for life," I repeated, "unless you take care."

"Shall I now?"

"No—with reasonable caution I trust you will do well."

"That is enough. Do not trouble yourself any more about me. Pray go back to my father."

She turned from me and closed her eyes. There was nothing more to be done with Miss Penelope. Calling a servant who stood by, I gave my last orders concerning her, and departed. A strange person—this elder sister. What differences of character exist in families!

There was no change in my other patient. As I stood looking at him, his daughter glided round to my side. We exchanged a glance only—she seemed quite to understand that talking was inadmissible. Then she stood by me, silently gazing.

"You are sure there is no change?"

"None."

"Lisa—ought she not to know? I never sent a telegraph message; will you tell me how to do it?"

Her quiet assumption of duty—her thoughtful methodical arrangements; surely the sister was wrong,—that is, as I knew well, any great necessity would soon prove her to be wrong—about Miss Theodora.

I said there was no need to telegraph until morning, when, as I rode back to the camp, I would do it myself.

"Thank you."

No objection or apology; only that soft "thank you"—taking all things calmly and naturally, as a man would like to see a woman take the gift of his life, if necessary. No, not life; that is owed—but any or all of its few pleasures would be cheerfully laid down for such another "thank you."

While I was considering what should be done for the night, there came a rustling and chattering outside in the passage. Miss Johnston had sent a servant to sit up with her father. She came—knocking at the door-handle, rattling the candlestick, and tramping across the floor like a regiment of soldiers—so that my patient moaned, and put up his hand to his head.

I said—sharply enough, no doubt—that I must have quiet. A loud voice, a door slammed to, even a heavy step across the floor, and I would not answer for the consequences. If Mr. Johnston were meant to recover, there must be no one in his room but the doctor and the nurse.

"I understand—Susan, come away."

There was a brief conference outside; then Miss Theodora re-entered alone, bolted the door, and was again at my side.

"Will that do?"

"Yes."

The clock struck two while we were standing there. I stole a glance at her white, composed face.

"Can you sit up?—do you think?"

"Certainly."

Without more ado—for I was just then too much occupied with a passing change in my patient—the matter was decided. When I next looked for her, she had slipped round the foot of the bed, and taken her place behind the curtain on the other side. There we both sat, hour after hour, in total silence.

I tell everything, you see, just as minutely as I remember it—and shall remember—long after every circumstance, trivial or great, has faded out of every memory except mine. If these letters are ever read by other than myself, words and incidents long forgotten may revive: that when I die, as in the course of nature I shall do, long before younger persons, it may be seen that it is not youth alone which can receive impressions vividly and retain them strongly.

I could not see her—I could only see the face on the pillow, where a dim light fell; just enough to shew me the slightest change, did any come. But, closely as I watched, none did come. Not even a twitch or quiver broke that blank expression of repose which was neither life nor death.

I thought several times that it would settle into death before morning. And then?

Where was all my boasted skill, my belief in my own powers of saving life. Why, sitting here, trusted and looked up to, depended upon as the sole human stay—my countenance examined, as I felt it was, even as if it were the index and arbiter of fate—I—watching as I never watched before by any sick bed, this breath which trembled in the balance, felt myself as ignorant and useless as a child. Nay, I was “as a dead man before Thee,” O Thou humbler of pride!

Crying to myself thus—Job's cry—I thought of another Hebrew, who sought “not unto the Lord, but unto the physicians;” and died. It came into my mind, May there not be, even in these days, such a thing as “seeking the Lord?”

I believe there is: I *know* there is.

The candle went out. I had sat with my eyes shut, and had not noticed it, till I heard her steal across the room, trying to get a light. Afraid to trust my own heavy step—hers seemed as soft as snow—I contrived to pull the window-blind aside, so that a pale white streak fell across the hearth where she was kneeling—the cheerless hearth, for I had not dared to risk the noise of keeping up a fire.

She looked up, and shivered.

“Is that light morning?”

“Yes. Are you cold?”

“A little.”

“It is always cold at day-break. Go and get a shawl.”

She took no notice, but put the candle in its place and came over to me.

“How do you think he is?”

“No worse.”

A sigh, patient, but hopeless. I took an opportunity of examining her closely, to judge how long her self-control was likely to last; or whether, after this great shock and weary night-watch, her physical strength would fail. So looking, I noticed a few blood-drops trickling over her forehead, oozing from under her hair:—

“What is this?”

“Oh, nothing. I struck myself as we were lifting papa from the carriage. I thought it had ceased bleeding.”

“Let me look at it a moment. There—I shall not hurt you.”

“Oh, no. I am not afraid.”

I cut the hair from round the place, and plastered it up. It hardly took a minute; was the smallest of surgical operations; yet she trembled. I saw her strength was beginning to yield; and she might need it all.

“Now, you must go and lie down for an hour.”

She shook her head.

“You must.”

There might have been something harsh in the words—I did not quite know what I was saying—for she looked surprised.

“I mean you ought; which is enough argument with a girl like you. If you do not rest, you will never be able to keep up for another twelve hours, during which your father may need you. He does not need you now.”

“And you?”

“I had much rather be alone.” Which was most true.

So she left me; but, ten minutes after, I heard again the light step at the door.

“I have brought you this” (some biscuits and a glass of milk) “I know you never take wine.”

Wine! O Heaven, no! Would that, years ago, the first drop had burnt my lips—been as gall to my tongue—proved to me not drink, but poison—as the poor old man now lying there once wished it might have happened to any son of his. Well might my father, my young happy father, who married my mother, and, loving and loved, spent with her the brief years of their youth—well, indeed, might my father have wished it for me!

So there I sat, after the food she brought me had been swallowed down somehow—for it would have hurt her to come back and find it untouched. Thus watching, hope lessened by degrees, sank into mere conjectures as to the manner in which the watch would end. Possibly, in this state of half-consciousness, the breath would quietly pass away, without struggle or pain; which would be easiest for them all.

I laid my plans, in that case, either to be of any use to the family if I could, by remaining until the Trehermes arrived, or to leave immediately all was over. Circumstances, and their apparent wish, must be my only guide. Afterwards there would be no difficulty; the less they saw of any one who had been associated with such a painful time, the better. Better for all of them.

The clock below struck—what hour I did not count, but it felt like morning. It was,—must be—I must make it morning.

I went to the window to refresh my eyes with the soft white dawn, which, as I opened the blind, stole into the room, making the candle burn yellow and dim. The night was over and gone. Across the moorland, and up on the far hills, it was already morning.

A thought struck me, suggesting one more chance. Extinguishing the candle, I drew aside all the curtains, so as to throw the daylight in a full stream across the foot of the bed; and by the side of it—with the patient's hand between mine, and my eyes fixed steadily on his face—I sat down.

His eyes opened, not in the old blank way, but with an expression in them that I never expected to see again. They turned instinctively to the light; then, with a slow, a wandering, but perfectly rational, look towards me, feebly, the old man smiled.

That minute was worth dying for; or rather, having lived for, all these twenty years.

The rest which I have to tell must be told another time.

CHAPTER II. HIS STORY.

I have not been able to continue this. Every day has been full of business, and every night I have spent at Rockmount for the last three weeks.

Such was, I solemnly aver—from no fixed intention: I meant only to go as an ordinary doctor—in order, if possible, to serve the life that was valuable in itself, and most precious to some few; afterwards, whichever way the case terminated, to take my leave, like any other medical attendant: receiving thanks, or fee. Yes—if they offered it, I determined to take a fee; in order to show, both to them and myself, that I was only the doctor—the paid physician. But this last wound has been spared me—and I only name it now in proof that nothing has happened as I expected or intended.

I remember Dallas, in reading to me the sermons he used to write for practice, preparing for the sacred duties which, to him, never came—had one upon the text “Thy will be done,”—where, in words more beautiful than I dare try to repeat in mine, he explained how good it was for us that things so seldom fell out according to our shortsighted plannings; how many a man had lived to bless God that his own petty will had not been done; that nothing had happened to him according as he expected or intended.

Do you know, you to whom I write, how much it means, my thus naming to you of Dallas—whose name, since he died, has never but once passed my lips.

I think you would have liked my brother Dallas. He was not at all like me—I took after my father, people said, and he after our mother. He had soft, English features, and smooth, fine, dark hair. He was smaller than I, though so much the elder. The very last Christmas we had at St. Andrews, I mind lifting him up and carrying him several yards in play, laughing at him for being as thin and light as a lady. We were merry-hearted fellows, and had many a joke, the two of us, when we were together. Strange to think, that I am a man nigh upon forty, and that he has been dead twenty years.

It is you—little as you guess it, who have made me think upon these my dead, my father, mother, and Dallas, whom I have never dared to think of until now. Let me continue.

Mr. Johnston's has been a difficult case—more so in its secondary stages than at first. I explained this to his daughter—the second daughter; the only one whom I found of much assistance. Miss Johnston being extremely nervous, and irritable, and Mrs. Treherne, whom I trusted would have taken her share in the nursing, proving more of a hindrance than a help. She could not be made to comprehend why, when her father was out of danger, she should not rush in and out of the sick room continually, with her chattering voice, and her noisy silk dresses. And she was offended because, when Mr. Charteris, having come for a day from London, was admitted, quiet, scared, and shocked, to spend a few minutes by the old man's bed-side—her Augustus, full of lively rattle and rude animal spirits, was carefully kept out of the room.

“You plan it all between you,” she said, one day, half sulkily, to her sister and myself. “You play into one another's hands as if you had lived together all your lives. Confess, Doctor,—confess, Miss Nurse, you would keep me too out of papa's room, if you could.”

I certainly would. Though an excellent person, kind-hearted and good-tempered to a degree, Mrs. Treherne contrived to try my temper more than I should like to say, for two intolerable days.

The third, I resolved on a little conversation with Miss Theodora; who, having sat up till my watch began at two, now came in to me while I was taking breakfast, to receive my orders for the day. These were simple enough; quiet, silence; and, except old Mrs. Cartwright, whom I had sent for, only one person to be allowed in my patient's room.

“Ah, yes, I'm glad of that. Just hearken!” Doors slamming—footsteps on the stairs—Mrs. Treherne calling out to her husband not to smoke in the hall.—“That is how it is all day, when you are away. What can I do? Help me, please, help me!”

An entreaty, almost childish in its earnestness; now and then, through all this time, she has seemed in her behaviour towards me, less like a woman than a trusting dependant child.

I sent for Treherne and his wife, and told them that the present was a matter of life and death, in which there could be no standing upon ceremony; that in this house, where no legitimate rule existed, and all were young and inexperienced, I, as the physician, must have authority, which authority must be obeyed. If they wished, I would resign the case altogether—but I soon saw that was not desired. They promised obedience; and I repeated the medical orders, adding, that during my absence, only one person, the person I chose,

should be left in charge of my patient.

"Very well, Doctor," said Mrs. Treherne, "and that is—"

"Miss Theodora."

"Theodora—oh, nonsense! She never nursed anybody. She never was fit for anything."

"She is fit for all I require, and her father wishes for her also; therefore, if you please, will you at once go up to him, Miss Theodora?"

She had stood patient and impassive till I spoke, then the colour rushed into her face and the tears into her eyes. She left the room immediately.

But, as I went, she was lying in wait for me at the door. "Thank you—thank you so much! But do you really think I shall make a good careful nurse for dear papa?"

I told her "Certainly—better than any one else here—better indeed than anyone I knew."

It was good to see her look of happy surprise.

"Do you really think that? Nobody ever thought so well of me before. I will try—ah! won't I try, to deserve your good opinion."

Ignorant, simple heart.

Most people have some other person, real or imaginary, who is more "comfortable" to them than anyone else—to whom in trouble the thoughts always first fly, who in sickness would be chosen to smooth the weary pillow, and holding whose hand they would like to die. Now, it would be quite easy, quite happy to die in a certain chamber I know, shadowy and still, with a carpet of a green leafy pattern, and bunches of fuchsias papering the walls. And about the room, a little figure moving; slender, noiseless, busy and sweet—in a brown dress, soft to touch, and making no sound, with a white collar fastened by a little coloured bow above it; the delicate throat and small head like a deer's; and the eyes something like a deer's eyes also, which turn round large and quiet, to look you right in the face—as they did then.

I wonder if any accident or illness were to happen to me here, while staying in the camp—something that would make it certain I had only a few days, or hours, to live, and I happened to have sufficient consciousness and will to say what I wished done, whom I desired to see, in those few last hours, when the longing of a dying man could injure nobody,—Enough—this is the merest folly. To live, not to die, is likely to be my portion I accept it—blame me not.

Day after day has gone on in the same round—my ride to Rockmount after dusk, tea there, and my evening sleep in "the Doctor's room." There, at midnight, Treherne wakes me—I dress and return to that quiet chamber where the little figure rises from beside the bed with a smile and a whisper—"Not at all tired, thank you." A few words more, and I give it my candle, bid it good night, and take its place, sitting down in the same armchair, and leaning my head back against the same cushion, which still keeps the indentation, soft and warm; and so I watch by the old man till morning.

This is how it has regularly been.

Until lately, night was the patient's most trying time. He used to lie moaning, or watching the shadows of the fire-light on the curtains. Sometimes, when I gave him food or medicine, turning upon me with a wild stare, as if he hardly knew me, or thought I was someone else. Or he would question me vaguely as to where was Dora?—and would I take care that she had a good long sleep—poor Dora!

Dora—Theodora—"the gift of God,"—it is good to have names with meanings to them, though people so seldom resemble their names. Her father seems beginning to feel that she is not unlike hers.

"She is a good girl, Doctor," he said one evening, when, after having safely borne moving from bed to his arm-chair, I pronounced my patient convalescent, and his daughter was sent to take tea and spend the evening downstairs, "she is a very good girl. Perhaps I have never thought of my daughters."

I answered vaguely, daughters were a great blessing—often more so than sons.

"You are right, sir," he said suddenly, after a few minutes' pause. "You were never married I believe?"

"No."

"If you do marry—never long for a son. Never build your hopes on him—trusting he will keep up your name, and be the stay of your old age. I had one boy, sir; he was more to me than all my daughters."

A desperate question was I prompted to ask—I could not withhold it—though the old man's agitated countenance showed that it must be one passing question only.

"Is your son living?"

"No. He died young."

This, then, must be the secret—simple and plain enough. He was "a boy"—he died "young," perhaps about eighteen or nineteen—the age when boys are most prone to run wild. This lad must have done so; putting all the circumstances together, the conclusion was obvious, that in some way or other he had, before his death, or in his death, caused his father great grief and shame.

I could well imagine it; fancy drew the whole picture, filling it up pertinaciously, line by line. A man of Mr. Johnston's character, marrying late in life—as he must have done, to be seventy when his youngest child was not much over twenty—would be a dangerous father for any impetuous headstrong boy. A motherless boy too; Mrs. Johnston died early. It was easy to understand how strife would rise between him and the father, no longer young, with all his habits and peculiarities formed, sensitive, over-exacting; rigidly good, yet of somewhat narrow-minded virtue: scrupulously kind, yet not tender; alive to the lightest fault, yet seldom warming into sympathy or praise. The sort of man who compels respect, and whom, being oneself blameless, one might even love; but having committed any error, one's first impulse would be to fly from him to the very end of the earth.

Such, no doubt, had been the case with that poor boy, who "died young." Out of England, no doubt, or surely they would have brought him home and buried him under the shadow of his father's church, and his memory would have left some trace in the family, the village, or the neighbourhood. As it was, it seemed

blotted out—as if he had never existed. No one knew about him—no one spoke about him, not even the sisters, his playmates. So she—the second sister—had said. It was a tacit hint for me also to keep silence; otherwise I would have liked to ask her more about him—this poor fallen boy. I know how suddenly, how involuntarily, as it seems, a wretched boy can fall—into some perdition never afterwards retrieved.

Thinking thus—sitting by the bedroom fire with Mr. Johnston asleep opposite—poor old man, it must have been his boy's case and not his own which has made him so sensitive about only sons—I suddenly called to mind how, in the absorbing anxiety of the last three weeks—*that day*—the anniversary—had slipped by, and I had not even recollected it. It could be forgotten then?—was this a warning that I might let it pass, if it would, into oblivion—and yield like any other man, to pleasant duties, and social ties, the warmth of which stole into me, body and soul, like this blessed household fire. It could not last—but while it did last, why not share it; why persist in sitting outside in the cold?

You will not understand this. There are some things I cannot explain, till the last letter, if ever I should come to write it. Then you will know.

Tea over, Miss Theodora came to see after “our patient,” as she called him, asking if he had behaved well, and done nothing he ought not to have done?

I told her, that was an amount of perfection scarcely to be exacted from any mortal creature; at which she laughed, and replied, she was sure I said this with an air of deprecation, as if afraid such perfection might be required of me.

Often her little hand carries an invisible sword. I try to hide the wounds, but the last hour's meditation made them sharper than ordinary. For once, she saw it. She came and knelt by the fire, not far from me, thoughtfully. Then, suddenly turning round, said:—

“If ever I say a rude thing to you, forgive it. I wish I were only half as good as you.”

The tone, so earnest, yet so utterly simple,—a child might have said the same, looking into one's face with the same frank eyes. God forgive me! God pity me!

I rose and went to the bedside to speak to her father, who just then woke, and called for “Dora.”

If in nothing else, this illness has been a blessing; drawing closer together the father and daughter. She must have been thinking so, when to-day she said to me:—

“It is strange how many mouthfuls of absolute happiness one sometimes tastes in the midst of trouble,” adding—I can see her attitude as she talked, standing with eyes cast down, mouth sweet and smiling, and fingers playing with her apron-tassels—a trick she has—“that she now felt as if she should never be afraid of trouble any more.”

That also is comprehensible. Anything which calls out the dormant energies of the character must do a woman good. With some women, to be good and to be happy is one and the same thing.

She is changed too, I can see. Pale as she looks, there is a softness in her manner and a sweet composure in her face, different from the restlessness I once noticed there—the fitful irritability, or morbid pain, perceptible at times, though she tried hard to disguise both. And succeeded doubtless, in all eyes but mine.

She is more cheerful too than she ever used to be, not restlessly lively, like her eldest sister, but seeming to carry about in her heart a well-spring of content, which bubbles out refreshingly upon everything and everybody about her. It is especially welcome in the sick room, where, she knows, our chief aim is to keep the mind at ease, and the feeble brain in absolute rest. I could smile, remembering the hours we have spent—patient, doctor and nurse, in the most puerile amusements, and altogether delicious nonsense, since Mr. Johnston became convalescent.

All this is over now. I knew it was. I sat by the fire, watching her play off her loving jests upon her father, and prattle with him, childish-like, about all that was going on downstairs.

“You little quiz!” he cried at last. “Doctor, this girl is growing—I can't say witty—but absolutely mischievous.”

I said, talents long dormant sometimes appeared. We might yet discover in Miss Theodora Johnston the most brilliant wit of her day.

“Doctor Urquhart, it's a shame! How can you laugh at me so? But I don't care. You are all the better for having somebody to laugh at. You know you are.”

I did know it—only too well, and my eyes might have betrayed it, for hers sank. She coloured a little, sat down to her work, and sewed on silently, thoughtfully, for a good while.

What was in her mind? Was it pity? Did she fancy she had hurt me—touched unwittingly one of my many sores? She knows I have had a hard life, with few pleasures in it; she would gladly give me some; she is sorry for me.

Most people's compassion is worse than their indifference; but hers—given out of the fullness of the pure, tender, unsuspecting heart—I can bear it. I can be grateful for it.

On this first evening that broke the uniformity of the sick-room, we thought it better, she and I, considering the peculiarities of the rest of the family, which she seems to take for granted I am aware of, and can make allowance for—that none of them should be admitted this night. A prohibition not likely to afflict them much.

“And pray, Miss Dora, how do you mean to entertain the doctor and me?”

“I mean to give you a large dose of my brilliant conversation, and, lest it becomes too exciting, to season it with a little reading, out of something that neither of you take the smallest interest in, and will be able to go to sleep over properly. Poetry—most likely.”

“Some of yours?”

She coloured deeply. “Hush, papa, I thought you had forgotten—you said it was 'nonsense,' you know.”

“Very likely it was. But I mean to give it another reading some day. Never mind—nobody heard.”

So she writes poetry. I always knew she was very clever, besides being well-educated. Talented women—modern Corinnes—my impression of them was rather repulsive. But she—that soft, shy girl, with her gay

simplicity, her meek, household ways—

I said, if Miss Theodora were going to read, perhaps she might remember she had once promised to improve my mind with a course of German literature. There was a book about a gentleman of my own name—Max—Max something or other—

“Piccolomini. You have not forgotten him! What a memory you have for little things.” She thought so! I said, if she considered a poor doctor, accustomed to deal more with bodies than souls, could comprehend the sort of books she seemed so fond of, I would like to hear about Max Piccolomini.

“Certainly. Only—”

“You think I could not understand it.”

“I never thought any such thing,” she cried out in her old abrupt way, and went out of the room immediately.

The book she fetched was a little dainty one. Perhaps it had been a gift. I asked to look at it.

“Can you read German?”

“Not a line.” For my few words of conversational foreign tongues have been learnt orally, the better to communicate with stray patients in hospitals. I told her so. “I am very ignorant, as you must have long since found out, Miss Theodora.”

She said nothing, but began to read. At first translating line by line; then saying a written translation would be less trouble, she fetched one. It was in her handwriting—probably her own doing.

No doubt every one, except such an unlearned ass as myself, is familiar with the story—historical, I believe she said—how a young soldier, Max Piccolomini, fell in love with the daughter of his General Wallenstein, who, heading an insurrection, wished the youth to join in—promising him the girl's hand. There is one scene where the father tempts, and brings the daughter to tempt him, by hope of this bliss, to turn rebel; but the young man is firm—the girl, too, when he appeals to her, bids him keep to his duty, and renounce his love. It is a case such as may have happened—might happen in these days—were modern men and women capable of such attachments. Something of the sort of love upon which Dallas used to theorise when we were boys, always winding up with his favourite verse—how strange that it should come back to my mind now:—

“I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.”

Max—odd enough the name sounded, and she hesitated over it at first, with a half-laughing apology, then forgetting all but her book, it came out naturally and sweetly—oh, so sweetly sometimes—Max *died*. How, I do not clearly remember, but I know he died, and never married the girl he loved; that the time when he held her in his arms, and kissed her before her father and them all, was the last time they ever saw one another.

She read, sometimes hurriedly and almost inaudibly, and then just like the people who were speaking, as if quite forgetting herself in them. I do not think she even recognised that there was a listener in the room. Perhaps she thought, because I sat so still, that I did not hear or feel, that I, Max Urquhart, have altogether forgotten what it is to be young and to love.

When she ceased, Mr. Johnston was sound asleep; we both sat silent. I stretched out my hand for the written pages, to go over some of the sentences again; she went on reading the German volume to herself. Her face was turned away, but I could see the curve of her cheek, and the smooth, spiral twist of her hair behind—I suppose, if untwisted, it would reach down to her knees. This German girl, Thekla, might have had just such hair; this boy—this Max—might have been allowed sometimes to touch it—reverently to kiss it.

I was interrupted here. A case at the hospital; James McDermot—fever-ward—cut his throat in a fit of delirium. There must have been great neglect in the nurse or orderly—perhaps in more than they. These night absences were bad—this pre-occupation—though I have tried earnestly to fulfil all my duties. Yet, as I walked back, the ghastly figure of the dead man was ever before me.

Have I not a morbid conscience, which revels in self-accusation? Suppose there were one who knew me as I knew myself—could shew myself unto myself, and say, “Poor soul, 'tis nothing. Forget thyself, think of another—thy other self—of me.”

Why recount this, one of the countless painful incidents that are always recurring to our profession? Because, having begun, I must tell you all that happens to me, as a man would, coming home after his day's labour to his—let me write down the word steadily—his *wife*. His wife; nearer to him than any mortal thing—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; his rest, comfort, and delight—whom, more than almost any man, a doctor requires, seeing that on the dark side of human life his path must continually lie.

Sometimes, though, bright bits come across us—such as when the heavy heart is relieved, or the shadow of death lifted off from a dwelling: moments when the doctor, much to his own conscious humiliation, is apt to be regarded as an angel of deliverance—seasons when he is glad to linger a little amidst the glow of happiness he has been instrumental in bringing, before he turns out again into the shadows of his appointed way.

And such will always be this, which I may v consider the last of my nights at Rockmount.

They would not hear of my leaving, though it was needless to sit up. And when I had seen Mr. Johnston safe, and snug for the night, they insisted on my joining the merry supper-table, where, relieved now from all care, the family assembled. The family included, of course, Mr. Charteris. I was the only stranger.

They did not treat me as a stranger—you know that. Sometimes falling, as the little party naturally did, into two, and two, and two, it seemed as if the whole world were conspiring to wrap me in the maddest of delusions; as if I always had sat, and were meant to sit, familiarly, brotherly, at that family table; as if my old solitude were quite over and gone, never to return more. And, over all, was the atmosphere of that German love-tale, which came up curiously to the surface, and caused a conversation, which, in some parts of it, seems the strangest thing of all that strange evening.

It was Mrs. Treherne who originated it. She asked her sister what had we been doing that we were so exceedingly quiet upstairs?

"Reading—papa wished it." And being further questioned, Miss Theodora told what had been read.

Mrs. Treherne burst out laughing immoderately.

It would hardly be expected of such well-bred and amiable ladies, but I have often seen the eldest and youngest sisters annoy her—the second one—in some feminine way—men would never think of doing it, or guess how it is done—sufficient to call the angry blood to her cheeks, and cause her whole manner to change from gentleness into defiance. It was so now.

"I do not see anything so very ridiculous in my reading to papa out of any book I choose."

I explained that I myself had begged for this one.

"Oh! and I'm sure she was delighted to oblige you."

"I was," she said, boldly; "and I consider that anything, small or great, which either I, or you, or Penelope, can do to oblige Doctor Urquhart, we ought to be happy and thankful to do for the remainder of our lives."

Mrs. Treherne was silenced. And here, Mr. Charteris—breaking the uncomfortable pause—good-naturedly began a disquisition on the play in question. He bore, for some time, the chief part in a literary and critical conversation, of which I did not hear or follow much. Then the ladies took up the story in its moral and personal phase, and talked it over pretty well.

The youngest sister was voluble against it. She hated doleful books: she liked a pleasant ending, where the people were all married, cheerfully and comfortably.

It was suggested, from my side of the table, that this play had not an uncomfortable ending, though the lovers both died.

"What an odd notion of comfort Dora has," said Mr. Charteris.

"Yes, indeed," added Mrs. Treherne. For if they hadn't died, were they not supposed never to meet again? My dear child, how do you intend to make your lover happy?

"By bidding him an eternal farewell, allowing him to get killed, and then dying on his tomb?"

Everybody laughed. Treherne said he was thankful his Lisa was not of her sister's mind.

"Ay, Gus dear, well you may! Suppose I had come and said to you, like Dora's heroine, 'my dear boy, we are very fond of one another, but we can't ever be married. It's of no consequence. Never mind. Give me a kiss, and good-bye,'—what would you have done, eh, Augustus?"

"Hanged myself," replied Augustus, forcibly.

"If you did not think better of it while searching for a cord," drily observed Mr. Charteris. (I have for various reasons noticed this gentleman rather closely of late.) "Dora's theories about love are pretty enough, but too much on the gossamer style. Poor human nature requires a little warmer clothing than these 'sky robes of iris woof,' which are *not* warranted to wear."

As he spoke, I saw Miss Johnston's black eyes dart over to his face in keen observation, but he did not see them. Immediately afterwards she said:—

"Francis is quite right. Dora's heroics do her no good—nor anybody; because such characters do not exist, and never did. Max and Thekla, for instance, are a pair of lovers utterly impossible in this world."

"True," said Mr. Charteris, "even as Romeo and Juliet are impossible, Shakspeare himself owns

'These violent delights have violent ends.'

Had Juliet lived, she would probably not by force, but in the most legal, genteel, and satisfactory way, have been 'married to the County;' or, supposing she had got off safe to Mantua, obtained parental forgiveness, and returned to set up house-keeping as Mrs. R. Montague; depend upon it she and Romeo would have wearied of one another in a year, quarrelled, parted, and she might, after all, have consoled herself with Paris, who seems such a sweet-spoken, pretty-behaved young gentleman throughout. Do you not think so, Doctor Urquhart? that is, if you are a reader of Shakspeare."

Which he apparently thought I was not. I answered, what has often struck me about this play, "that Shakspeare only meant it as a tale of boy and girl passion. Whether it would have lasted, or grown out of passion into love, one need not speculate, any more than the poet does. Enough, that while it lasts, it is a true and beautiful picture of youthful love—that is, youth's ideal of love. Though the love of maturer life is often a far deeper, higher, and better thing."

Here Mrs. Treherne, bursting into one of her hearty laughs, accused her sister of having "turned Doctor Urquhart poetical."

It is painful to appear like a fool, even when a lively young woman is trying to make you do so. I sat, cruelly conscious how little I have to say—how like an awkward, dull clod I often feel—in the society of young and clever people, when I heard her speaking from the other end of the table—I mean, Miss Theodora.

"Lisabel, you are talking of what you do not understand. You never did, and never will understand my Max and Thekla, any more than Francis there, though he once thought it so fine, when he was teaching Penelope German, a few years ago."

"Dora, your excitement is unlady-like."

"I do not care," she answered, turning upon her elder sister with flashing eyes. "To sit by quietly and hear such doctrines, is worse than unlady-like—unwoman-like! You two girls may think as you please on the matter; but I know what I have always thought—and think still."

"Pray, will you indulge us with your creed?" cried Mr. Charteris.

She hesitated—her cheeks burnt like fire—but still she spoke out bravely.

"I believe, spite of all you say, that there is, not only in books, but in the world, such a thing as love, unselfish, faithful and true, like that of my Thekla and my Max. I believe that such a love—a *right* love—teaches people to think of the *right* first, and themselves afterwards; and, therefore, if necessary, they could bear to part for any number of years—or even for ever."

"Bless us all; I wouldn't give two farthings for a man who would not do anything—do wrong even—for my sake."

"And I, Lisabel, should esteem a man a selfish coward, whom I might pity, but I don't think I could ever love him again, if in any way he did wrong for mine."

From my corner, whither I had gone and sat down a little out of the circle, I saw this young face—flashing, full of a new expression. Dallas, when he talked sometimes, used to have just such a light in his eyes—just such a glory streaming from all his features; but then he was a boy, and this was a woman. Ay, one felt her womanhood, the passion and power of it, with all its capabilities for either blessing or maddening, in the very core of one's being.

The others chattered a little more, and then I heard her speaking again.

"Yes, Lisabel, you are quite right; I do *not* think it of so very much importance, whether people who are very deeply attached, ever live to be married or not. In one sense they are married already, and nothing can come between them, so long as they love one another."

This seemed an excellent joke to the Trehermes, and drew a remark or two from Mr. Charteris, to which she refused to reply.

"No; you put me in a passion, and forced me to speak; but I have done now. I shall not argue the point any more."

Her voice trembled, and her little hands nervously clutched and plaited the table-cloth; but she sat in her place, without moving features or eyes. Gradually the burning in her cheeks faded, and she grew excessively pale; but no one seemed to notice her. They were too full of themselves.

I had time to learn the picture by heart. every line; this little figure sitting by the table, bent head, drooping shoulders, and loose white sleeves shading the two hands, which were crushed so tightly together, that when she stirred I saw the finger-marks of one imprinted on the other. What could she have been thinking of?

"Miss Dora, please."

It was only a servant, saying her father wished to speak to her before he went to sleep.

"Say I am coming." She rose quickly, but turned before she reached the door. "I may not see you again before you go. Good night, Dr. Urquhart."

We have said good night, and shaken hands every night for three weeks. I know I have done my duty; no lingering, tender clasping what I had no right to clasp; a mere "good night," and shake of the hand. But, to-night?

I did not say a word—I did not look at her. Yet the touch of that little cold, passive hand has never left mine since. If I lay my hand down here, on this table, it seems to creep into it and nestle there; if I let it go, it comes back again; if I crush my fingers down upon it, though there is nothing, I feel it still—feel it through every nerve and pulse, in heart, soul, body, and brain.

This is the merest hallucination, like some of the spectral illusions I have been subject to at times;—the same which made Coleridge once say "he had seen too many ghosts to believe in them."

Let me gather up my faculties.

I am sitting in my hut. There is no fire—no one ever thinks of lighting a fire, for me, of course, unless I specially order it. The room is chill, warning me that winter is nigh at hand: disorderly—no one ever touches my goods and chattels, and I have been too much from home lately to institute any arrangement myself. All solitary, too; even my cat, who used to be the one living thing lingering about me, marching daintily over my books, or stealing up purring to lay her head upon my knee, even my cat, weary of my long absence, has disappeared to my next-door neighbour. I am quite alone.

Well, such is the natural position of a man without near kindred, who has reached my years, and has not married. He has no right to expect aught else to the end of his days.

I rode home from Rockmount two hours ago, leaving a still lively group sitting round the fire in the parlour—Miss Johnston on her sofa, with Mr. Charteris beside her; Treherne sitting opposite, with his arm round his wife's waist.

And upstairs, I know how things will look—the shadowy bed-chamber, the little white china lamp on the table, and one curtain half-looped back, so that the old man may just catch a glimpse of the bending figure, reading to him the Evening Psalms; or else she will, by this time, have said "Good night, papa," and kissed him, and gone away to the upper part of the house, of which I know nothing, and have never seen. Therefore, I can only fancy her as I one night happened to see, going upstairs, candle in hand, softly, step by step, as saintly souls slip away into paradise, and we below, though we would cling to the hem of their garments, crush our lips in the very print of their feet, can neither hold them, nor dare beseech them to stay.

Oh, if I were only dead, that you might have this letter,—might know, feel, comprehend all these things!

I have been "doing wrong." I owe it to myself—to more than myself, not to yield to weak lamentation or unmanly bursts of frenzy against inevitable fate.

Is it inevitable?

Before beginning to write to-night, for two hours I sat arguing with myself this question; viewing the

circumstances of both parties, for such a question necessarily includes both, with a calmness which I believe even I can attain, when the matter involves not myself alone. I have come to the conclusion that it *is* inevitable.

When you reach these my years, when you have experienced all those changes which you now dream over, and theorise upon in your innocent, unconscious heart, you also will see that my judgment was right.

To seek and sue a woman's yet unwon love, implies the telling her, when won, the whole previous history of her lover, concealing nothing, fair or foul, which does not compromise any other than himself. This confidence she has a right to expect, and the man who withholds it is either a coward in himself, or doubts the woman of his choice, as, should he so doubt his wife,—woe to him and to her! To carry into the sanctuary of a true wife's breast, some accursed thing which must be for ever hidden in his own, has always seemed to me one of the blackest treasons against both honour and love, of which a man could be capable.

Could I tell my wife, or the woman whom I would fain teach to love me, my whole history? And if I did, would it not close the door of her heart eternally against me? or, supposing it was too late for that, and she already loved me, would it not make her, for my sake, miserable for life? I believe it would.

On this account merely, things are inevitable.

There is another reason; whether it comes second or first in my arguments with myself, I do not know. When a man has vowed a vow, dare he break it?

There is a certain vow of mine, which, did I marry, *must* be broken. No man in his senses, or possessing the commonest feelings of justice and tenderness, would give his name to a beloved woman, with the possibility of children to inherit it, and then bring upon each and all of them *the end*, which I have all my life resolutely contemplated as a thing necessary to be done—either immediately before my death, or after it.

Therefore, also, it is inevitable.

That word—inevitable—always calms me. It is the will of God. If He had meant otherwise, He would have found out a way—perhaps by sending me some good woman to love me, as men are loved sometimes, but not such men as I. There is no fear—or hope—which shall I say?—of any one ever loving me.

Sleep, child! You are fast asleep by this hour, I am sure: you once said, you always fall asleep the instant your head touches the pillow. Blessed pillow! precious, tender, lovely head!

“Good night.” Sleep well, happy ignorant child.

CHAPTER III. HER STORY.

Finished to-morrow.” What a life-time seems to have elapsed since I wrote that line!

A month and four days ago, I sat here, waiting for papa and Penelope to come home from their dinner party. Trying to be cheerful—wondering why I was not so: yet with my heart as heavy as lead all the time.

I think it will never be quite so heavy any more. Never weighed down by imaginary wrongs and ideal woes. It has known real anguish and been taught wisdom.

We have been very near losing our beloved father. Humanly speaking, we should have lost him but for Doctor Urquhart, to whose great skill and unremitting care, Doctor Black himself confessed yesterday, papa has, under God, owed his life.

It is impossible for me to write down here the particulars of dear papa's accident, and the illness which followed, every day of which seems at once so vivid and so unreal. I shall never forget it while I live, and yet, even now, am afraid to recall it. Though at the time I seemed afraid of nothing—strong enough for everything. I felt—or it now appears as though I must have done so—as I did on one sunshiny afternoon, at a pic-nic, about a dozen years ago—when I, following Colin Granton, walked round the top of a circular rock, on a ledge two feet wide, a sloping ledge of short slippery grass, where, if we had slipped, it was about ninety perpendicular feet to fall.

I shudder to think of that feat, even now; and telling it to Doctor Urquhart in illustration of what I am here mentioning, namely, the quiet unconsciousness with which one sometimes passes through exceeding great danger, he too shuddered, turned deadly white. I never saw a strong man lose colour so suddenly and completely as he does, at times.

Can he be really strong? Those nights of watching must have told upon his health; which is so valuable. Doubly valuable to one in his profession. We must try to make him take care of himself, and allow us—Rockmount generally—to take care of him. Though, since his night-watchings ceased, he has not given us much opportunity, having only paid his due medical visit once a-day, and scarcely stayed ten minutes afterwards,—until to-day, when by papa's express desire, Augustus drove over and fetched him to dinner.

It is pleasant to be able to write down here, how very much better I like my brother-in-law. His thorough goodness of nature, his kindly cheering ways, and his unaffected, if rather obstreperous love for his wife, which is reflected, as it should be, upon every creature belonging to her, make it impossible not to like him. I am heartily glad he has sold out, so that even if war breaks out again, there will be no chance of his being ordered off on foreign service. Though in that case, he declares he should feel himself in honour bound to volunteer. But Lisabel only laughs; she knows better.

Still, I trust there may be no occasion. War, viewed in the abstract, is sufficiently terrible; but when it comes home, when one's self, and one's own, are bound up in the chances of it, the case is altogether

changed. Some misfortunes contemplated as personal possibilities, seem more than human nature could bear. How the mothers, sisters, wives, have borne them all through this war is—

My head turned dizzy here, and I was obliged to leave off writing, and lie down. I have not felt very strong lately—that is, not bodily strong. In my heart I have—thoroughly calm, happy, and thankful—as God knows we have all need to be, since he has spared our dear father, never loved so dearly as now. But physically, I am rather tired and weak, as if I would fain rest my head somewhere and be taken care of. If there were anybody to do it, which there is not. Since I can remember, nobody ever took care of me.

While writing this last line, old Mrs. Cartwright came up to bring me some arrowroot with wine in it, for my supper, entreating me to go to bed “like a good child.” She said “the Doctor” told her to look after me; but she should have done it herself, anyhow. She is a good old body—I wish we could find out anything about her poor lost daughter.

What was I writing about? Oh, the history of to-day: where I take up the thread of my journal, leaving the whole interval between, a blank. I could not write about it if I would.

I did not go to church with them this morning, feeling sure I could not walk so far, and some one ought to stay with papa. So the girls went, and Doctor Urquhart also, at which papa seemed just a little disappointed, he having counted on a long morning's chat.

I never knew papa attach himself to any man before, or take such exceeding delight in any one's company. He said the other day, when Augustus annoyed him about some trifle or other, that “he wished he might have chosen his own son-in-law—Lisabel had far better have married Doctor Urquhart.”

Our Lisabel and Doctor Urquhart! I could not help laughing. Day and night—fire and water, would have best described their union.

Penelope now, though she has abused him so much—but that was Francis's fault,—would have suited him a deal better. They are more friendly than they used to be—indeed he is on good terms with all Rockmount. We feel, every one of us, I trust, that our obligations to him are of a kind of which we never can acquit ourselves while we live.

This great grief has been in many ways, like most afflictions, “a blessing in disguise.” It has drawn us altogether, as nothing but trouble ever does, as I did not think anything ever would, so queer a family are we. But we are improving. We do not now shut ourselves up in our rooms, hiding each in her hole like a selfish bear until feeding time—we assemble in the parlor—we sit and talk round papa's study-chair. There, this morning after church, we held a convocation and confabulation before papa came down.

And, strange to say—almost the first time such a thing ever happened in ours, though a clergyman's family—we talked about church and the sermon.

It was preached by the young man whom papa has been obliged to take as curate, and who, Penelope said, she feared would never suit, if he took such eccentric texts, and preached such out-of-the-way sermons as the one this morning. I asked what it was about, and was answered, “the cities of refuge.”

I fear I do not know my Bible—the historic portion of it—so well as I might; for I scandalized Penelope exceedingly by inquiring what were “the cities of refuge.” She declared any child in her school would have been better acquainted with the Old Testament, and I had it at my tongue's end to say that a good many of her children seemed far too glibly and irreverently acquainted with the Old Testament, for I once overheard a knot of them doing the little drama of Elijah, the mocking children, and the bears in the wood, to the confusion of our poor bald-headed organist, and their own uproarious delight, especially the two boys who enacted the bears. But 'tis wicked to tease our good Penelope—at least I think it wicked now.

So I said nothing; but after the sermon had been well talked over as “extraordinary,” “unheard of in our church,” “such a mixing of politics and religion, and bringing up everyday subjects into the pulpit,”—for it seems he had alluded to some question of capital punishment, which now fills the newspapers—I took an opportunity of asking Doctor Urquhart what the sermon really had been about. I can often speak to him of things which I never should dream of discussing with my sisters, or even papa. For, whatever the subject is, he will always listen, answer, explain; either laughing away my follies, or talking to me seriously and kindly.

This time, though, he was not so patient; asked me abruptly, “Why I wanted to know?”

“About the sermon? From harmless curiosity. Or rather,”—for I would not wish him to think that in any religious matter I was guided by no higher motive than curiosity, “because I doubt Penelope's judgment of the curate. She is rather harsh sometimes.”

“Is she?”

“Will you find for me,”—and I took out of my pocket my little Bible, which I had been reading in the garden,—“about the cities of refuge? That is, unless you dislike to talk on the subject.”

“Who—I—what made you suppose so?”

I replied candidly, his own manner, while they were arguing it.

“You must not mind my manner—it is not kind—it is not friendly.” And then he begged my pardon, saying he knew he often spoke more rudely to me than to anyone else.

If he does it harms me not. He must have so many causes of anxiety and irritation, which escape by expression. I wish he would express them a little more, indeed. One could bear to be really scolded, if it did him any good. But, of course, I should have let the theological question slip by, had he not, some minutes after, referred to it himself. We were standing outside the window; there was no one within hearing; indeed, he rarely talks very seriously unless he and I happen to be alone.

“Did you think as they do—your sisters, I mean—that the Mosaic law is still our law—an eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth—a life for a life—and so on?”

I said I did not quite understand him.

“It was the subject of the sermon. Whether he who takes life forfeits his own. The law of Moses enacted this. Even the chance murderer, the man guilty of manslaughter, as we should term it now, was not safe out of the bounds of the three cities of refuge. The avenger of blood finding him, might slay him.”

I asked, what he thought was meant by "the avenger of blood." Was it divine or human retribution?

"I cannot tell. How should I know? Why do you question me?"

I might have said, because I liked to talk to him, and hear him talk; because, in many a perplexed subject over which I had been wearying myself, his opinion had guided me and set me right. I did hint something of the kind, but he seemed not to hear or heed it, and continued:—

"Do you think, with the minister of this morning, that, except in very rare cases, we—we Christians, have no right to exact a life for a life? Or do you believe, on religious as well as rational grounds, that every man-slayer, should inevitably be hanged?"

I have often puzzled over that question, which Doctor Urquhart evidently felt as much as I did. Truly, many a time have I turned sick at the hangings which I have had to read to papa in the newspapers—have wakened at seven in the morning, and counted, minute by minute some wretched convict's last hour—till the whole scene grew so vivid that the execution seemed more of a murder than the original crime of which it was the expiation. But still, to say that there ought to be no capital punishments? I could not tell. I only repeated softly, words that came into my mind at that instant.

"For we know that no murderer hath eternal life in him?"

"But if he were *not* a wilful murderer?—if life were taken—let us suppose such a case—in violent passion, or under circumstances which made the man not himself?—if his crime were repented of and atoned for in every possible way—the lost life re-purchased by his own—not by dying, but by the long torment of living?"

"Yes," I said, "I could well imagine a convict's existence, or that of one convicted in his own conscience—a duellist, for instance—far more terrible than death upon the scaffold."

"You are right; I have seen such cases."

No doubt he has, since, as an officer once told me, the army still holds duelling to be the necessary defence of a gentleman's "honor." The recollections aroused were apparently very sore; so much so that I suggested our changing the subject, which seemed both painful and unprofitable.

"Not quite. Besides, would you quit a truth because it happened to be painful? That is not like you."

"I hope not."

After a few minutes' silence, he continued:—"This is a question I have thought over deeply. I have my own opinion concerning it, and I know that of most men; but I should like to hear a woman's—a Christian woman's. Tell me, do you believe the avenger of blood walks through the Christian world, as through the land of Israel, requiring retribution; that for blood-shedding as for all other crimes, there is, in this world, whatever there may be in another, expiation, but no pardon. Think well, answer slowly, for it is a momentous question."

"I know that—the one question of our times."

Doctor Urquhart bent his head without replying. He hardly could speak; I never saw him so terribly in earnest. His agitation roused me from the natural shyness I have in lifting up my own voice and setting forth my own girlish opinion on topics of which every one has a right to think, but very few to speak.

"I believe that in the Almighty's gradual teaching of His creatures, a Diviner than Moses brought to us a higher law—in which the sole expiation required is penitence, with obedience: *"Repent ye? "Go and sin no more?"* It appears to me, so far as I can judge and read here"—my Bible was still in my hand—"that throughout the New, and in many parts of the Old Testament, runs one clear doctrine, namely, that any sin, however great, being repented of and forsaken, is by God, and ought to be by man, altogether pardoned, blotted out and done away."

"God bless you!"

For the second time he said to me those words—said them twice over, and left me.

Rather abruptly; but he is sometimes abrupt when thinking deeply of anything.

Thus ended our little talk: yet it left a pleasant impression. True, the subject was strange enough; my sisters might have been shocked at it; and at my freedom in asking and giving opinions. But oh! the blessing it is to have a friend to whom one can speak fearlessly on any subject; with whom one's deepest as well as one's most foolish thoughts come out simply and safely. Oh, the comfort—the inexpressible comfort of feeling *safe* with a person—having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.

Somebody must have done a good deal of the winnowing business this afternoon; for in the course of it I gave him as much nonsense as any reasonable man could stand—even such an ultra-reasonable man as Doctor Urquhart. Papa said once, that she was "taking too great liberty of speech with our good friend, the Doctor"—that foolish little Dora but foolish little Dora knows well enough what she is about—when to be silly and when to be wise. She believes in her heart that there are some people to whom it does great good to be dragged down from their heights of wisdom, and forced to talk and smile, until the clouds wears off, and the smile becomes permanent—grows into a sunshine that warms every one else all through. Oh, if he had had a happy life—if Dallas had lived—this Dallas, whom I often think about, and seem to know quite well—what a cheerful blithe nature his would have been!

Just before tea, when papa was taking his sleep, Doctor Urquhart proposed that we should all go for a walk. Penelope excused herself; besides, she thinks it wrong to walk out on a Sunday; but Lisabel and Augustus were very glad to go. So was I, having never been beyond the garden since papa's illness.

If I try to remember all the trivial incidents of to-day, at full length, it is because it has been such an exceedingly happy day: to preserve which from the chances of this mortal life, "the sundry and manifold changes of this world," as the prayer says, I here write them down.

How vague, how incompatible with the humdrum tenor of our quiet days at Rockmount that collect used to sound!

"That amidst the sundry and manifold changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where

true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen." Now, as if newly understanding it, I also repeat, "Amen."

We started, Lisabel, Augustus, Doctor Urquhart, and I. We went through the village, down the moorland-road, to the ponds, which Augustus wanted to examine, with a view to wild-duck shooting, next, or, rather, I might say, this winter, for Christmas is coming close upon us, though the weather is still so mild.

Lisa and her husband walked on first, and quickly left us far behind; for, not having been out for so long, except the daily stroll round the garden, which Doctor Urquhart had insisted upon, the fresh air seemed to turn me dizzy. I managed to stumble on through the village, keeping up talk, too, for Doctor Urquhart hardly said anything, until we came out upon the open moor, bright, breezy, sunshiny. Then I felt a choking—a longing to cry out or sob—my head swam round and round.

"Are you wearied?—you look as if you were."

"Will you like to take my arm?"

"Sit down—sit down on this stone—my child!"

I heard these sentences distinctly, one after the other, but could not answer. I felt my bonnet-strings untied, and the wind blowing on my face—then all grew light again, and I looked round.

"Do not be frightened; you will be well in a minute or two. I only wonder that you have kept up so bravely, and are so strong."

This I heard too—in a cheerful kind voice—and soon after I became quite myself, but ready to cry with vexation, or something, I don't know what.

"You will not tell anybody?" I entreated.

"No, not anybody," said he, smiling, "if turning faint was such a crime. Now, you can walk? Only not alone, just at present, if you please."

I do not marvel at the almost unlimited power which, Augustus says, Doctor Urquhart has over his patients. A true physician—not only of bodies, but souls.

We walked on, I holding his arm. For a moment, I was half afraid of Lisabel's laugh, and the silly etiquette of our neighbourhood; which holds that if a lady and gentleman walk arm-in-arm they must be going to be married. Then I forgot both, and only thought what a comfort it was in one's weakness to have an arm to lean on, and one that you knew, you felt, was not unwilling to have you resting there.

I have never said, but I will say it here, that I know Doctor Urquhart likes me—better than any other of my family; better, perhaps, than any friend he has, for he has not many. He is a man of great kindness of nature, but few personal attachments. I have heard him say "that though he liked a great many people, only one or two were absolutely necessary to him." Dallas might have been, had he lived. He told me, one day, there was a certain look in me which occasionally reminded him of Dallas. It is by these little things that I guess he likes me—at least, enough to make me feel, when with him, that rest and content that I never feel with those who do not care for me.

I made him laugh, and he made me laugh, several times, about trifles that, now I call them to mind, were not funny at all. Yet "it takes a wise man to make a fool, and none but a fool is always wise."

With which sapient saying we consoled ourselves, standing at the edge of the larger pool, watching the other couple strolling along, doubtless very busy over the wild-duck affair.

"Your sister and Treherne seem to suit one another remarkably well. I doubted once if they would."

"So did I. It ought to be a warning to us against hasty judgments. Especially here." Mischief prompted the latter suggestion, for Doctor Urquhart must have recollected, as well as I did, the last and only time he and I had walked across this moorland-road, when we had such a serious quarrel, and I was more passionate and rude to him than I ever was to anybody—out of my own family. I hope he has forgiven me. Yet he was a little wrong too.

"Yes, especially here," he repeated, smiling—so I have no doubt he did remember.

Just then, Lisabel's laugh, and her husband's with it, rang distantly across the pool.

"They seem very happy, those two."

I said, I felt sure they were, and that it was a blessed thing to find, the older one grew, how very much of happiness there is in life.

"Do you think so?"

"Do *you* not think so?"

"I do; but not in your sense exactly. Remember, Miss Theodora, people see life in a different aspect at twenty-five and at—"

"Forty. I know that."

"That I am forty? Which I am not quite, by the bye. No doubt it seems to you a most awful age."

I said, it was perhaps for a woman, but for a man no more than the prime of life, with many years before him in which both to work and enjoy.

"Yes, for work is enjoyment, the only enjoyment that ever satisfies."

He stood gazing across the moorland, *my* moorland, which put on its best smile for us to-day. Ay, though the heather was brown, and the furze-bushes had lost their gold. But so long as there is free air, sunshine, and sky, the beauty never can vanish from my beloved moor. I wondered how anyone could look at it and not enjoy it; could stand here as we stood and not be satisfied.

Perhaps in some slight way I hinted this, at least, so far as concerned myself, to whom everything seemed so delicious, after this month of sorrow.

"Ah, yes, I understand," said Doctor Urquhart, "and so it should be with me also. So it is, I trust. This is a lovely day, lovely to its very close, you see."

For the sun was sinking westward, and the clouds robing themselves for one of those infinitely varied late

autumn sunsets, of the glory of which no human eye can ever tire.

"You never saw a tropical sunset? I have, many. I wonder if I shall ever see another." After a little hesitation, I asked if he thought it likely? Did he wish to go abroad again?

"For some reasons, yes!" Then speaking forcibly:—"Do not think me morbid; of all things, morbid, cowardly sentimentality is my abhorrence—but I am not naturally a cheerful-minded man. That is, I believe I was, but circumstances have been stronger than nature; and it now costs me an effort to attain what I think every man ought to have, if he is not absolutely a wicked man."

"You mean an even, happy temper, that tries to make the best of all things, which I am sure you do."

"An idle life," he went on, unheeding, "is of all things the very worst for me. Unless I have as much work as ever I can do, I am never happy."

This was comprehensible in degree. Though one thing surprised and pained me, that even Doctor Urquhart was not "happy." Is anybody "happy?"

"Do not misunderstand me." (I had not spoken, but he often guesses my thoughts in a way that makes me thankful I have nothing to hide). "There are as many degrees of happiness as of goodness, and the perfection of either is impossible. But I have my share. Yes, truly, I have my share."

"Of both?"

"Don't—don't!"

Nor ought I to have jested when he was in such heavy earnest.

And then for some time we were so still, that I remember hearing a large bee, deluded by the mild weather, come swinging and singing over the moor, and stop at the last, the very last, blue-bell—I dared not call it a hare-bell with Doctor Urquhart by—of the year, for his honey-supper. While he was eating it, I picked one of the flower-stalks, and stroked it softly over his great brown back and wings.

"What a child you are still!"

(But for once Doctor Urquhart was mistaken.)

"How quiet everything is here!" he added.

"Yes, that wavy purple line always reminded me of the hills in the 'Happy Valley' of Prince Kasselas. Beyond them lies the world."

"If you knew what 'the world' is, as you must one day. But I hope you will only see the best half of it. I hope you will have a happy life."

I was silent.

"This picture; the moorland, hills, and lake,—your pond is as wide and bright as a lake—will always put me in mind of Rasselas, but one cannot live for ever in our 'Happy Valley,' nor in our lazy camp either. I often wish I had more work to do."

"How—and where?"

As soon as I had put it I blushed at the intrusiveness of this question. In all he tells me of his affairs I listen, but never dare to enquire, aware that I have no right to ask of him more than he chooses to reveal.

Right or not, he was not offended; he replied to me fully and long; talking more as if I had been a man and his confidential friend, than only a simple girl, who has in this at least some sense, that she feels she can understand him.

It appears, that in peace-time, the duties of a regimental surgeon are almost nothing, except in circumstances where they become as hopeless as they are heavy; such as the cases of unhealthy barracks, and other avoidable causes of mortality, which Doctor Urquhart and Augustus discussed, and which he has since occasionally referred to, when talking to papa and me. He told me with what anxiety he had tried to set on foot reforms in these matters; how all his plans had been frustrated, by the tardiness of Government; and how he was hopeless of ever attaining his end. Indeed he showed me an official letter, received that morning, finally dismissing the question.

"You see, Miss Theodora,

'To mend the world's a vast design.'

too vast for my poor powers."

"Are you discouraged?"

"No. But I suspect I began at the wrong end; that I attempted too much, and gave myself credit for more influence than I possessed. It does not do to depend upon other people; much safer is that amount of work which a man can do with his own two hands and head. I should be far freer, and therefore more useful, if I left the army altogether, and set up practice on my own account.

"That is, if you settled somewhere as a consulting physician, like Doctor Black?"

"No," he smiled—"not exactly like Doctor Black. Mine would be a much humbler position. You know, I have no income except my pay."

I confessed that I had never given a thought to his income, and again smiling, he answered—"No, he was sure of that."

He then went on to explain that he believed moral and physical evil to be so bound up together, that it was idle to attack one without trying to cure the other. He thought, better than all building of gaols and reformatories, or even of churches—since the Word can be spread abroad without need of bricks and mortar—would be the establishing of sanitary improvements in our great towns, and trying to teach the poor, not how to be taken care of in workhouses, prisons, and hospitals, but how to take care of themselves, in their own homes. And then, in answer to my questions, he told me many things about the life, say rather existence, of the working-classes in most large towns, which made me turn sick at heart; marvelling how, with all this

going on around me, I could ever sit dreamily gazing over my moorland, and play childish tricks with bees!

Yes, something ought to be done. I was glad, I was proud, that it had come into his mind to do it. Better far to labour thus in his own country than to follow an idle regiment into foreign parts, or even a fighting regiment into the terrible campaign. I said so. "Ah—you 'hate soldiers' still."

I did not answer, but met his eyes. I know mine were full—I know my lips were quivering. Horribly painful it was to be jested with just then.

Doctor Urquhart said gravely; "I was not in earnest; I beg your pardon."

We then returned to the discussion of his plans and intentions. I asked him how he meant to begin his labors?

"From a very simple starting-point. 'The doctor' has, of all persons, the greatest influence among the poor—if only he cares to use it. As a commencement, and also because I must earn salt to my porridge, you know, my best course would be to obtain the situation of surgeon to some dispensary, workhouse, hospital, or even gaol. Thence, I could widen my field of work at pleasure, so far as time and money were forthcoming."

"If some one could only give you a fortune now!"

"I do not believe in fortunes. A man's best wealth consists of his personal labors, personal life. 'Silver and gold have I none'—but wherever I am, I can give myself, my labors, and my life."

I said something about that being a great gift—many men would call it a great sacrifice.

"Less to me than to most men—since, as you know, I have no relatives; nor is it likely I shall ever marry."

I believed so. Not constantly; but at intervals. Something in his manner and mode of thought fixed the conviction in my mind, from our earliest acquaintance.

Of course, I merely made some silent assent to this confidence. What was there to say? Perhaps he expected something—for as we turned to walk home, the sun having set, he remained a long time silent. But I could not speak. In truth, nothing came into my head to say.

At last I lifted my eyes from the ground, and saw the mist beginning to rise over my moorland—my grey, soft, dreamy moorland. Ay, dreamy, it was, and belonging only to dreams. But the world beyond—the struggling suffering, sinning world of which he had told me—that was a reality.

I said to my friend who walked beside me, feeling keenly that he was my friend, and that I had a right to look up into his good noble face, wherein all his life was written as clearly as on a book—thinking too what a comfort and privilege it was to have more than any one else had the reading of that book—I said to Doctor Urquhart—my old hesitation having somehow altogether vanished—that I wished to know all he could possibly tell me of his plans and projects: that I liked to listen to them, and would fain do more than listen—help.

He thanked me. "Listening is helping. I hope you will not refuse sometimes to help me in that way—it is a great comfort to me. But the labor I hope for is exclusively a man's—if any woman could give aid you could, for you are the bravest woman I ever knew."

"And do you think I never can help you?"

"No."

So our walk ended.

I say "ended," because, though there was a great deal of laughing with Augustus and Lisabel—who had pushed one another ankle-deep into the pond, and behaved exactly like a couple of school-children out on a holiday, and though, they, hurrying home, Doctor Urquhart and I afterwards followed leisurely, walking together slowly, along the moor-land road—we did not renew our conversation. We scarcely exchanged more than a few words;—but walking thus arm-in-arm we did not feel—that is, I did not feel, either apart, or unfriendly, or sad.

There is more in life than mere happiness—even as there are more things in the world than mere marrying and giving in marriage. If, from circumstances, he has taken that resolution, he is perfectly justified in having done so, and in keeping to it. I would do exactly the same. The character of a man who marries himself to a cause, or a duty—has always been an ideal of mine—like my Max—Max and Thekla.—But they were lovers, betrothed lovers; free to say "I love you" with eyes and lips—just once, for a day or two—a little hour or two.—Would this have made parting less bitter or more? I cannot tell; I do not know. I shall never know aught about these things. So I will not think of them.

When we came home—Doctor Urquhart and myself—I left him at the door, and went up into my own room.

In the parlour I found Colin Granton come to tea—he had missed me at church, he said, and was afraid I had made myself ill; so walked over to Rockmount to see. It was very kind—though, while acknowledging, it he seemed half ashamed of the kindness.

He and Augustus, now on the best of terms, kept us alive all the evening with their talking and laughing. They planned all sorts of excursions—hunting, shooting, and what not—to take place during the grand Christmas gathering which is to be at Treherne Court. Doctor Urquhart—one of the invited guests, listened to all, with a look of amused content.

Yes—he is content. More than once, as I caught his eye following me about the room, we exchanged a smile—friendly, even affectionate.—Ay, he does like me. If I were a little younger—if I were a little girl in curls, I should say he is "fond" of me.—"Fond of"—what an idle phrase!—such as one would use towards a dog, or cat, or bird. What a difference between that and the holy words, "I love"—not as silly young folks say, I am "in love"—but "*I love;*" with all my reason, will, and strength; with all the tenderness of my heart, all the reverence of my soul.

Be quiet, heart—be silent, soul! I have, as I said before—nought to do with these things.

The evening passed pleasantly and calmly enough, all parties seeming to enjoy themselves: even poor Colin coming out his brilliantest and best; and making himself quite at home with us. Though he got into a little disgrace before going away, by saying something which irritated papa; and which made me glad that the little

conversation this morning between Doctor Urquhart and myself had been not in family conclave, but private.

Colin was speaking of the sermon, and how "shocked" his mother had been at its pleading against capital punishment.

"Against capital punishment, did you say?"—cried papa. "Did my curate bring this disgraceful subject into my pulpit in order to speak against the law of the land—the law of God?—Girls, why did you not tell me. Dora, remind me I must see the young man to-morrow."

I was mortally afraid this would end in the poor young man's summary dismissal; for papa never allows any "new-fangled notions" in his curates; they must think and preach as he does—or quit. I pleaded a little for this one, who has a brother and sister dependent on him, lodging in the village; and, as far as I dared and could, I pleaded for his sermon. Colin tried to aid me, honest fellow, backing my words, every one, with the most eager asseverations—well-meant, though they did not exactly help the argument.

"Dora," cried papa, in utmost astonishment, "what do you mean?"

"Miss Dora's quite right: she always is,"—said Colin, stoutly. "I don't think anybody ever ought to be hanged; least of all a poor fellow who, like—" he mentioned the name, but I forget it—it was the case that has been so much in the newspapers—"killed another fellow out of jealousy—or in a passion—or being drunk—which was it? I say, Urquhart—Treherne—won't you bear me out?"

"In what?" asked Augustus, laughing. "That many a man has sometimes felt inclined to commit murder?—I have myself—ha! ha!—and many a poor devil is kicked out of the world dancing upon nothing, who isn't a bit worse, may be better, than a great many young scoundrels who die unhung. That's truth, Mr. Johnston, though I say it."

"Sir," said papa, turning white with anger, "you are at perfect liberty to say exactly what you please—provided it is not in my presence. No one, before me, shall so insult my cloth, and blaspheme my Maker, as to deny His law set down here," dropping his hand over our great Family Bible, which he allows no one but himself to touch, because, as we know, there is the fly-leaf pasted down, not to be read by any one, nor written on again during poor papa's life-time. "God's law is blood for blood. '*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed!*' That law, sir, my church believes never has been—never will be—annulled. And though your maudlin, loose charity may sympathize with hanged murderers, uphold duellists, and exalt into heroes cowardly man-slayers, I say that I will no more have in my house the defenders of such, than I would, under any pretext, grasp in mine the hand of a man who had taken the life of another."

To see papa so excited, alarmed us all. Colin, greatly distressed, begged his pardon and retracted everything—but the mischief was done. Though we anticipate no serious results, indeed he has been now for some hours calmly asleep in his bed, still he was made much worse by this unfortunate dispute.

Doctor Urquhart stayed, at our earnest wish, till midnight, though he did not go into papa's room. When I asked him what was to be done in case of papa's head suffering for this excitement—if we should send to the camp for him—he said, "No, he would rather we sent for Doctor Black."

Yet he was anxious, I know; for after Colin left, he sat by himself in the study, saying he had a letter to write and post, but would come upstairs to papa if we sent for him. And when, satisfied that the danger was past and papa asleep, he prepared to leave—I never, in all the time of our acquaintance, saw him looking so exceedingly pale and weary.

I wanted him to take something—wine or food; or at least to have one of our ponies saddled that he might ride instead of walking home. But he would not.

We were standing at the hall—only he and I—the others having gone to bed. He took both my hands, and looked long and steadily in my face as he said good-bye.

"Keep up heart. I do not think any harm will come to your father."

"I hope not. Dear, dear papa—it would indeed be terrible."

"It would. Nothing must be allowed to grieve him in any way—as long as he lives."

"No."

Doctor Urquhart was not more explicit than this; but I am sure he wished me to understand that in any of those points discussed today, wherein he and I agreed, and both differed from my father—it was our duty henceforth, as much as possible, to preserve a respectful silence. And I thanked him in my heart—and with my eyes too, I know—for this, and for his forbearance in not having contradicted papa, even when most violent and unjust.

"When shall you be coming again, Doctor Urquhart?"

"Some day—some day."

"Do not let it be very long first. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

And here befell a thing so strange—so unexpected, that if I think of it, it seems as if I must have been dreaming; as if, while all the rest of the events of to-day, which I have so quietly written down, were perfectly natural, real, and probable—this alone were something unreal, and impossible to tell—hardly right to tell.

And yet—oh me! it is not wrong—though it makes my cheek burn and my hand tremble—this poor little hand.

I thought he had gone—and was standing on the door-step, preparing to lock up—when Doctor Urquhart came back again along the walk. It was he—though in manner and voice so unlike himself—that even now I can hardly believe the whole is not a delusion.

"For God's sake—for pity's sake—do not utterly forget me, Theodora."

And then—then—

He said once, that every man ought to hold every woman sacred; that, if not of her own kindred, he had no right, except as the merest salutation, even to press her hand. Unless—unless he loved her.

Then, why—

No: I ought not to write it, and I will not. It is—if it is anything—something sacred between him and me—something in which no one else has any part—which may not be told to anyone—except in my prayers.

My heart is so full. I will close this and say my prayers.

CHAPTER IV. HER STORY.

Treherne Court.

Where, after another month's pause, I resume my journal.

Papa and I have been here a week. At the last moment Penelope declined going, saying that some one ought to keep house at Rock-mount. I wished to do so; but she would not allow me.

This is a fine place, and papa enjoys it extremely. The enforced change, the complete upsetting of his former solitary ways, first by Lisabel's marriage, and then by his own illness, seem to have made him quite young again. Before we left, Doctor Black pronounced him entirely recovered; that he might reasonably look forward to a healthy, green old age. God grant it! For, altered as he is, in so many ways, by some imperceptible influence; having wider interests—is it wrong to write affections?—than he has had for the last twenty years, he will enjoy life far more than ever before. Ah me; how can any body really enjoy life without having others to make happy, and to draw happiness from?

Doctor Black wished, as a matter of professional etiquette, that papa should once again consult Dr. Urquhart, about his taking this long northern journey; but on sending to the camp we found he was "absent on leave," and had been for some time. Papa was disappointed and a little annoyed. It was strange, rather; but might have been sudden and important business, connected with the plans of which he told me, and which I did not quite feel justified in communicating further, till he informs papa himself.

I had a week of that restless laziness, which I suppose most people unaccustomed to leave home experience for the first few days of a visit: not unpleasant laziness, neither, for there was the Christmas week to anticipate and plan for, and every nook in this beautiful place to investigate, as its own possessors scarcely care to do; but which I, and other visitors, shall so intensely enjoy. I am trying to feel settled now.

In this octagon room, which Lisabel—such a thoughtful, kindly hostess, as Lisa makes! has specially appropriated mine, I take up my rest. It is the wee-est room attainable in this great, wide, wandering mansion; where I still at times feel as strange as a bird in a crystal palace; such birds as in the Aladdin Palace of 1851. we used to see flying about the tops of these gigantic, motionless trees, caught under the glass, and cheated by those green, windless, unstirred leaves into planning a natural wild-wood nest. Poor little things! To have once dreamed of a nest, and then never to be able to find or build it, must be a sore thing.

This grand "show" house has no pretensions to the character of "nest," or "home." To use the word in it seems half-ridiculous, or pathetic; though Lisa does not find it so. Stately and easy, our girl moves through these magnificent rooms, and enjoys her position as if she were born to it. She shows good taste and good feeling too—treats meek, prosy, washed-out Lady Augusta Treherne, and little, fussy, infirm Sir William, whose brown scratch-wig and gold spectacles rarely appear out of his own room, with unfailing respect and consideration. They are mightily proud of her, as they need to be. Truly the best thing this their patrician blood could do, was to ally itself with our plebeian line.

But, thank goodness that Lisa, not I, was the victim of that union! To me, this great house, so carefully swept and garnished, sometimes feels like a beautiful body without a soul: I should dread a demon's entering and possessing it, compelling me to all sorts of wild and wicked deeds, in order to break the suave harmony of things. For instance, the three drawing-rooms, *en suite*, where Lis and I spend our mornings, amidst a labyrinth of costly lumber—sofas, tables and chairs, with our choice of five fires to warm at, glowing in steel and gilded grates, and glittering with pointed china tiles; having eleven mirrors, large and small, wherein to catch, at all points, views of our sweet selves—in this splendid wilderness, I should, did trouble seize me, roam, rage, or ramp about like any wild animal. The oppression of it would be intolerable. Better, a thousand times, my little room at Rockmount, with its little window, in at which the branches wave; I can see them as I lie in bed. My own dear little bed, beside which I flung myself down the night before I left it, and prayed that my coming back might be as happy as my going.

This is the first time since then, that I have suffered myself to cry. When people feel happy causelessly, it is said to be a sign that the joy cannot last, that there is sorrow coming. So, on the other hand, it may be a good omen to feel one's heart aching, without cause. Yet, a tear or two seems to relieve it and do it good. Enough now.

I was about to describe Treherne Court. Had any of us seen it before the wedding, ill-natured people might have said, that Miss Lisabel Johnston married the Court and not the master—so magnificent is it. Estate, extending goodness knows where; park, with deer; avenue, two miles long; plantations, sloping down to the river—one of the "principal rivers of England," as we used to learn in Pinnock's Geography—the broad, quiet, and yet fast-running Dee. How lovely it must look in summer, with those great trees dipping greenly into it, and those meadows dotted with lazy cows.

There are gardens, too, and an iron bridge, and statues, and a lawn with a sun-dial, though not half so pretty as that one at the Cedars, and a quadrangular stable, almost as grand as the house; and which Augustus thinks of quite as much importance. He has made Lisa a first-rate horse-woman, and they used to go careering half over the country, until lately. Certainly, those two have the most thorough enjoyment of life, fresh, young, animal life and spirits, that it is possible to conceive. Their whole existence, present and future,

seems to be one blaze of sunshine.

I broke off here to write to Penelope. I wish Penelope were with us. She will find her Christmas very dull without us all; and, consequently, without Francis; though he could not have come to Rockmount under any circumstances, he said. "Important business."—This "business" a lack, is often hard to brook. Well!

"Men must work, and women must weep."

No, they ought not to weep; they are cowards if they do. They ought to cheer and encourage the men, never to bemoan and blame them. Yet, I wish—I wish Penelope could get a sight of Francis this Christmas time. It is such a holy time, when hearts seem "knit together in love"—when one would like to have all one's best-beloved about one.

And she loves Francis—has loved him for so long.

Dr. Urquhart said to me once, the only time he ever referred to the matter—for he is too delicate to gossip about family love-affairs; "that he wished sincerely my sister and Mr. Charteris had been married—it would have been the best thing which could have happened to him—and to her, if she loved him." I smiled; little doubt about that "if." In truth, though I once thought differently, it is one of the chief foundations of the esteem and sympathy which I take shame to myself for not having hitherto given to my elder sister. I shall do better, please God, in time to come; better in every way.

And to begin:—In order to shake off a certain half-fretful dreaminess that creeps over me, it may be partly in consequence of the breaking-up of home-habits, and the sudden plunge into a life so totally new, I mean to write regularly at my journal; to put down everything that happens from this time; so that it may be a complete history of this visit at Treherne Court; if at a future time, I, or any one, should ever read it. Will any one ever do so? Will any one ever have the right? No; rights enforced are ugly things; will any one ever come and say to me, "Dora," or "Theodora,"—I think I like my full name best—"I *should like* to read your journal."

Let me see: to-night is Sunday; I seem always to choose Sunday for these entries, because we usually retire early, and it is such a peaceful family day at Rockmount; which indeed is the case here. We only went to church once, and dined as usual at seven, so that I had a long afternoon's wander about the grounds; first with papa, and then by myself. I hope it was a truly Sunday walk; that I was content and thankful, as I ought to be.

So endeth Sunday. Let us see what Monday will bring.

Monday.—It brought an instalment of visitors; the first for our Christmas, week.

At church-time a fly drove up to the door, and who should leap out of it, with the brightest faces in the world, but Colin Granton and his mother. I was so surprised—startled indeed, for I happened to be standing at the hall-door when the fly appeared; that I hardly could find two words to say to either. Only my eyes might have shewn—I trust they did—that, after the first minute, I was very glad to see them.

I tucked the dear old lady under my arm, and marched her through all the servants into the dining-room, leaving Colin to take care of himself, a duty of which the young man is well capable. Then I had a grand hunt after papa and Lisa; finally way-laying the shy Lady Augusta, and begging to introduce to her my dear old friend. Every friend's face is so welcome when one is away from home.

After lunch, the gentlemen adjourned to the stables; while Mrs. Treherne escorted her guest in hospitable state through the long corridors to her room, and I was glad to see the very best bed-room of all was assigned to the old lady. Lisa—bless the girl!—looked just a little bit proud of her beautiful house, and not unnatural either. A wife has a right to be proud of all the good things her husband's love endows her with; only they might be better things than houses and lands, clothes and furniture. When Lisa has said sometimes, "My dear, I am the happiest girl in the world. Don't you envy me?" my heart has never found the least difficulty in replying.

Yet she is happy. There is a look of contented matronhood growing in her face day by day, far sweeter than anything her girlhood could boast. She is very fond of her husband too. It was charming to see the bright blush with which she started up from Mrs. Granton's fireside, the instant Augustus was heard calling outside, "Lis! Lis! Mrs. Treherne! Where's Mrs. Treherne?"

"Run away to your husband, my dear. I see he can't do without you. How well she looks, and how happy she seems!" added the old lady, who has apparently forgotten the slight to "my Colin."

By the way, I do not suppose Colin ever actually proposed to our Lisa; only it was a sort of received notion in our family that he would. If he had, his mother never would have brought him here, to be a daily witness of Mrs. Treherne's beauty and contentment; which he bears with a stoicism most remarkable in a young man who has ever been in love with her. Do men so easily forget?—Some, perhaps; not all. It is oftentimes honorable and generous to conquer an unfortunate love; but there is something discreditable in totally ignoring and forgetting it. I doubt, I should rather despise a man who despised his first love, even for me.

Let me see: where did I leave myself? Oh, sitting by Mrs. Granton's fire; or helping; her to take off her things—a sinecure office, for her "things"—no other word befits them—are popped off and on with the ease and untidiness of fifteen, instead of the preciseness of sixty-five: order and regularity being omitted by Providence in the manufacture of this dear old lady. Also listening—which is no sinecure; for she always has plenty to say about everything and everybody, except herself.

I may never have said it in so many words, but I love Mrs. Granton. Every line in her nice old withered face is pleasant to me; every creak of her quick footstep; every angular fold in her everlasting black silk gown—a very shabby gown often, for she does not care how she dresses. She is by no means one of your picturesque, ancient gentlewomen, looking as if they had just stepped out of a gilt-frame—she is only a little, active, bright old lady. As a girl, she might have been pretty—I am not sure, though she has still a delicate expressive mouth, and soft grey eyes; but I am very sure that she often looks beautiful now.

And why?—for, guessing what all the grand people at the dinner to-night will think of her and myself, I

cannot help smiling as this application of the word—because she has one of the most beautiful natures that can adorn an old woman—or a young one, either: all loving-kindness, energy, cheerfulness. Because age has failed to sour her; affliction to harden her heart. Of all people I know, she is the quickest to praise, the slowest to judge, the gentlest to condemn. A living homily on the text, which, specifying the trinity of Christian virtues, names—“these three—but *the greatest of these is charity.*”

Long familiarity made me unmindful of these qualities in her, till, taught by the observations of others, and by my own comparison of the people I meet out in the world, which may be supposed to mean Treherne Court, with my good old friend.

“Have you much company, then?” asked she, while I was trying to persuade her to let me twist into a little more form the shapeless “bob” of her dear old grey hair, and put her cap not quite so much on one side. “And do you enjoy it, my dear? Have you seen anybody you liked very much?”

“None that I liked better than myself, be sure. How should I?”

A true saying, though she did not understand its under-meaning. I have set more value on myself of late, and taken pains to be pleasant to every one. It would not do to have people saying, “What a disagreeable girl is that Theodora Johnston! I wonder how anybody can like her?” Has Mrs. Granton an idea that anybody—nay, let it come out—that anybody does like me?

Her eyes were very sharp, and her questions keen, as I entertained her with our doings at Treherne Court, and the acquaintances we had made—a large number—from county nobility to clerical dignitaries, and gay young officers from Whitchester, which seems made up entirely of barracks and cathedral. But she gave me no news in return, except that Colin found the Cedars so dull that he had never rested till he had got his mother away here; which fact did not extremely interest me. He was always a restless youth, but I trusted his late occupations had inclined him to homequietness. Can his interest in them have ended?—or is there no friend at hand to keep him steadily at work?

We sat so long gossiping, that Lisabel, ready for dinner, with Treherne diamonds blazing on her white neck and arms, called us to order, and sent me away to dress. As I left, I heard her say, Augustus had sent her to ask if Mrs. Granton had seen Doctor Urquhart lately?

“Oh, yes! Colin saw him a few days since. He is quite well, and very busy.”

“And where is he? Will he be here this week; Augustus wants to know?”

“I have not the slightest idea. He did not say a word about it.”

Lisabel inquired no further, but began exhibiting her velvet dress, and her beautiful point-lace ruffles, Lady Treherne's present—to her a far more interesting subject. Verily gratitude is not the most lasting of human emotions in young women who have homes, and husbands, and everything they can desire.

Quite well and very busy; though not too busy to write to Colin Granton. I am glad. I have sometimes thought he might be ill.

The dinner-party was the largest since we have been here. Two long rows of faces; not one in whom I took the slightest interest, save Mrs. Granton and Colin. I tried to sit next the former, and the latter to sit next to me; but both designs failed, and we fell among strangers, which is sometimes as bad as falling among thieves. I did not enjoy my evening as much as I expected; but I hope I behaved well; that, as Mrs. Treherne's sister, I tried to be attentive and courteous to the people, that no one need have been ashamed of poor Theodora.

And it was some comfort when, by the merest chance, I overheard Mrs. Granton say to Lisabel, “that she never saw a girl so much improved as Miss Dora.”

Improved! Yes, I ought to be. There was room for it. Oh, that I may go on improving—growing better and better every day! Too good I cannot be.

“Quite well and very busy.” Again runs in my head that sweet sad ditty:—

“Men must work and women must weep,
For there's little to earn and many to keep.”

Oh! to think of any one's ever working *for me!*

Tuesday.—Nothing at all happened. No letters, no news. Colin drove out his mother and me towards the Welsh hills, which I had expressed a wish to see, and after lunch, asked if I would go with him to the river side in search of a boat, for he thought we may still have a row, though it is December, the weather being so mild. He remembered how I used to like his pulling Lisabel and me up and down the ponds in the moorland—we won't say how many years ago. I think Colin also is “improved.” He is so exceedingly attentive and kind.

Wednesday.—A real event happened to-day—quite a surprise. Let me make the most of it; for this journal seems very uninteresting.

I was standing, “flattening my nose,” as children say, against the great iron gates of the avenue; peering through them at the two lines of bare trees, planted three deep, and the broad gravel-drive, straight as an arrow, narrowing in perspective almost to a point—the lodge plainly visible at the end of the two miles, which seems no distance at all; but when you have to walk it, it's “awfu' lang,” as says the old Scotch gardener, who is my very particular friend, and my informant on all subjects, animal, vegetable, and historical, pertaining to Treherne Court. And, looking at it from these gates, the road does seem “awfu' lang,” like life. I was thinking so, when some one touched me, and said, “Dora.”

Francis startled me so: I am sure I must have blushed as much as if I had been Penelope; that is, as Penelope used to blush in former days. The next minute, I thought of her, and felt alarmed.

“Oh, Francis, nothing is the matter—nothing has happened to Penelope?”

“You silly girl, what should happen? I do not know anything about Rockmount, was not aware but that you were all at home, till I saw you here, and knew by the sentimental attitude it could be nobody but Dora. Tell me, when did you come?”

"When did *you* come? I understood it was impossible for you to leave London."

"I had business with my uncle, Sir William. Besides, if Penelope is here—"

"You must know quite well, Francis, that Penelope is not here."

I never scruple to speak my mind to Francis Charteris. We do not much like one another, and are both aware of it. His soft, silken politeness often strikes me as insincere, and my "want of refinement," as he terms it, may be quite as distasteful to him. We do not suit, and were we ever so fond of one another, this incompatibility would be apparent. People may like and respect one another extremely, yet not suit, even as two good tunes are not always capable of being harmonised. I once heard an ingenious performer try to play at once, "The Last Rose of Summer," and "Garry Owen." The result resembled many a conversation between Francis and me.

This promised to be one of them; so, as a preventive measure, I suggested luncheontime.

"Oh, thank you, I am not hungry, I lunched at Birmingham."

Still, it might have struck Francis that other people had not.

We crossed the gardens towards the river, under the great Portugal laurels, which he stood to admire.

"I have watched their growth ever since I was a boy. You know, Dora, once this place was to have been mine."

"It would have given you a vast deal of trouble, and you don't like trouble. You will enjoy it much more as a visitor."

Francis made no reply, and when I asked the reason of his sudden change of plans, and if Penelope were acquainted with it, he seemed vexed.

"Of course Penelope knows; I wrote today, and told her my purpose in coming here was to see Sir William. Cannot a man pay his respects to his uncle without being questioned and suspected?"

"I never suspected you, Francis,—until now, when you look as if you were afraid I should. What is the matter? Do tell me."

For, truly, I felt alarmed. He was so extremely nervous and irritable, and his sensitive features, which he cannot keep from telling tales, betrayed so much inward discomfiture, that I dreaded some ill, threatening him or Penelope. If one, of course both.

"Do tell, me, Francis. Forgive my rudeness. We are almost brother and sister."

"Which tie is supposed to excuse any rudeness. But really I have nothing to tell—except that your ladyship is growing blunter than ever, under the instruction, no doubt, of your friend, Doctor Urquhart. Pray, is he here?"

"No."

"Is he expected?"

"You had better ask Captain Treherne."

"Pshaw! What do men care for one another? I thought a young lady was the likeliest person to take an interest in the proceedings of a young—I beg his pardon—a middle-aged gentleman."

If Francis thought either to irritate or confuse me, he was disappointed. A month ago it might have been. Not now. But probably, —and I have since felt sure of it—he was merely pursuing his own ends without heeding me.

"Now, Dora, seriously, I want to know something of Doctor Urquhart's proceedings, and where a letter might reach him. Do find out for me, there's a good girl."

And he put his arm round me, in the elder-brotherly caressing manner which he sometimes adopted with Lisa and me, and which I never used to mind. Now, I felt as if I could not endure it, and slipped away.

"I don't see, Francis, why you should not ask such a simple question yourself. It is no business of mine."

"Then you really know nothing of Doctor Urquhart's whereabouts lately? He has not been to Rockmount?"

"No."

"Nor written?"

"I believe not. Why do you want to know? Have you been quarrelling with him?"

For, aware that they two were not over fond of one another—a sudden idea, so ridiculously romantic that I laughed at it the next minute—made me, for one second, turn quite sick and cold.

"Quarrelling, my dear child—young lady, I mean—am I ever so silly, so ungentlemanly, as to quarrel with anybody? I assure you not. There is the Dee! What a beautiful view this is!"

He began to expatiate on its beauties, with that delicate appreciative taste which he has in such perfection, and in the expression of which he never fails. Under such circumstances, when he really seems pleased—not languidly, but actively, and tries to please others, I grant all Francis's claims to be a charming companion—for an hour's walk. For life—ah! that is a different matter! When with him, I often think of *Beatrices* answer when *Don Pedro* asks if she will have him as a husband?—"No, my lord, unless I might have another for working-days. Your Grace is too costly to wear every day."

Love—fit for constant wear and tear, able to sink safely down

"to the level of every day's
Most quiet need; by sun and candle-light,"

must be a rare thing, and precious as rare.

"I think I never saw such a Christmas-eve. Look, Dora, the sky is blue as June. How sharp and clear the reflection of those branches in the river. Heigho! this is a lovely place. What a difference it would have made to me if Sir William had never married, and I had been heir to Treherne Court."

"No difference to you in yourself," said I, stoutly. "Penelope would not have loved you one whit the more, only you would have been married a little sooner, which might have been the better for both parties."

"Heaven knows—yes," muttered he, in such anguish of regret, that I felt sorry for him. Then, suddenly: "Do you think your sister is tired of waiting? Would she wish the—our engagement broken?"

"Not at all. Indeed, I meant not to vex you. Penelope wishes no such thing."

"If she did," and he looked more vexed still, "it would be quite natural."

"No, indeed," I cried, in some indignation, "it would not be natural. Do you suppose we women are in such a frightful hurry to be married, that love promised and sure, such as Penelope has—or ought to have—is not sufficient to make us happy for any number of years? If you doubt it, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You don't know women; least of all such women as my sister Penelope."

"Ay, she has been a good, faithful girl," said he, again sighing. "Poor Penelope."

And then he recurred to the beautiful scenery which I, feeling that extreme want of topics of conversation which always appals me in *tete-à-tetes* with Francis Charteris—gladly accepted. It lasted till we re-entered the house, and, not unwillingly, parted company.

After luncheon—being unable to find anybody in this great, wide house—I sat in my own room awhile; till, finding it was not good to be lazy and dreaming, I went to Mrs. Granton's and listened to her pleasant gossip about people with whom she had been mixed up during her long life. Who have every one this remarkable characteristic, that they are all the very best people that ever lived. The burthen of her talk is, of course, "my Colin," who she makes out to have been the most angelic babe, the sweetest school-boy, the noblest youth, and the most perfect man upon this poor earth. One cannot smile at the fond old mother. Besides, I am fond of Colin myself. Was he not my first love?

Hush! let me not, even in jest, profane that holy word,

I sat with Mrs. Granton a long time—sometimes hearing, sometimes not; probably saying, "yes," and "no," and "certainly," to many things which now I have not the least idea of. My thoughts wandered—lulled by the wind, which began to rise into a regular Christmas blast.

Yes, to-night was Christmas-eve, and all the Christmas guests were now gathering in country-houses. Ours, too; there were rings at the resonant door-bell, and feet passing up and down the corridor. I like to recall—just for a moment's delusion—the sensations of that hour, between the lights, resting by Mrs. Granton's fire, lazy, warm, content. The only drawback to my content was the thought of Penelope—poor girl—all alone at Rockmount, and expecting nobody.

At the dressing-bell, I slipped through the long, half-dark staircases—to my room. As it was to be a large party at dinner I thought I would put on my new dress—Augustus's present; black velvet; "horridly old-womanish" Lisa had protested. Yet it looked well—I stood before the glass and admired myself in it—just a little. I was so glad to look well.

Foolish vanity—only lasting a minute. Yet that minute was pleasant. Lisabel, who came into my room with her husband following her to the very door, must have real pleasure in her splendours. I told her so.

"Oh, nonsense, child. Why I am as vexed and cross as possible. So many disappointments to-night. People with colds, and rheumatism, and dead relatives."

"Oh, Lisa!"

"Well, but is it not annoying? Everybody wanted, does not come; those not wanted, do. For instance: Doctor Urquhart—who always keeps both papa and Sir William in the best of humours, is not here. And Francis, who fidgets them both to death, and whom I was so thankful was not coming—he is just come. You stupid girl, you seem not the least bit sorry. You are thinking of something else the whole time."

I said, I was sorry, and was not thinking of anything else.

"Augustus wanted to see him particularly; but I forgot, you don't know—however, you will soon, child. Still, isn't it a downright shame of Doctor Urquhart neither to come nor send?"

I suggested something might have happened.

"A railway accident. Dear me, I never thought of that."

"Nor I. Heaven knows, no!"

I had a time-table, and searched through it for the last train stopping at Whitcheater, then counted how long it would take to drive to Treherne Court, and looked at my watch. No, he could not be here to-night.

"And if there had been any accident, there was time for us to have heard of it," said Lisa, carelessly, as she took up her fan and gloves to go downstairs. "So, child, we must make the best we can of your friend's behaviour. Are you ready for dinner?"

"In two minutes."

I shut the door after my sister, and stood still, before the glass, fastening a brooch, or something.

Mine, my friend. He was that. Whenever they were vexed with him, all the family usually called him so.

It was very strange his not coming—having promised Augustus, for some reason which I did not know of. Also, there was another reason—which they did not know of—he had promised *me*. He once said to me, positively, that this, the first Christmas he has kept in England for many years, should be kept with us—with me.

Now, a promise is a promise. I, myself, would keep one, at all costs, that involved no wrong to any other person. He is of the same mind. Then something must have happened.

For a moment I had been angry, though scarcely with him; for wherever he was he would be doing his duty. Yet, why should he be always doing his duty to everyone, *except* me? Had I no right? I, to whom even Lisa, who knew nothing, called him my friend?

Yes, *mine*. Of a sudden I seemed to feel all that the word meant, and to take all the burthen of it. It quieted me.

I went downstairs. There were the usual two lines of dinner-table faces—the usual murmur of dinner-table talk; but all was dim and uncertain, like a picture, or the sound of people chattering very far off. Colin beside me, kept talking about how well I looked in my new gown—how he would like to see me dressed as fine as a queen—and how he hoped we should spend many a Christmas as merry as this—till something seemed tempting me to bid him hold his tongue—myself to start up and scream.

At dessert, the butler brought a large letter to Sir William. It was a telegraph message—I recognized the look of the things we had several during papa's illness. Easy to sit still now. I seemed to know quite well what was coming, but the only clear thought was "mine—mine."

Sir William read, folded up the message, and passed it on to Augustus, then rose.

"Friends, fill your glasses. I have just had good news; not unexpected, but still good news. Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honour to give you the health of my nephew, Francis Charteris, Esquire, Governor-elect of —————."

In the cheering, confusion, and congratulation that followed, Lisa passed the telegram to me, and I saw it was from "Max Urquhart, London."

As soon as we got into a corner by ourselves, my sister burst out with the whole mystery.

"Thank goodness, it's over; I never kept a secret before, and Augustus was so frightened lest I should tell—and then what would Doctor Urquhart have said? It's Doctor Urquhart's planning, and he was to have brought the good news to-day; and I'm very sorry I abused him, for he has been working like a horse for Fancis's interest, and—did you ever see a young fellow take a piece of good fortune so coolly—a lovely West Indian Island, with Government house, and salary large enough to make Penelope a most magnificent governor's wife—yet he is not a bit thankful for it—I declare I am ashamed of Francis Charteris."

She went on a good deal more in this fashion, but I had nothing to say—I felt so strange and confused; till at last I leant my head on her shoulder, and cried softly. Which brought me into great opprobrium, and subjected me to the accusation of always weeping when there was the least prospect of a marriage in the family.

Marriage! just at that moment, there might not have been such a thing as marriage in the world. I never thought of it. I only thought of life, a life still kept safe, labouring busily to make everybody happy, true to itself and to its promises, forgetting nothing and no one, kind to the thankful and unthankful alike. Compared to it, my own insignificant life, with its small hopes and petty pains, all crumbled down into nothingness.

"Well, are you glad, Dora?"

Ay, I was; very glad—very content.

Papa came in soon, and he and I walked up and down, arm-in-arm, talking the matter over; till, seeing Francis sitting alone in a recess, we went up to him, and papa again wished him all happiness. He merely said, "thank you," and muttered something about "wishing to explain by-and-by."

"Which means, I suppose, that I am shortly to be left with only one girl to take care of me—eh! Francis," said papa, smiling.

"Sir—I did not mean—I" he actually stammered. "I hope, Mr. Johnston, you understand that this appointment is not yet accepted—indeed I am uncertain if I shall accept it."

Papa looked exceedingly surprised; and remembering some of Francis's sayings to me this morning, I was rather more than surprised—indignant. But no remark was made, and just then Augustus called the whole party to go down into the great kitchen and see the Christmas mummers or guizers, as they are called in that county.

We looked at them for a long half-hour, and then everybody, great and small, got into the full whirl of Christmas merriment. Colin, in particular, grew so lively, that he wanted to lead me under the mistletoe; but when I declined, first gaily, and then seriously, he desisted, saying he would not offend me for the world. Nevertheless, he and one or two more kissed Lisabel. How could she endure it? when I,—I now sometimes feel jealous over even a strange touch of this my hand.

The revels ended early, and as I sit writing, the house is quite still. I have just drawn up my blind, and looked out. The wind has sunk; snow is falling. I like snow on a Christmas morning.

Already it is Christmas morning. Unto whom have I silently to wish those good wishes which always lie nearest to one's heart? My own family, of course; papa and Lisa, and Penelope, far away. Poor dear Penelope! may she find herself a happy woman this time next year. Are these all? They were, last Christmas. But I am richer now. Richer, it often seems to me, than anybody in the whole world.

Good night! a merry—no—for "often in mirth the heart is sad"—a happy Christmas, and a good new year!

I

CHAPTER V. HIS STORY.

Dec. 31st, 1855.

The merry-making of my neighbours in the flat above—probably Scotch or Irish, both of which greatly abound in this town—is a sad counteraction of work for to-night. But why grumble, when I am one of the few people who pretend to work at all on this holiday—a night which used to be such a treat to us boys. The sounds overhead put me in mind of that old festival of Hogmanay, which, for a good many things, would be “more honoured in the breach than the observance.”

This Liverpool is an awful town for drinking. Other towns may be as bad; statistics prove it; but I know no place where intoxication is so open and shameless. Not only in bye streets and foul courts, where one expects to see it, but everywhere. I never take a short railway journey in the after part of the day, but I am liable to meet at least one drunken “gentleman” snoozing in his first-class carriage; or, in the second class, two or three drunken “men,” singing, swearing, or pushed stupidly about by pale-faced wives. The sadness of the thing is, that the wives do not seem to mind it, that everybody takes it quite as a matter of course. The “gentleman,” often grey-haired, is but “merry,” as he is accustomed to be every night of his life; the poor man has only “had a drop or two,” as all his comrades are in the habit of taking, whenever they get the chance: they see no disgrace in it; so they laugh at him a bit, and humour him, and are quite ready to stand up for him against all in-comers who may object to such a fellow-passenger. *They* don't; nor do the women belonging to them, who are well-used to tolerate drunken sweethearts, and lead about and pacify drunken husbands. It makes me sick at heart sometimes to see a decent, pretty girl, sit tittering at a foul-mouthed beast opposite; or a tidy young mother with two or three bonnie children, trying to coax home, without harm to himself or them, some brutish husband, who does not know his right hand from his left, so utterly stupid is he with drink. To-night, but for my chance hand at a railway-station, such a family party as this might have reached home fatherless, and no great misfortune, one might suppose. Yet the wife had not even looked sad—had only scolded and laughed at him.

In this, as in most cases of reform, it is the women who must make the first step. There are two great sins of men: drunkenness in the lower classes; a still worse form of vice in the higher, which I believe women might help to stop, if they tried. Would to God I could cry to every young working woman, “Never encourage a drunken sweetheart!” and to every young lady thinking of marriage, “Beware! better die, than live to give children to a loose-principled, unchaste father.”

These are strong words—dare I leave them for eyes that may, years hence, read this page?—Ay, for by then, they will—they must, in the natural course of things—have gained at least a tithe of my own bitter knowledge of the world. God preserve them from all knowledge beyond what is actually necessary! when I think of any suffering coming to them, any sight of sin or avoidable sorrow troubling those dear eyes, it almost drives me mad. If, for instance, you were to marry a man, like some men I have known, and who indeed form the majority of our sex, and he were unkind to you, or wronged you in the smallest degree, I think I could murd

Hush!—not that word!

You see how my mind keeps wandering purposelessly, having nothing to communicate. I had indeed, for some time, avoided writing here at all. And I have been, and am, necessarily occupied, laying the groundwork of that new plan of life which I explained to you.

Its whole bearing you did not see, noe did I intend you should; though your own words originated it; lit it with a ray of hope so exquisite that I could follow on cheerfully for indefinite years.

It only lasted an hour or two; and then your father's words—though, heaven be praised, they were not yours—plunged me into darkness again; a darkness out of which I had never crept, had I been still the morbid coward I was a year ago.

As it was, you little guessed all the thoughts you shut in with me behind the study door, till your light foot came back to it—that night. Nor that in the interval I had had strength to weigh all circumstances, and form a definite deliberate plan, firm as I believe my heart to be—since I have known you.

I have resolved, in consequence of some words of yours, to change my whole scheme of life. That is, I will at some future day, whether near or far, circumstances must decide, submit to you every event of my history, and then ask you dispassionately as a friend, to decide if I shall still live on according to my purpose, in prospect of *the end*, or, shaking off the burthen of it, shall trust in God's mercy, consider all things past and gone, and myself at liberty like any other, to love, and woo, and marry.

Afterwards, according to your decision, may or may not follow that other question—the very hope and suspense of which is like passing into a new life, through the gate of death.

Your father said distinctly—but I will not repeat it. It is enough to make me dread to win my best blessing, lest I might also win her father's curse. To evoke that curse, knowingly to sow dissension between a man and his own daughter, is an awful thing. I dare not do it. During his life-time I must wait.

So, for the present, farewell, innocent child! for no child can be more innocent and happy than you.

But you will not always be a child. If you do not marry—and you seem of an opposite mind to your sisters in that particular—you will, years hence, be a woman, no longer young, perhaps little sought after, for you are not beautiful to most eyes, nor from your peculiar temperament do you please many people. By then, you may have known care and sorrow—will be an orphan and alone. I should despise myself for reckoning up these possibilities, did I not know that in so far as any human hand can shield you from trouble, you shall be shielded, that while one poor life lasts, you never shall be left desolate.

I have given up entirely my intention of quitting England. Even if I am not able to get sight of you from year's end to year's end, if I have to stretch out and diminish to the slenderest link which will remain unbroken my acquaintance with your family, I must keep within reach of you. Nothing must happen to you or any one belonging to you, without my informing myself of it. And though you may forget—I say not you will, but you may—I am none the less resolved that you shall never lose me, while a man can protect a woman, a friend sustain and comfort a friend.

You will probably set down to mere friendship one insane outburst of mine. Wrong, I confess; but to see you standing in the lamplight, looking after me into the dark, with a face so tender, mild, and sweet, and to know

I should not look at that face again for so long, it nearly maddened me. But you were calm—you would not understand.

It will never do for me to see you often, or to live in your neighbourhood, and therefore it was best to take immediate steps for the change I contemplate, and of which I told you. Accordingly, the very next day, I applied for leave of absence. The colonel was just riding over to call at Rockmount, so I sent a message to your father. I shrank from writing to him: to you, it was of course impossible. In this, as in many a future instance, I can only trust to that good heart which knows me—not wholly—alas, will it ever know me wholly? but better than any other human being does, or ever will. I believe it will judge me charitably, patiently, faithfully; for is it not itself the truest, simplest, faithfulest heart?

Let me here say one word. I believe there is no love in it; nothing that need make a man hesitate lest his own happiness should not be the only sacrifice. Sympathy, affection, you have for me; but I do not think you ever knew what love was. Any one worthy of you may yet have free opportunity of winning you—of making you happy. And if I saw you happy, thoroughly and righteously happy, I could endure it.

I will tell you my plans.

I am trying for the appointment of surgeon to a gaol near this town. I hope to obtain it: for it will open a wide field of work—to me the salt of life: and it is only fifty miles from Treherne Court, where you will visit, and where, from time to time, I may be able to meet you.

You see—this my hope, dim as it is in the future, and vague enough as to present comfort—does not make me weaker but stronger for the ordinary concerns of life; therefore I believe it to be a holy hope, and one that I dare carry along with me in all my worldly doings and plannings. Believe one fact, for my nature has sufficient unity of purpose never to do things by halves—that no single plan, act, or thought, is without reference to you.

Shall I tell you my ways and means, as calculated to-night, the last night of the year?

Selling out of the army will supply me with a good sum. Which I mean to put by, letting the interest accumulate, as a provision for accidental illness, or old age, if I live to be old: or for—do you guess?

My salary will be about 300L. a-year. Now, half of that ought to suffice a man of my moderate habits. Many a poor clerk, educated, and obliged to appear as a gentleman, has no larger income, and contrives to marry upon it, too, if love seizes hold of him while still in the venturesome stage of existence.

We men are strange animals: at twenty, ready to rush into matrimony on any prospects whatever, or none at all; at thirty, having thought better of it, rejoice in our escape; but after forty, when the shadows begin to fall, when the outer world darkens, and the fireside feels comfortless and lone, then, we sit and ponder—I mean, most men. Mine is an individual and special case, not germane to the subject.

With all deference to young Tom Turton, his friend Mr. Charteris, and others of the set, which I have lately been among in London, the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds a-year seems to me amply sufficient to maintain in as much comfort as is good for him, and in all the necessary outward decencies of middle-class life, a man without any expensive habits or relations dependent on him, and who has neither wife nor child.

Neither wife nor child! As I write them, the words smite hard.

To have no wife, no child! Never to seek what the idlest, most drunken loon of a mechanic may get for the asking; never to experience the joy which I saw on a poor fellow's face only yesterday; when, in the same room with one dead lad, and another sickening, the wife brought into the world a third, a living child, and the ragged, starved father cried out, "Lord be thankit!" that it *was* a living child.

O Lord, Thy ways are equal: it is ours only which are unequal. Forbid it Thou that I should have given Thee of that which cost me nothing!

Yet, on this night—this last night of a year so momentous—let me break silence, and cry—Thou alone wilt hear.

I want her—I crave her; my very heart and soul are hungry for her! Not as a brief possession, like gathering a flower and wearying of it, or throwing it away. I want her for always—to have her morning, noon, and night; day after day and year after year; happy or sorrowful, good or faulty, young or old; only mine, mine! I feel sometimes as if, found thus late, all eternity could not give me enough of her. It is not the body she inhabits, —though, from head to foot, my love is all fair, fair as daylight and pure as snow—it is herself I want, ever close at hand to be the better self of this me, who have tried vainly all these years to stand alone, to live and endure alone! Folly!—proud folly! such is not a natural state of things; God himself said, "It is not good for man to be alone."

I think I never shall be so solitary as I have been. That good heart, pure and unselfish as I never saw woman's before, will always incline kindly to as much of mine as I dare show; those sweet, honest eyes will never be less trustful than now—unless I gave them cause to doubt me. Her friendship, like her character, is steadfast as a rock.

But oh! if she *loved* me! If I were one of those poor clerks at a hundred a-year; if we had only meat, raiment, and a roof to cover us, and she loved me! If I were, as I might have been, a young doctor, toiling day and night, with barely time for food and sleep; but with a home to come to, and her to love me! If we sat in this room, poor and mean as it is, with this scanty supper between us, asking a blessing upon it, while, her hand in mine and her lips on my forehead, told me, "Max, I love you!"

God forgive me if I murmur! I am not young; my life is slipping away—my life, which is *owed*. Oh! that I might live long enough to teach her to say, "Max, I love you!"

Enough. The last minutes of this year—this blessed year! shall not be wasted in moans.

Already the streets are growing quiet. People do not seem to keep this festival here as we do, north of the Tweed; they think more of Christmas. Most likely she will have forgotten all about the day, and be peacefully sleeping the old year out and the new year in—this little English girl. Well, I am awake, and that will do for both.

My letter to Treherne—could you have seen it? I suppose you did. It made no excuses for not coming at

Christmas, because I intended to come and see you as to-morrow.

I mean to wish you a happy New Year, on this, the first since I knew you, since I was aware of there being such a little creature existing in the world.

Also, I mean to come and see you every New Year, if possible. The word possible, implying so far as my own will can control circumstances. I desire to see you; it is life to me to see you, and see you I will. Not often, for I dare not, but as often as I dare. And—for I have faith in anniversaries, always on the anniversary of the day I first saw you, and on New Year's Day.

One—two—three; I waited for the clock to cease striking, and now all the bells are ringing from every church-tower. Is this an English custom? I must ask you tomorrow, that is, to-day, for it is morning—it is the New Year.

My day-dawn, my gift of God, my little English girl, a happy New Year!

Max Urquhart.

CHAPTER VI. HER STORY.

New Year's Morning. So, this long-anticipated festival-week is ended, and the old year gone. Poor old year!

“He gave me a friend and true, true love,
And the New Year will take them away.”

Ah, no, no, no!

Things are strange. The utmost I can say of them is, that they seem very strange. One would suppose, if one liked a friend, and there existed no reasonable cause for not shewing it, why one would shew it, just a little? That, with only forty miles between—a half-hour's railway ride not to run over and shake hands—to write a letter and not to mention one's name therein, was, at least, strange. Such a small thing, even under any pressure of business—just a line written, an hour spared. Talk of want of time! Why, if I were a man I would make time, I would—

Simpleton! what would you do, indeed, when your plainest duty you do not do,—just to wait and trust.

Yet I do trust. Once believing in people, I believe in them always, against all evidence except their own—ay, and should to the very last—“until death us do part.”

Those words have set me right again, showing me that I am not afraid, either for myself or any other, even of that change. As I have read somewhere, all pure love of every kind partakes in this of the nature of the love divine, “neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature,” are able to separate or annihilate it. One feels that—or if one does not feel it, it is not true love, is worth nothing, and had better be let go.

I write idly,—perhaps from having been somewhat tired this week. Let me tell my troubles, it is only to this paper. Troubles indeed, they would scarcely deserve to be called, had they not happened in this festive week, when everyone expected to be so uncommonly happy.

First, there was Francis's matter, which ought to have been a great joy, and yet has seemed to weigh us down like a great care; perhaps because the individual most concerned took it as such, never once looking pleased, nor giving a hearty “thank you,” to a single congratulation. Also, instead of coming to talk over his happy prospects with papa and me, he has avoided us pertinaciously. Whenever we lighted upon him, it was sure to be by accident, and he slipped away as soon as he could, to do the polite to Treherne cousins, or to play interminably at billiards, which he considered “the most fascinating game in the world.”

I hate it. What can be the charm of prowling for hours round and round a green-baize table, trying to knock so many red and white balls into so many holes? I never could discover, and told him so. He laughed, and said it was only my ignorance; but Colin, who stood by, blushed up to the eyes, and almost immediately left off playing. Who would have supposed the lad so sensitive?

I am beginning to understand the interest taken by a friend of theirs and mine in these two young men. Augustus Treherne and Colin Granton. Though neither particularly clever, they have both two qualities sufficiently rare in all men to make one thankful to find them in any—uprightness of character and unselfishness of disposition. By-the-by, I never knew but one thoroughly unselfish man in all my life, and that was—

Well, and it was *not* Francis Charteris, of whom I am now speaking. The aforesaid little interchange of civility passed between him and me on the Saturday after Christmas-day, when I had been searching for him with a letter from Penelope. (There was in the postbag another letter, addressed to Sir William, which made me feel sure we should have no more guests to-day, nor, consequently, till Monday. Indeed, the letter, which, after some difficulty, I obtained in the shape of cigar-lighters, made no mention of any such possibility at all; but then it had been a *promise*.)

Francis put my sister's note into his pocket, and went on with the game so earnestly that when Augustus came behind and caught hold of him, he started as if he had been collared by a policeman.

“My dear fellow, beg pardon, but the governor wants to know if you have written that letter?”

Lisa had told me what it was—the letter of acceptance of the appointment offered him, which ought to have been sent immediately.

Francis looked annoyed. “Plenty of time.—My compliments to Sir William, and I’ll—think about it.”

“Cool!” muttered Augustus. “’Tis your look-out, Charteris, not mine—only, one way or other, your answer must go to-day, for my father has heard from—”

Here he reined up, as he himself would say; but having seen the handwriting in the post-bag, I guessed who was meant.

“Heard from whom, did you say? Some of the officious persons who are always so obliging as to keep my uncle informed of my affairs?”

“Nonsense—that is one of your crotchets. You have no warmer friend than my father, if only you wouldn’t rub him up the wrong way. Come along, and have done with it. Otherwise—you know him of old—the old gentleman will get uncommon savage.”

“Though I have the honour of knowing Sir William Treherne of old, I really cannot be accountable for his becoming ‘uncommon savage,’” said Francis, haughtily. “Mr. Granton, will you be marker this game?”

“Upon my word, he is the coolest customer! By George, Charteris, if you wanted Penelope as much as I did my wife—”

“Excuse me,” returned Francis, “I have never mentioned Miss Johnston’s name.”

Certainly Augustus goes awkwardly to work with his cousin, who has good points if you know how to take hold of them. To use my brother-in-law’s own phrase, Francis too gets “rubbed up the wrong way,” especially when something has annoyed him. I saw him afterwards stand by a window, of the library, reading Penelope’s letter, with an expression of such perplexity and pain that I should have been alarmed, had not hers to me been so cheerful. They cannot have been quarrelling, for then she is never cheerful. No wonder. Silences, or slight clouds of doubt between friends are hard enough to bear: a real quarrel, and between lovers, must be heart-breaking. With all Francis’s peculiarities, I trust it will never come to that.

Yet something must have been amiss, for there he stood, looking out vacantly on the Italian garden, with the dreary statues half clad in snow—on Antinous, almost seeming to shiver under anything but an Egyptian sky; and a white-limbed Egeria pouring out of her urn a stream of icicles. Of my presence he was scarcely conscious, I do believe, until I ventured to speak.

“Francis, do you see how near it is to post-time?”

Again a start, which with difficulty he concealed. “Et tu Brute? You also among my tormentors?—I quit the field.”

—And the room: whence he was just escaping, had not his uncle’s wheeled-chair filled up the door-way.

“Just in search of you”—cried the querulous voice, which Francis declares goes through his nervous system like a galvanic shock. “Have you written that letter?”

“My dear Sir William—”

“Have you written that letter?”

“No sir, but—”

“Can’t wait for ‘buts’—I know your ways. There’s pen and ink—and—I mean to wait here till the letter is done.”

I thought Francis would have been indignant. And with reason: Sir William, despite his good blood, is certainly a degree short of a gentleman:—but old habit may have force with his nephew, who, without more remonstrance, quietly sat down to write.

A long half hour, only broken by the rustle of Sir William’s *Times*, and Lady Augusta’s short cough—she was more nervous than usual, and whispered me that she hoped Mr. Charteris would not offend his uncle, for the gout was threatening. An involuntary feeling of suspense oppressed even me; until, slipping across the room, I saw that a few stray scribbles were the only writing on Francis’s sheet of paper.

That intolerable procrastination of his! he would let everything slip—his credit, his happiness—nor his alone. And, the more people irritated him, the worse he was. I thought, in despair, I would try my hand at this incorrigible young man, who makes me often feel as if, clever and pleasing as he is, he were not half good enough for our Penelope.

“Francis”—I held out my watch with a warning whisper. He caught at it with great relief, and closed the letter-case.

“Too late for to-day; I’ll do it to-morrow.”

“To-morrow will indeed be too late: Augustus said so distinctly. The appointment will be given to some one else—and then—”

“And then, you acute, logical and businesslike young lady?”

There was no time for ultra-delicacy. “And then you may not be able to marry Penelope for ten more years.”

“Penelope will be exceedingly obliged to you for suggesting the possibility, and taking me to task for it in this way—such a child as you?”

Am I a child? but it mattered not to him how old I seem to have grown. Nor did his satirical tone vex me as it once might have done.

“Forgive me,” I said; “I did not mean to take you to task. But it is not your own happiness alone which is at stake, and Penelope is my sister.”

Strange to say, he was not offended. Perhaps, if Penelope had sometimes spoken her mind to him, instead of everlastingly adoring him, he might have been the better for it.

Francis sighed, and made another scribble on his paper—“Do you think, you who seem to be well acquainted with your sister’s mind, that Penelope would be exceedingly unhappy if—if I were to decline this appointment?”

"Decline—oh!—you're jesting."

"Not at all. The governorship looks far finer than it is. A hot climate—and I detest warm weather: no society—and I should lose all my London enjoyments—give up all my friends and acquaintance."

"So would Penelope."

"So would Penelope, as you say. But—"

"But women count that as nothing—they are used to it. Easy for them to renounce home and country, kindred and friends, and follow a man to the ends of the earth. Quite natural, and they ought to be exceedingly obliged to him for taking them."

He looked at me; then begged me not to fly into a passion, as somebody might hear.

I said he might trust me for that; I would rather not, for his sake—for all our sakes, that anybody did hear—and then the thought of Penelope's gay letter suddenly choked me.

"Don't cry, Dora—I never could bear to see a girl cry. I am very sorry. Heaven help me! was there ever such an unfortunate fellow born? but it is all circumstances: I have been the sport of circumstances during my whole life. No, you need not contradict. What the devil do you torment me for?"

I have thought since, how great must have been the dormant irritation and excitement which could have forced that ugly word out of the elegant lips of Francis Charteris. And, the smile being off it, I saw a face, haggard and sallow with anxiety.

I told him, as gently as I could, that the only thing wanted of him was to make up his mind, either way.—If he saw good reasons for declining—why, decline; Penelope would be content.

"Do as you think best—only do it—and let my sister know. There are two things which you men, the best of you, count for nought; but which are the two things which almost break a woman's heart—one is, when you keep secrets from her; the other when you hesitate and hesitate, and never know your own minds. Pray, Francis, don't do so with Penelope. She is very fond of you."

"I know that. Poor Penelope!" He dropped his head, with something very like a groan.

Much shocked, to see that what ought to have been his comfort, seemed to be his worst pain, I forgot all about the letter in my anxiety lest anything should be seriously amiss between them: and my great concern roused him.

"Nonsense, child. Nothing is amiss. Very likely I shall be Governor of——— after all, and your sister governor's lady, if she chooses. Hush!—not a word; Sir William is calling.—Yes, sir, nearly ready. There, Dora, you can swear the letter is begun." And he hastily wrote the date—Treherne Court.

Even then, though, I doubt if he would have finished it, save for the merest accident, which shows what trifles apparently cause important results, especially with characters so impressible and variable as Francis.

Sir William, opening his letters, called me to look at one with a name written on the corner.

"Is that meant for my nephew? His correspondent writes an atrocious hand, and cannot spell. 'Mr. F. Chatters!'—the commonest tradesman might have had the decency to put 'Francis Charteris, Esquire.' Perhaps it is not for him, but for one of the servants."

It was not: for Francis, looking rather confused, claimed it as from his tailor—and then, under his uncle's keen eyes, turned scarlet. These two must have had some sharp encounters, in former days, since, even now, their power of provoking one another is grievous to see. Heartily vexed for Francis, I took up the ugly letter to give to him, but Sir William interfered.

"No thank you, young lady. Tradesmen's bills can always wait. Mr. Francis shall have this letter when he has written his own."

Rude as this behaviour, was, Francis bore with it. I was called out of the library, but half an hour afterwards I learned that the letter was written—a letter of acceptance.

So I conclude his hesitation was all talk—or else his better self, sees that a good and loving wife, in any nook of the world, outweighs a host of grand London acquaintance, miscalled "friends."

Dear old Mrs. Granton beamed with delight at the hope of another marriage at Rockmount.

"Only," said she—"what will become of your poor papa, when he has lost all his daughters?"

I reminded her that Francis did not intend marrying more than one of us, and the other was likely to be a fixture for many years.

"Not so sure of that, my dear; but it is very pretty of you to say so. We'll see—something will be thought of for your good papa when the time comes."

What could she mean?—But I was afterwards convinced that only my imagination suspected her of meaning anything beyond her usual old-ladyish eagerness in getting young people "settled."

Sunday was another long day—they seem so long and still in spite of all the gaiety with which these country cousins fill Treherne Court, which is often so oppressive to me, and affects me—with such a strange sensation of nervous irritation, that when Colin and his mother, who take a special charge of me, have hunted me out of stray corners, their affectionate kindness has made me feel like to cry.

—Now, I did not mean to write about myself—I have been trying desperately to fill my mind with other people's affairs—but it will out. I am not myself, I know. All Sunday, a formal and dreary day at Treherne Court, I do think a dozen gentle words would have made me cry like a baby. I did cry once, but it was when nobody saw me, in the firelight, by Mrs. Granton's arm-chair.

"What is ailing you my dear?" she had been saying. "You are not near so lively as you were a week ago. Has any body been vexing my Dora?"

Which, of course, Dora at once denied, and tried to be as blithe as a lark, all the evening.

No, not vexed, that would be impossible—but just a little hurt. If I could only talk about some things that puzzle me—talk in a cursory way, or mention names carelessly, like other names, or ask a question or two, that might throw a light on circumstances not clear, then they would be easier to bear. But I dare not trust

my tongue, or my cheeks, so all goes inwards—I keep pondering and wondering till my brain is bewildered, and my whole heart sore. People should not—cannot—that is good people cannot—say things they do not mean; it would not be kind or generous; it would not be *right* in short; and as good people usually act rightly, or what they believe to be right, that doubt falls to the ground.

Has there risen up somebody better than I? with fewer faults and nobler virtues? God knows I have small need to be proud. Yet I am myself—this Theodora Johnston—as I was from the first, no better and no worse; honest and true if nothing else, and he knew it. Nobody ever knew me so thoroughly—faults and all.

We women must be constituted differently from men. A word said, a line written and we are happy; omitted, our hearts ache—ache as if for a great misfortune. Men cannot feel it, or guess at it—if they did, the most careless of them would be slow to wound us so.

There's Penelope, now, waiting alone at Rockmount. Augustus wanted to go post haste and fetch her here, but Francis objected. He had to return to London immediately, he said, and yet, here he is still. How can men make themselves so content abroad, while the women are wearing their hearts out at home?

I am bitter—naughty—I know I am. I was even cross to Colin to-day, when he wanted me to take a walk with him, and then persisted in staying beside me indoors. Colin likes me—Colin is kind to me—Colin would walk twenty miles for an hour of his old playmate's company—he told me so. And yet I was cross with him.

Oh, I am wicked, wicked! But my heart is so sore. One look into eyes I knew—one clasp of a steadfast kindly hand, and I would be all right again. Merry, happy, brave—afraid of nothing and nobody—not even of myself; it cannot be so bad a self if it is worth being cared for. I can't see to write. There now, there now—as one would say to a child in a passion—cry your heart out, it will do you good, Theodora.

After that, I should have courage to tell the last thing, which, this evening, put a climax to my ill-humours, and in some sense cleared them off, thunder-storm fashion. An incident so unexpected, a story so ridiculous, so cowardly, that had Francis been less to me than my expected brother-in-law, I declare I would have cut his acquaintance for ever and ever, and never spoken to him again.

I was sitting in a corner of the billiard-room, which, when the players are busy, is as quiet unobserved a nook as any in the house. I had a book—but read little, being stopped by the eternal click-clack of the billiard-balls. There were only three in the room—Francis, Augustus, and Colin Granton, who came up and asked my leave to play just one game. My leave? How comical! I told him he might play on till Midsummer, for all I cared.

They were soon absorbed in their game, and their talk between whiles went in and out of my head as vaguely as the book itself had done, till something caught my attention.

"I say, Charteris, you know Tom Turton? He was the cleverest fellow at a cannon. It was refreshing only to watch him hold the cue, so long as his hand was steady, and even after he got a little "screwed." He was a wild one, rather. What has become of him?"

"I cannot say. Doctor Urquhart might, in whose company I last met him."

Augustus stared.

"Well, that is a good joke. Doctor Urquhart with Tom Turton. I was nothing to boast of myself before I married; but Tom Turton!" "They seemed intimate enough; dined, and went to the theatre together and finished the evening—I really forget where. Your friend the doctor made himself uncommonly agreeable."

"Urquhart and Tom Turton," Augustus kept repeating, quite unable to get over his surprise at such a juxtaposition; from which I conclude that Mr. Turton, whose name I never heard before, was one of the not too creditable associates of my brother-in-law in his bachelor days. When, some one calling, he went out, Colin took up the theme; being also familiar with this notorious person, it appeared.

"Very odd, Doctor Urquhart's hunting in couples with Tom Turton. However, I hope he may do him good—there was room for it."

"In Tom, of course; your doctor being one of those china patterns of humanity, in which it is vain to find a flaw, and whose mission it is to go about as patent cementers of all cracked and unworthy vessels."

"Eh?" said Colin, opening his good, stupid eyes.

"Query—whether your humdrum Scotch doctor is one whit better than his neighbours. (Score that as twenty, Granton). I once heard he has a wife and six children living in the shade, near some cathedral town, Canterbury, or Salisbury."

"What!" and Colin's eyes almost started out of his head with astonishment.

I laugh now—I could have laughed then, the minute after, to recollect what a "stound" it gave us both, Colin and me, this utterly improbable and ridiculous tale, which Francis so coolly promulgated.

"I don't believe it," said Colin, doggedly, bless his honest heart! Beg your pardon, Charteris, but there must be some mistake. I don't believe it."

"As you will—it is a matter of very little consequence. Your game, now."

"I won't believe it," persisted Colin, who, once getting a thing into his head, keeps it there. "Doctor Urquhart isn't the sort of man to do it. If he had married ever so low a woman, he would have made the best of her. He'd never take a wife and keep her in the background. Six young ones, too—and he so fond of children."

Francis laughed.

And all this while I sat quiet in my chair.

"Children are sometimes inconvenient—even to a gentleman of your friend's parental propensities. Perhaps—we know such things do occur, and can't be helped, sometimes—perhaps the tale is all true, except that he omitted the marriage ceremony."

"Charteris, that girl's sitting there."

It was this hurried whisper of Colin's, and a certain tone of Francis's, which made me guess at the meaning, which, when I clearly caught it—for I am not a child exactly, and Lydia Cartwright's story has lately made me

sorrowfully wise,—sent me burning hot all over, and then so cold.

“That girl.” Yes, she was but a girl. Perhaps she ought to have crept blushing away, or pretended not to have heard a syllable of these men’s talk. But, girl as she was, she scorned to be such a hypocrite—such a coward. What! sit still to hear a friend sneered at, and his character impeached.

While one—the only one at hand to do it—durst not so much as say “The tale is false—prove it.” And why? Because she happened to be a woman! Out upon it! I should despise the womanhood that skulked behind such rags of miscalled modesty as these.

“Mr. Granton,” I said, as steadily and coolly as I could, “your caution comes too late. If you gentlemen wished to talk about anything I should not hear, you ought to have gone into another room. I have heard every word you uttered.”

“I’m sorry for it,” said Colin, bluntly.

Francis proposed carelessly “to drop the subject.” What! take away a man’s good name, behind his back, and then merely “drop the subject.” Suppose the listener had been other than I, and had believed: or Colin had been a less honest fellow than he is, and he had believed, and we had both gone and promulgated the story, with a few elegant improvements of our own, where would it have ended? These are the things that destroy character—foul tales, that grow up in darkness, and before a man can seize hold of them, root them up, and drag them to light, homes are poisoned, reputation gone.

Such thoughts came in a crowd upon me. I hardly knew till then how much I cared for him—I mean his honour, his stainless name, all that helps to make his life valuable and noble. And he absent, too, unable to defend himself. I was right to do as I did; I take shame to myself even for this long preamble lest it might look like an apology.

“Francis,” I said, holding fast by the billiard-table, and trying to smother down the heat of my face, and the beat at my heart, which nearly choked me, “if you please, you have no right to say such things, and then drop the subject. You are quite mistaken. Doctor Urquhart was never married, he told papa so. Who informed you that he had a wife and six children living at Salisbury?”

“My dear girl, I do not vouch for any such fact; I merely ‘tell the tale, as it was told to me.’”

“By whom? Remember the name, if you can. Any one who repeated it, ought to be able to give full confirmation.”

“Faith, I almost forget what the story was.”

“You said, he had a wife and six children, living near Salisbury. Or,” and I looked Francis direct in the face, “a woman who was not his wife, but who ought to have been.”

He must have been ashamed of himself, I think; for he turned away and began striking irritably at the balls.

“I must say, Dora, these are extraordinary questions to put. Young ladies ought to know nothing about such things; what possible concern is this of yours?”

I did not shrink; or I am sure he could not have seen me do so. “It is my concern, as much as it is Colin’s, there; or that of any honest stander-by. Francis, I think that to take away a man’s character behind his back, as you have been doing, is as bad as murdering him.”

“She’s right,” cried Colin; “upon my soul she is!—Dora—Miss Dora, if Charteris will only give me the scoundrel’s name that told him this, I’ll hunt him down, and unearthen him, wherever he is. Come, my dear fellow, try and remember. Who was it?”

“I think,” observed Francis, after a pause; “his name was Augustus Treherne.”

Colin started—but I only said, “Very well, I shall go and ask him.”

And just then it chanced that papa and Augustus were seen passing the window. I was well nigh doing, great mischief by forgetting, for the moment, how that the name of the place was Salisbury. It would never have done to hurt papa even by the mention of Salisbury, so I let him go by. I then called in my brother-in-law, and at once, without an instant’s delay, put the question.

He utterly and instantly denied having said any such thing. But afterwards, just in time to prevent a serious fracas between him and Francis, he suddenly burst out laughing violently.

“I have it, and if it isn’t one of the best jokes going! Once, when I was chaffing Urquhart about marrying, I told him he ‘looked as savage, as if he had a wife and six children hidden somewhere on Salisbury Plain.’ And I dare say afterwards, I told some fellow at the camp, who told somebody else, and so it got round.”

“And that was all?”

“Upon my word of honour, Granton, that was all.”

Mr. Charteris said, he was exceedingly happy to hear it. They all seemed to consider it a capital joke, and in the midst of their mirth I slipped out.

But, the thing ended, my courage gave way. O the wickedness of this world and of the men in it! Oh! if there were any human being to speak to, to trust, to lean upon! I laid my head in my hands and cried. If he could know how bitterly I have cried.

New Year’s night.

Feeling wakeful, I will just put down the remaining occurrences of this New Year’s day.

When I was writing the last line, Lisa knocked at the door.

“Dora, Dr. Urquhart is in the library; make haste, if you care to see him; he says he can only stop half an hour.”

So, after a minute, I shut and locked my desk. Only half an hour!

I have the credit of "flying into a passion," as Francis says, about things that vex and annoy me. Things that wound, that stab to the heart, affect me quite differently. Then, I merely say "yes," or "no," or "of course," and go about quietly, as if nothing were amiss. Probably, did there come any mortal blow, I should be like one of those poor soldiers one hears of, who, being shot, will stand up as if unhurt, or even fight on for a minute or so, then suddenly drop down—dead.

I fastened my neck-ribbon, smoothed my hair, and descended. I knew I should have entered the library all proper, and put out my hand. Ah! he should not—he ought not, that night—this very same right hand.

I mean to say, I should have met Doctor Urquhart exactly as usual, had I not, just in the corridor, entering from the garden, come upon him and Colin Granton in close talk.

"How do you do?" and "It is a very cold morning." Then they passed on. I have since thought that their haste was Colin's doing. He looked confused, as if it were a confidential conversation I had interrupted, which very probably it was. I hope, not the incident of the morning, for it would vex Doctor Urquhart so; and blunt as Colin is, his kind heart teaches him tact, oftentimes.

Doctor Urquhart stayed out his half-hour punctually, and over the luncheon-table there was plenty of general conversation. He also took an opportunity to put to me, in my character of nurse, various questions about papa's health, and desired me, still in the same general half-medical tone, to be careful of my own, as Treherne Court was a much colder place than Rockmount, and we were likely to have a severe winter. I said it would not much signify, as we did not purpose remaining more than a week longer; to which he merely answered, "Oh, indeed!"

We had no more conversation, except that on taking leave, having resisted all the Treherne's entreaties to remain, he wished me "a happy New Year."

"I may not see you again for some time to come; if not, good-bye; good-bye!"

Twice over, good-bye; and that was all.

A happy New Year. So now, the Christmas time is over and gone; and to-morrow, January 2nd, 1857, will be like all other days in all other years. If I ever thought or expected otherwise, I was mistaken.

One thing made me feel deeply and solemnly glad of Doctor Urquhart's visit to-day. It was, that if ever Francis, or any one else, was inclined to give a moment's credence to that atrocious lie, his whole appearance and demeanour were, its instantaneous contradiction. Whether Colin had told him anything, I could not discover; he looked grave, and somewhat anxious, but his manner was composed and at ease—the air of a man whose life, if not above sorrow, was wholly above suspicion; whose heart was steadfast and whose conscience free.

"A thoroughly good man, if ever there was one," said papa, emphatically, when he had gone away.

"Yes," Augustus answered, looking at Francis and then at me. "As honest and upright a man as God ever made."

Therefore, no matter—even if I was mistaken.

CHAPTER VII. HIS STORY.

I continue these letters, having hitherto been made aware of no reason why they should cease. If that reason comes, they shall cease at once, and for ever; and these now existing be burnt immediately, by my own hand, as I did those of my sick friend in the Crimea. Be satisfied of that.

You will learn to-morrow morning, what, had an opportunity offered, I meant to have told you on New Year's Day—my appointment as surgeon to the gaol, where I shall shortly enter upon my duties. The other portion of them, my private practice in the neighbourhood, I mean to commence as soon as ever I can, afterwards.

Thus, you see my "Ishmaelish wanderings" as you once called them, are ended. I have a fixed position in one place. I begin to look on this broad river with an eye of interest, and am teaching myself to grow familiar with its miles of docks, forests of shipping, and its two busy, ever-growing towns along either shore, even as one accustoms one's self to the natural features of the place, wherever it be, that we call "home."

If not home, this is at least my probable sphere of labour for many years to come: I shall try to take root here, and make the best of everything.

The information that will reach you tomorrow, comes necessarily through Treherne. He will get it at the breakfast-table, pass it on to his wife, who will make her lively comments on it, and then it will be almost sure to go on to you. You will, in degree, understand, what they will not, why I should give up my position as regimental surgeon to establish myself here. For all else, it is of little moment what my friends think, as I am settled in my own mind—strengthened by certain good words of yours, that soft, still, autumn day, with the haze over the moorland and the sun setting in the ripples of the pool.

You will have discovered by this time a fact of which, so far as I could judge, you were a week since entirely ignorant—that you have a suitor for your hand. He himself informed me of his intentions with regard to you—asking my advice and good wishes. What could I say?

I will tell you, being unwilling that in the smallest degree a nature so candid and true as yours could suppose me guilty of doubledealing. I said, "that I believed you would make the best of wives to any man you

loved, and that I hoped when you did marry, it would be under those circumstances. Whether he himself were that man, it rested with your suitor alone to discover and decide." He confessed honestly that on this point he was as ignorant as myself, but declared that he should "do his best." Which implies that while I have been occupied in this gaol business, he has had daily, hourly access to your sweet company, with every opportunity in his favour—money, youth, consent of friends,—he said you have been his mother's choice for years. With, best of all, an honest heart, which vows that, except a passing "smite" or two, it has been yours since you were children together. That such an honest heart should not have its fair chance with you, God forbid.

Though I will tell you the truth; I did not believe he had any chance. Nothing in you has ever given me the slightest indication of it. Your sudden blush when you met him surprised me, also your exclamation—I was not aware you were in the habit of calling him by his Christian name. But that you love this young man, I do not believe.

Some women can be persuaded into love, but you are not of that sort, so far as I can judge. Time will show. You are entirely and absolutely free.

Pardon me, but after the first surprise of this communication I rejoiced that you were thus free. Even were I other than I am—young, handsome, with a large income and everything favourable, you should still, at this crisis, be left exactly as you are, free to elect your own fate, as every woman ought to do. I may be proud, but were I seeking a wife, the only love that ever would satisfy me would be that which was given spontaneously and unsought:—dependent on nothing I gave, but on what I was. If you choose this suitor, my faith in you will convince me that your feelings was such, for him, and I shall be able to say, "Be happy, and God bless you."

Thus far, I trust, I have written with the steadiness of one who, in either case, has no right to be even surprised—who has nothing whatever to claim, and who accordingly claims nothing.

Treherne will of course answer—and I shall find his letter at the camp when I return, which will be the day after to-morrow. It may bring me—as, indeed, I have expected day by day, being so much the friend of both parties—definite tidings.

Let me stop writing here. My ghosts of old have been haunting me, every day this week; is it because my good angel is vanishing—vanishing—far away? Let me recall your words, which nothing ever can obliterate from my memory—and which in any case I shall bless you for as long as I live.

"I believe that every sin, however great, being repented of and forsaken, is by God, and ought to be by men, altogether forgiven, blotted out and done away?"

A truth, which I hope never to forget, but to set forth continually—I shall have plenty of opportunity, as a gaol-surgeon. Ay, I shall probably live and die as a poor gaol-surgeon.

And you?

"The children of Alice call Bartrum father."

This line of Elia's has been running in my head all day. A very quiet, patient, pathetically sentimental line. But Charles Lamb was only a gentle dreamer—or he wrote it when he was old.

Understand, I do *not* believe you love this young man. If you do—marry him! But if, not loving him, you marry him—I had rather you died. Oh, child, child, with your eyes so like my mother and Dallas—I had rather, ten thousand times, that you died.

CHAPTER VIII HER STORY.

Penelope has brought me my desk to pass away the long day during her absence in London—whither she has gone up with Mrs. Granton to buy the first instalment of her wedding-clothes. She looked very sorry that I could not accompany her. She is exceedingly kind—more so than ever in her life before, though I have given her a deal of trouble, and seem to be giving more every day.

I have had "fever-and-agur," as the poor folk hereabouts call it—caught, probably, in those long walks over the moorlands, which I indulged in after our return from the north—supposing they would do me good. But the illness has done me more; so it comes to the same thing in the end.

I could be quite happy now, I believe, were those about me happy too; and, above all, were Penelope less anxious on my account, so as to have no cloud on her own prospects. She is to be married in April, and they will sail in May; I must contrive to get well long before then, if possible. Francis has been very little down here; being fully occupied in official arrangements; but Penelope only laughs, and says he is better out of the way during this busy time. She is so happy, she can afford to jest. Mrs. Granton takes my place in assisting her, which is good for the dear old lady too.

Poor Mrs. Granton! it cut me to the heart at first to see how puzzled she was at the strange freak which took Colin off to the Mediterranean—only puzzled, never cross—how could she be cross at anything "my Colin" does? he is always right, of course. He was really right this time, though it made her unhappy for awhile; but she would have been more so, had she known all. Now, she only wonders a little; regards me with a sort of half-pitying curiosity; is specially kind to me, brings me every letter of her son's to read—thank heaven, they are already very cheerful letters—and treats me altogether as if she thought I were breaking my heart for her Colin, and that Colin had not yet discovered what was good for himself concerning me, but would in time. It is of little consequence—so as she is content and discovers nothing.

Poor Colin! I can only reward him by loving his old mother for his sake.

After a long pause, writing being somewhat fatiguing, I have thought it best to take this opportunity of setting down a circumstance which befell me since I last wrote in my journal. It was at first not my intention to mention it here at all, but on second thoughts I do so, lest, should anything happen to prevent my destroying this journal during my life time, there might be no opportunity, through the omission of it, for any misconstructions as to Colin's conduct or mine. I am weak enough to feel that, not even after I was dead, would I like it to be supposed I had given any encouragement to Colin Granton, or cared for him in any other way than as I shall always care for him, and as he well deserves.

It is a most painful thing to confess, and one for which I still take some blame to myself, for not having seen and prevented it, but the day before we left Treherne Court, Colin Granton made me an offer of marriage.

When I state that this was unforeseen, I do not mean up to the actual moment of its befalling me. They say, women instinctively find out when a man is in love with them, so long as they themselves are indifferent to him; but I did not, probably because my mind was so full of other things. Until the last week of our visit, such a possibility never entered my mind. I mention this, to explain my not having prevented—what every girl ought to prevent if she can—the final declaration, which it must be such a cruel mortification to any man to make, and be denied.

This was how it happened. After the new year came in, our gaieties and late hours, following the cares of papa's illness, were too much for me, or else this fever was coming on. I felt—not ill exactly—but not myself, and Mrs. Granton saw it. She petted me like a mother, and was always telling me to regard her as such, which I innocently promised; when she would look at me earnestly, and say, often with tears in her eyes, that “she was sure I would never be unkind to the old lady,” and that “she should get the best of daughters.”

Yet still I had not the least suspicion. No, nor when Colin was continually about me, watching me, waiting upon me, sometimes almost irritating me, and then again touching me inexpressibly with his unfailing kindness, did I suspect anything for long. At last, I did.

There is no need to relate what trifles first opened my eyes, nor the wretchedness of the two intermediate days between my dreading and being sure of it.

I suppose it must always be a very terrible thing to any woman, the discovery that some one whom she likes heartily, and only likes, loves her. Of course, in every possible way that it could be done, without wounding him, or betraying him to other people, I avoided Colin; but it was dreadful, notwithstanding. The sight of his honest, happy face, was sadder to me than the saddest face in the world, yet when it clouded over, my heart ached. And then his mother, with her caresses and praises, made me feel the most conscience-stricken wretch that ever breathed.

Thus things went on. I shall set down no incidents, though bitterly I remember them all. At last it came to an end. I shall relate this, that there may be no doubt left as to what passed between us—Colin and me.

We were standing in the corridor, his mother having just quitted us, to settle with papa about to-morrow's journey, desiring us to wait for her till she returned. Colin suggested waiting in the library, but I preferred the corridor, where continually there were persons coming and going. I thought if I never gave him any opportunity of saying anything, he might understand what I so earnestly wished to save him from being plainly told. So we stood looking out of the hall-windows. I can see the view this minute, the large, level circle of snow, with the sun-dial in the centre, and beyond, the great avenue-gates, with the avenue itself, two black lines and a white one between, lessening and fading away in the mist of a January afternoon.

“How soon the day is closing in—our last day here!”

I said this without thinking. The next minute I would have given anything to recall it. For Colin answered something—I hardly remember what—but the manner, the tone, there was no mistaking. I suppose the saying is true;—no woman with a heart in her bosom can mistake for long together when a man really loves her. I felt it was coming; perhaps better let it come, and, then it would be over, and there would be an end of it.

So I just stood still, with my eyes on the snow, and my hands locked tight together, for Colin had tried to take one of them. He was trembling much, and so I am sure was I. He had said only half-a-dozen words, when I begged him to stop, “unless he wished to break my heart.” And seeing him turn pale as death, and lean against the wall, I did indeed feel as if my heart were breaking.

For a moment the thought came—let me confess it—how cruel things were, as they were; how happy had they been otherwise, and I could have made him happy—this good honest soul that loved me, his dear old mother, and every one belonging to us; also, whether anyhow I ought not to try.—No: that was not possible. I can understand women's renouncing love, or dying of it, or learning to live without it: but marrying without it, either for “spite,” or for money, necessity, pity, or persuasion, is to me utterly incomprehensible. Nay, the self-devoted heroines of the *Emilia Wyndham* school seem creatures so weak that if not compassionating one would simply despise them. Out of duty or gratitude, it might be possible to work, live, or even die for a person, but *never* to marry him.

So, when Colin, recovering, tried to take my hand again, I shrunk into myself, and became my right self at once. For which, lest tried overmuch, and liking him as I do, some chance emotion might have led him momentarily astray, I most earnestly thank God.

And then I had to look him in the eyes and tell him the plain truth.

“Colin, I do not love you; I never shall be able to love you, and so it would be wicked even to think of this. You must give it all up, and let us go back to our old ways.”

“Dora?”

“Yes, indeed, it is true. You *must* believe it.”

For a long time, the only words he said were:—

“I knew it—knew I was not half good enough for you.”

It being nearly dark, no one came by until we heard his mother's step, and her cheerful “Where's my Colin?”—loud enough as if she meant—poor dear!—in fond precaution, to give us notice of her coming.

Instinctively we hid from her in the library. She looked in at the door, but did not, or would not, see us, and went trotting away down the corridor. Oh, what a wretch I felt!

When she had departed, I was stealing away, but Colin caught my dress.

"One word—just one. Did you never care for me—never the least bit in all the world?"

"Yes," I answered sorrowfully, feeling no more ashamed of telling this, or anything, than one would be in a dying confession. "Yes, Colin, I was once very fond of you, when I was about eleven years old."

"And never afterwards?"

"No—as my saying this proves. Never afterwards, and never should, by any possible chance—in the sort of way you wish."

"That is enough—I understand," he said, with a sort of mournful dignity quite new in Colin Granton. "I was only good enough for you when you were a child, and we are not children now. We never shall be children any more."

"No—ah, no." And the thought of that old time came upon me like a flood—the winter games at the Cedars—the blackberrying and bilberrying upon the sunshiny summer moors—the grief when he went to school, and the joy when he came home again—the love that was so innocent, so painless. And he had loved me ever since—me, not Lisabel; though for a time he tried flirting with her, he owned, just to find out whether or not I cared for him. I hid my face and sobbed.

And then, I had need to recover self-control; it is such an awful thing to see a man weep.

I stood by Colin till we were both calmer: trusting all was safe over; and that without the one question I most dreaded. But it came.

"Dora, *why* do you not care for me? Is there—tell me or not, as you like—is there any one else?"

Conscience! let me be as just to myself as I would be to another in my place.

Once, I wrote that I had been "mistaken," as I have been in some things, but not in all. Could I have honestly said so, taking all blame on myself and freeing all others from everything save mere kindness to a poor girl who was foolish enough, but very honest and true, and wholly ignorant of where things were tending, till too late; if I could have done this, I believe I should then and there have confessed the whole truth to Colin Granton. But as things are, it was impossible.

Therefore I said, and started to notice how literally my words imitated other words, the secondary meaning of which had struck me differently from their first, "that it was not likely I should ever be married."

Colin asked no more.

The dressing-bell rang, and I again tried to get away; but he whispered "Stop one minute—my mother—what am I to tell my mother?"

"How much does she know?"

"Nothing. But she guesses, poor dear—and I was always going to tell her outright; but somehow I couldn't. But now, as you will tell your father and sisters, and—"

"No, Colin; I shall not tell any human being."

And I was thankful that if I could not return his love I could at least save his pride, and his mother's tender heart.

"Tell her nothing; go home and be brave for her sake. Let her see that her boy is not unhappy. Let her feel that not a girl in the land is more precious to him than his old mother."

"That's true!" he said, with a hard breath. "I won't break her dear old heart. I'll will, Dora." hold my tongue and bear it.

"I know you will," and I held out my hand. Surely, that clasp wronged no one; for it was hardly like a lover's—only my old playmate—Colin, my dear.

We then agreed, that if his mother asked any questions, he should simply tell her that he had changed his mind concerning me, and that otherwise the matter should be buried with him and me, now and always. "Except only"—and he seemed about to tell me something, but stopped, saying it was of no matter—it was all as one now. I asked no farther, only desiring to get away.

Then, with another long, sorrowful, silent clasp of the hand, Colin and I parted.

A long parting it has proved; for he kept aloof from me at dinner, and instead of travelling home with us, went round another way. A week or two afterwards, he called at Rockmount, to tell us he had bought a yacht, and was going a cruise to the Mediterranean. I being out on the moor, did not see him; he left next day, telling his mother to "wish good-bye for him to his playmate Dora."

Poor Colin! God bless him and keep him safe, so that I may feel I only wounded his heart, but did his soul no harm. I meant it not! And when he comes back to his old mother, perhaps bringing her home a fair daughter-in-law, as no doubt he will one day, I shall be happy enough to smile at all the misery of that time at Treherne Court and afterwards, and at all the tender compassion which has been wasted upon me by good Mrs. Granton, because "my Colin" changed his mind, and went away without marrying his playmate Dora. Only "Dora." I am glad he never called me my full name. There is but one person who ever called me "Theodora."

I read in a book, the other day, this extract:—

"People do not sufficiently remember that in every relation of life as in the closest one of all, they ought to take one another 'for better, for worse.' That, granting the tie of friendship, gratitude, or esteem, be strong enough to have existed at all, it ought, either actively or passively, to exist for ever. And seeing we can, at best, know our neighbour, companion or friend, as little as, alas! we often find he knoweth of us, it behoveth us to treat him with the most patient fidelity, the tenderest forbearance; granting, unto all his words and actions that we do not understand, the utmost limit of faith that common sense and Christian justice will allow. Nay, these failing, is there not still left Christian charity? which, being past 'believing' and 'hoping,' still 'endureth all things?'"

I hear the carriage-wheels.

They will not let me go downstairs at all to-day.

I have been lying looking at the fire, alone, for Francis returned with Mrs. Granton and Penelope yesterday. They have gone a long walk across the moors. I watched them, strolling arm-in-arm—Darby and Joan fashion—till their two small black figures vanished over the hilly road, which always used to remind me of the Sleeping Beauty and her prince.

“And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went,
To that new world which is the old.”

They must be very happy—Francis and Penelope. '

I wonder how soon I shall be well. This fever and ague lasts sometimes for months; I remember Doctor Urquhart's once saying so.

Here, following my plan of keeping this journal accurate and complete, I ought to put down something which occurred yesterday, and which concerns Doctor Urquhart.

Driving through the camp, my sister Penelope saw him, and papa stopped the carriage and waited for him. He could not pass them by, as Francis declared he seemed intending to do, with a mere salutation, but stayed and spoke. The conversation was not told me, for, on mentioning it, a few sharp words took place between papa and Penelope. She protested against his taking; so much trouble in cultivating the society of a man, who, she said, was evidently, out of his own profession, “a perfect boor.”

Papa replied more warmly than I had at all expected.

“You will oblige me, Penelope, by allowing your father to have a will of his own in this as in most other matters, even if you do suppose him capable of choosing for his associate and friend 'a perfect boor.' And were that accusation as true as it is false, I trust I should never forget that a debt of gratitude, such as I owe to Doctor Urquhart, once incurred, is seldom to be repaid, and never to be obliterated.”

So the discourse ended. Penelope left my room, and papa took a chair by me. I tried to talk to him, but we soon both fell into silence. Once or twice, when I thought he was reading the newspaper, I found him looking at me, but he made no remark.

Papa and I have had much less of each other's company lately, though we have never lost the pleasant footing on which we learned to be during his illness. I wonder if, now that he is quite well, he has any recollection of the long, long hours, nights and days, with only daylight or candle-light to mark the difference between them, when he lay motionless in his bed, watched and nursed by us two.

I was thinking thus, when he asked a question, the abrupt coincidence of which with my secret thoughts startled me out of any answer than a simple “No, papa.”

“My dear, have you ever had any letter from Doctor Urquhart?”

How could he possibly imagine such a thing? Could Mrs. Granton, or Penelope, who is quick-sighted in some things, have led papa to think—to suppose—something, the bare idea of which turned me sick with fear. Me, they might blame as they liked; it would not harm me; but a word, a suggestion of blame to any other person, would drive me wild, furious. So I summoned up all my strength.

“You know, papa, Doctor Urquhart could have nothing to write to me about. Any message for me he could have put in a letter to you.”

“Certainly. I merely enquired, considering him so much a friend of the family, and aware that you had seen more of him, and liked him better than your sisters did. But if he had written to you, you would, of course, have told me?”

“Of course, papa.”

I did not say another word than this.

Papa went on, smoothing his newspaper, and looking direct at the fire:—

“I have not been altogether satisfied with Doctor Urquhart of late, much as I esteem him. He does not appear sufficiently to value what—I may say it without conceit—from an old man to a younger one, is always of some worth. Yesterday, when I invited him here, he declined again, and a little too—too decidedly.”

Seeing an answer waited for, I said, “Yes, papa.”

“I am sorry, having such great respect for him, and such pleasure in his society.” Papa paused. “When a man desires to win or retain his footing in a family, he usually takes some pains to secure it. If he does not, the natural conclusion is that he does *not* desire it.” Another pause. “Whenever Doctor Urquhart chooses to come here, he will always be welcome—most welcome; but I cannot again invite him to Rockmount.”

“No, papa.”

This was all. He then took up his Times, and read it through: I lay quiet; quiet all the evening—quiet until I went to bed.

To-day I find in the same old book before quoted:—

“The true theory of friendship is this:—Once a friend, always a friend. But, answerest thou, doth not every day's practice give the lie to that doctrine? Many, if not most friendships, be like a glove, that however well

fitting at first, doth by constant use wax loose and ungainly, if it doth not quite wear out. And others, not put off and on, but close to a man as his own skin and flesh, are yet liable to become diseased: he may have to lose them, and live on without them, as after the lopping off of a limb, or the blinding of an eye. And likewise, there be friendships which a man groweth out of, naturally and blamelessly, even as out of his child-clothes: the which, though no longer suitable for his needs, he keepeth religiously, unforgotten and undestroyed, and often visiteth with a kindly tenderness, though he knoweth they can cover and warm him no more. All these instances do clearly prove that a friend is not always a friend."

"'Yea,' quoth Fidelis, 'he is. Not in himself, may be, but unto thee. The future and the present are thine and his; the past is beyond ye both; an unalienable possession, a bond never disannulled. Ye may let it slip, of natural disuse, throw it aside as worn-out and foul; cut it off, cover it up, and bury it; but it hath been, and therefore in one sense for ever must be. Transmutation is the law of all mortal things; but so far as we know, there is not, and will not be, until the great day of the second death—in the whole universe, any such thing as annihilation.

"And so take heed. Deceive not thyself, saying that, because a thing is not, it never was. Respect thyself—thine old self, as well as thy new. Be faithful to thyself, and to all that ever was thine. Thy friend is always thy friend. Not to have or to hold, to love or rejoice in, but *to remember*.

"And if it befall thee, as befalleth most, that in course of time nothing will remain for thee, except to remember, be not afraid! Hold fast that which was thine—it is thine for ever. Deny it not—despise it not; respect its secrets—be silent over its wrongs. And, so kept, it shall never lie like a dead thing in thy heart, corrupting and breeding-corruption there, as dead things do. Bury it, and go thy way. It may chance that, one day, long hence, thou shalt come suddenly upon the grave of it—and behold! it is dewy-green!"

CHAPTER IX. HIS STORY.

That face,—that poor little white, patient face! How she is changed!

I wish to write down how it was I chanced to see you, though chance is hardly the right word. I *would* have seen you, even if I had waited all day and all night, like a thief, outside your garden-wall. If I could have seen you without your seeing me (as actually occurred) all the better; but in any case I would have seen you. So far as relates to you, the will of heaven only is strong enough to alter this resolute "I will," of mine.

You had no idea I was so near you. You did not seem to be thinking of anybody or anything in particular, but came to your bedroom-window, and stood there a minute, looking wistfully across the moorlands; the still, absorbed, hopeless look of a person who has had some heavy loss, or resigned something very dear to the heart—Dallas's look, almost, as I remember it when he quietly told me that instead of preaching his first sermon, he must go away at once abroad, or give up hope of ever living to preach at all. Child, if you should slip away and leave me as Dallas did!

You must have had a severe illness. And yet, if so, surely I should have heard of it, or your father and sister would have mentioned it when I met them. But no mere bodily illness could account for that expression—it is of the mind. You have been suffering mentally also. Can it be out of pity for that young man, who, I hear, has left England? Why, it is not difficult to guess, nor did I ever expect otherwise, knowing him and you. Poor fellow! But he was honest, and rich, and your friends would approve him. Have they been urging you on his behalf? Have you had family feuds to withstand? Is it this which has made you waste away, and turn so still and pale? You would just do that; you would never yield, but only break your heart quietly, and say nothing about it. I know you; nobody knows you half so well. Coward that I was, not to have taken care of you. I might have done it easily, as the friend of the family—the doctor—a grim fellow of forty. There was no fear for anybody save myself. Yes, I have been a coward. My child,—my gentle, tender, childlike child—they have been breaking your heart, and I have held aloof and let them do it.

You had a cough in autumn, and your eyes are apt to get that bright, limpid look, dilated pupils, with a dark shade under the lower eye-lid, which is supposed to indicate the consumptive tendency. Myself, I differ; believing it in you, as in many others, merely to indicate that which for want of a clearer term we call the nervous temperament; exquisitely sensitive, and liable to slight derangements, yet healthy and strong at the core. I see no trace of disease in you, no reason why, even fragile as you are, you should not live to be an old woman. That is, if treated as you ought to be, judiciously, tenderly; watched over, cared for, given a peaceful, cheerful life with plenty of love in it. Plenty of anxieties also, maybe; no one could shield you from these—but the love would counter-balance all, and you would feel that—you should feel it—I could make you feel it.

I must find out what has ailed you and who has been attending you. Doctor Black, probably. You disliked him, had almost a terror of him, I know. Yet they would of course have placed you in his hands, my little tender thing, my dove, my flower. It makes me mad.

Forgive! Forgive also that word "my," though in one sense you are even now mine. No one understands you as I do, or loves you. Not selfishly either; most solemnly do I here protest that if I could find myself now your father or your brother, through the natural tie of blood, which for ever prevents any other, I would rejoice in it, rather than part with you, rather than that you should slip away like Dallas, and bless my eyes no more.

You see now what you are to me, that a mere apparition of your little face at a window, could move me thus.

I must go to work now. To-morrow I shall have found out all about you.

I wish you to know how the discovery was made; since, be assured, I have ever guarded against the remotest possibility of friends or strangers finding out my secret, or gossiping neighbours coupling my name with yours.

Therefore, instead of going to Mrs. Granton,

I paid a visit to Widow Cartwright, whom I had news to give concerning her daughter. And here, lest at any time evil or careless tongues should bring you a garbled statement, let me just name all I have had to do with this matter of Lydia Cartwright, which your sister once spoke of as my "impertinent interference."

Widow Cartwright, in her trouble, begged me to try and learn something about her child, who had disappeared from the family where by Miss Johnston's recommendation, she went as parlour-maid, and in spite of various inquiries set on foot by Mr. Charteris and others, had, to your sister's great regret, never more been heard of. She was believed not to be dead, for she once or twice sent money to her mother; and lately she was seen in a private box at the theatre by a person named Turton, who recognized her, having often dined at the house where she once was servant. This information was what I had to give to her mother.

I would not have mentioned such a story to you, but that long ere you read these letters, if ever you do read them, you will have learnt that such sad and terrible facts do exist, and that even the purest woman dare not ignore them. Also, who knows, but in the infinite chances of life, you may have opportunities of doing in other cases, what I would fain have done, and one day entreated your sister to do—to use every effort for the redemption of this girl, who, from all I hear, must have been unusually pretty, affectionate and simple-minded.

Her poor old mother being a little comforted, I learnt tidings of you. Three weeks of fever and ague, or something, like it, nobody quite knew what; they, your family, had no notion till lately that there was anything ailing you.

No—they never would. They would let you go on in your silent, patient way, sick or well, happy or sorry, till you suddenly sunk, and then they would turn round astonished:—"Really, why did she not say she was ill? Who would have guessed there was anything the matter with her?"

And I—I who knew every change in your little face, every mood in that strange, quaint, variable spirit—I have let you slip, and been afraid to take care of you. Coward!

I proceeded at once to Rockmount, but learnt from the gardener that your father and sister were out, and "Miss Dora was ill in her room." So I waited, hung about the road for an hour or more, till at last it struck me to seek for information at the Cedars.

Mrs. Granton was glad to see me. She told me all about her son's departure—gentle heart! you have kept his secret—and, asking if I had seen you lately, poured out in a stream all her anxieties concerning you.

So, something must be done for you—something sudden and determined. They may all think what they like—act as they choose—and so shall I.

I advised Mrs. Granton to fetch you at once to the Cedars, by persuasion if she could; if not, by compulsion—bringing you there as if for a drive and keeping you. She has a will, that good old lady, when she sees fit to use it—and she has considerable influence with your father. She said, she thought she could persuade him to let her have you, and nurse you.

"And if the poor child herself is obstinate—she has been rather variable of temper lately—I may say that you ordered me to bring her here? She has a great respect for your opinion. I may tell her I acted by Dr. Urquhart's desire?"

I considered a moment, and then said she might.

We arranged everything as seemed best for your removal—a serious undertaking for an invalid. You, an invalid, my bright-eyed, lightfooted, moorland girl!

I do not think Mrs. Granton had a shadow of suspicion. She thanked me continually, in her warm-hearted fashion for my "great kindness." Kindness! She also begged me to call immediately—as *her* friend, lest I might have any professional scruples of etiquette about interfering with Doctor Black.

Scruples! I cast them all to the winds. Come what will, I must see you, must assure myself that there is no danger, that all is done for you which gives you a fair chance of recovery.

If not—if with the clear vision that I know

I can use on occasion, I see you fading from me—I shall snatch at you. I will have you—be it only for a day or an hour, I will have you, I say,—on my heart, in my arms. My love, my darling, my wife that ought to have been—you could not die out of my arms. I will make you live—I will make you love me. I will have you for my wife yet. I will—

God's will be done!

CHAPTER X. HER STORY.

I am at home again. I sit by my bed-room fire in a new easy-chair. Oh, such care am I taken of now! I cast my eyes over the white waves of moorland:—

“Moor and pleasaunce looking equal in one snow.”

Let me see, how does that verse begin?

“God be with thee, my beloved, God be with thee,
As alone thou goest forth
With thy face unto the North,
Moor and pleasaunce looking equal in one snow:
While I follow, vainly follow
With the farewell and the hollow
But cannot reach thee so.”

Ah, but I can—I can! Can reach any where; to the north or the south; over the land or across the sea, to the world's end. Yea, beyond there if need be; even into the other unknown world.

Since I last wrote here, in this room, things have befallen me, sudden and strange. And yet so natural do they seem, that I almost forget I was ever otherwise than I am now. I, Theodora Johnston, the same, yet not the same. I, just as I was, to be thought worthy of being—what I am, and what I hope some one day to be—God willing. My heart is full—how shall I write about these things—which never could be spoken about, which only to think of makes me feel as if I could but lay my head down in a wonder-stricken silence, that all should thus have happened unto me, this unworthy me.

It is not likely I shall keep this journal much longer—but, until closing it finally, it shall go on as usual. Perhaps, it may be pleasant to read over, some day when I am old—when *we* are old.

One morning, I forget how long after the last date here, Mrs. Granton surprised me and everybody by insisting that the only thing for me was change of air, and that I should go back at once with her to be nursed at the Cedars. There was an invalid-carriage at the gate, with cushions, mats, and furs; there was papa waiting to help me downstairs, and Penelope with my trunk packed—in short, I was taken by storm, and had only to submit. They all said, it was the surest way of recovering, and must be tried.

Now, I wished to get well, and fast, too; it was necessary I should, for several reasons.

First, there was Penelope's marriage, with the after responsibility of my being the only daughter now left to keep the house and take care of papa.

Secondly, Lisabel wrote that, before autumn, she should want me for a new duty and new tie; which, though we never spoke of it to one another, we all thought of with softened hearts; even papa, who, Penelope told me she had seen brushing the dust off our old rocking-horse in an absent sort of way, and stopping in his walk to watch Thomas, the gardener, toss his grandson. Poor dear papa!

I had a third reason. Sometimes I feared, by words Penelope dropped, that she and my father had laid their heads together concerning me and my weak health, and imagined—things which were not true. No; I repeat they were not true. I was ill of fever and ague, that was all; I should have recovered in time. If I were not quite happy, I should have recovered from that, also, in time. I should not have broken my heart. No one ought who has still another good heart to believe in; no one need, who has neither done wrong nor been wronged. So, it seemed necessary, or I fancied it so, thinking over all things during the long wakeful nights, that, not for my own sake alone, I should rouse myself, and try to get well as fast as possible.

Therefore, I made no objections to what, on some accounts, was to me an excessively painful thing—a visit to the Cedars.

Pain or no pain, it was to be, and it was done. I lay in a dream of exhaustion that felt like peace, in the little sitting-room, which looked on the familiar view—the lawn, the sun-dial, the boundary of evergreen bushes, and, farther off, the long, narrow valley, belted by fir-topped hills, standing out sharp against the western sky.

Mrs. Granton bustled in and out, and did everything for me as tenderly as if she had been my mother.

When we are sick and weak, to find comfort; when we are sore at heart, to be surrounded by love; when, at five-and-twenty, the world looks blank and dreary, to see it looking bright and sunshiny at sixty—this does one good. If I said I loved Mrs.

Granton, it but weakly expressed what I owed and now owe her—more than she is ever likely to know.

I had been a day and a night at the Cedars without seeing anyone, except the dear old lady, who watched me incessantly, and administered perpetual doses of “kitchen physic,” promising me faithfully that if I continued improving, the odious face of Doctor Black should never cross the threshold of the Cedars.

“But for all that, it would be more satisfactory to me if you would consent to see a medical friend of mine, my dear.”

Sickness sharpens our senses, making nothing seem sudden or unnatural. I knew as well as if she had told me, who it was she wanted me to see—who it was even now at the parlour-door.

Doctor Urquhart came in, and sat down beside my sofa. I do not remember anything that was said or done by any of us, except that I felt him sitting there, and heard him in his familiar voice talking to Mrs. Granton, about the pleasant view from this low window, and the sunshiny morning, and the blackbird that was solemnly hopping about under the sun-dial.

I will not deny it, why should I? The mere tone of his voice—the mere smile of his eyes, filled my whole soul with peace. I neither knew how he had come, nor why. I did not want to know; I only knew he was there; and

in his presence I was like a child who has been very forlorn, and is now taken care of; very hungry and is satisfied.

Some one calling Mrs. Granton out of the room, he suddenly turned and asked me, "how long I had been ill?"

I answered briefly; then said, in reply to further questions, that I believed it was fever and ague, caught in the moorland cottages, but that I was fast recovering—indeed, I was almost well again now.

"Are you? Give me your hand." He felt my pulse, counting it by his watch; it did not beat much like a convalescent's then, I know. "I see Mrs. Granton in the garden—I must have a little talk with her about you."

He went out of the room abruptly, and soon after I saw them walking together, up and down the terrace. Dr. Urquhart only came to me again to bid me good-bye.

But after that, we saw him every day for a week.

He used to appear at uncertain hours, sometimes forenoon, sometimes evening; but faithfully, if ever so late, he came. I had not been aware he was thus intimate at the Cedars, and one day when Mrs. Granton was speaking about him, I happened to say so.

She smiled.

"Yes, certainly; his coming here daily is a new thing; though I was always glad to see him, he was so kind to my Colin. But, in truth, my dear, if I must let out the secret, he now comes to see *you*."

"Me!" I was glad of the dim light we sat in, and horribly ashamed of myself when the old lady continued, matter-of-fact and grave.

"Yes, you, by my special desire. Though he willingly consented to attend you; he takes a most kindly interest in you. He was afraid of your being left to Doctor Black, whom in his heart I believe he considers an old humbug; so he planned your being brought here, to be petted and taken care of. And I am sure he himself has taken care of you, in every possible way that could be done without your finding it out. You are not offended, my dear?"

"No."

"I can't think how we shall manage about his fees; still it would have been wrong to have refused his kindness—so well meant and so delicately offered. I am sure he has the gentlest ways, and the tenderest heart of any man I ever knew. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

But, for all that, after the first week, I did not progress so fast as they two expected—also papa and Penelope, who came over to see me, and seemed equally satisfied with Doctor Urquhart's "kindness." Perhaps this very "kindness," as I, like the rest, now believed it, made things a little more trying for me. Or else the disease—the fever and ague—had taken firmer hold on me than anybody knew. Some days I felt as if health were a long way off—in fact, not visible at all in this mortal life, and the possibility seemed to me sometimes easy to bear, sometimes hard. I had many changes of mood and temper, very sore to struggle against—for all of which I now humbly crave forgiveness of my dear and kind friends, who were so patient with me, and of Him, the most merciful of all.

Doctor Urquhart came daily, as I have said. We had often very long talks together, sometimes with Mrs. Granton, sometimes alone. He told me of all his doings and plans, and gradually brought me out of the narrow sickroom world into which I was falling, towards the current of outward life—his own active life, with its large aims, duties and cares. The interest of it roused me; the power and beauty of it strengthened me. All the dreams of my youth, together with one I had dreamt that evening by the moorland pool, came back again. I sometimes longed for life, that I might live as he did; in any manner, anywhere, at any sacrifice, so that it was a life in some way resembling, and not unworthy of his own. This sort of life—equally solitary, equally painful, devoted more to duty than to joy, was—heaven knows—all I then thought possible. And I still think, with it, and with my thorough reverence and trust in him, together with what I now felt sure of—his sole, special, unailing affection for me, I could have been content all my days.

My spirit was brave enough, but sometimes my heart was weak. When one has been accustomed to rest on any other—to find each day the tie become more familiar, more necessary, belonging to daily life, and daily want; to feel the house empty, as it were, till there comes the ring at the door or the step in the hall, and to be aware that all this cannot last, that it must come to an end, and one must go back to the old, old life—shut up in oneself, with no arm to lean on, no smile to cheer and guide, no voice to say, "You are right, do it," or "There I think you are wrong," then, one grows frightened.

When I thought of his going to Liverpool, my courage broke down. I would hide my head in my pillow of nights, and say to myself, "Theodora, you are a coward; will not the good God make you strong enough by yourself, even for any sort of life He requires of you? Leave all in His hands." So I tried to do: believing that from any feeling that was holy and innocent He would not allow me to suffer more than I could bear, or more than is good for all of us to suffer at times.

(I did not mean to write thus; I meant only to tell my outward story; but such as is written let it be. I am not ashamed of it.)

Thus things went on, and I did not get stronger.

One Saturday afternoon Mrs. Granton went a long drive, to see some family in whom Doctor Urquhart had made her take an interest, if, indeed, there was need to do more than mention any one's being in trouble, in the dear woman's hearing, in order to unseal a whole torrent of benevolence. The people's name was Ansdell; they were strangers, belonging to the camp; there was a daughter dying of consumption.

It was one of my dark days: and I lay, thinking how much useless sentiment is wasted upon the young who die; how much vain regret at their being so early removed from the enjoyments they share, and the good they are doing, when they often do no good and have little joy to lose. Take, for instance, Mrs. Granton and me: if Death hesitated between us, I know which he had better choose: the one who had least pleasure in living, and who would be easiest spared—who, from either error or fate, or some inherent faults, which, become almost

equal to a fate, had lived twenty-five years without being of the smallest use to anybody; and to whom the best that could happen would apparently be to be caught up in the arms of the Great Reaper, and sown afresh in a new world, to begin again.

Let me confess all this—because it explains the mood which I afterwards betrayed; and because it caused me to find out that I was not the only person into whose mind such wild and wicked thoughts have come, to be reasoned down—battled down—prayed down.

I was in the large drawing-room, supposed to be lying peacefully on the sofa—but in reality, cowering down all in a heap, within the small circle of the fire-light. Beyond, it was very dark—so dark that the shadows would have frightened me, were there not too many spectres close at hand: sad, or evil spirits,—such as come about us all in our dark days. Still, the silence was so ghostly, that when the door opened, I slightly screamed.

“Do not be afraid. It is only I.”

I was shaken hands with; and I apologised for having been so startled. Doctor Urquhart said, it was he who ought to apologise, but he had knocked and I did not answer, and he had walked in, being “anxious.” Then he spoke about other things, and I soon became myself, and sat listening, with my eyes closed, till, suddenly seeing him, I saw him looking at me.

“You have been worse to-day.”

“It was my bad day.”

“I wish I could see you really better.”

“Thank you.”

My eyes closed again—all things seemed dim and far off, as if my life were floating away, and I had no care to seize hold of it—easier to let it go.

“My patient does not do me much credit. When do you intend to honour me by recovering, Miss Theodora?”

“I don't know;—it does not much matter.” It wearied me to answer even him.

He rose, walked up and down the room, several times, and returned to his place.

“Miss Theodora, I wish to say a few words to you seriously, about your health. I should like to see you better—very much better than now—before I go away.”

“Possibly you may.”

“In any case, you will have to take great care—to be taken great care of—for months to come. Your health is very delicate. Are you aware of that?”

“I suppose so.”

“You must listen—”

The tone roused me.

“If you please, you *must* listen, to what I am saying. It is useless telling any one else, but I tell *you*, that if you do not take care of yourself you will die.”

I looked up. No one but he would have said such a thing to me—if he said it, it must be true.

“Do you know that it is wrong to die—to let yourself carelessly slip out of God's world, in which He put you to do good work there?”

“I have no work to do.”

“None of us can say that. You ought not—you shall not. I will not allow it.”

His words struck me. There was truth in them—the truth, the faith of my first youth though both had faded in after years—till I knew him. And this was why I clung to this friend of mine, because amidst all the shams and falsenesses around me, and even in myself—in him I ever found, clearly acknowledged, and bravely outspoken—the *truth*. Why should he not help me now?

Humbly I asked him, “if he were angry with me?”

“Not angry, but grieved; you little know how deeply.”

Was it for my dying, or my wickedly wishing to die? I knew not; but that he was strongly affected, more even than he liked me to see, I did see, and it lifted the stone from my heart.

“I know I have been very wicked. If any one would thoroughly scold me—if I could only tell anybody—”

“Why cannot you tell me?”

So I told him, as far as I could, all the dark thoughts that had been troubling me this day; I laid upon him all my burthens; I confessed to him all my sins; and when I ended, not without agitation, for I had never spoken so plainly of myself to any creature before, Doctor Urquhart talked to me long and gently upon the things wherein he considered me wrong in myself and in my home; and of other things where he thought I was only “foolish,” or “mistaken.” Then he spoke of the manifold duties I had in life; of the glory and beauty of living; of the peace attainable, even in this world, by a life which, if ever so sad and difficult, has done the best it could with the materials granted to it—has walked, so far as it could see, in its appointed course, and left the rewarding and the brightening of it solely in the hands of Him who gave it, who never gives anything in vain.

This was his “sermon”—as, smiling, I afterwards called it, though all was said very simply, and as tenderly as if he had been talking with a child. At the end of it, I looked at him by a sudden blaze of the fire; and it seemed as if, mortal man as he was, with faults enough doubtless—and some of them I already knew, though there is no necessity to publish them here—I “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” And I thanked God, who sent him to me—who sent us each to one another.

For what should Doctor Urquhart reply when I asked him how he came to learn all these good things? but—also smiling:—

“Some of them I learned from you.”

“Me?” I said, in amazement.

“Yes; perhaps I may tell you how it was some day, but not now.” He spoke hurriedly; and immediately

began talking about other things; informing me,—as he had now got a habit of doing,—exactly how his affairs stood. Now, they were nearly arranged; and it became needful he should leave the camp, and begin his new duties by a certain day.

After a little more talk, he fixed—or rather, we fixed, for he asked me to decide—that day; briefly, as if it had been like any other day in the year; and quietly as if it had not involved the total ending for the present, with an indefinite future, of all this—what shall I call it?—between him and me, which, to one, at least, had become as natural and necessary as daily bread.

Thinking now of that two or three minutes of silence which followed—I could be very sorry for myself—far more so than then; for then I hardly felt it at all.

Doctor Urquhart rose, and said he must go—he could not wait longer for Mrs. Granton.

“Thursday week is the day then,” he added, “after which I shall not see you again for many months.”

“I suppose not.”

“I cannot write to you. I wish I could; but such a correspondence would not be possible, would not be right.”

I think I answered mechanically, “No.”

I was standing by the mantel-piece, steadying myself with one hand, the other hanging down. Doctor Urquhart touched it for a second.

“It is the very thinnest hand I ever saw!—You will remember,” he then said, “in case this should be our last chance of talking together—you will remember all we have been saying? You will do all you can to recover perfect health, so as to be happy and useful? You will never think despondingly of your life; there is many a life much harder than yours; you will have patience, and faith, and hope, as a girl ought to have, who is so precious to—many! Will you promise?”

“I will.”

“Good-bye, then.”

“Good-bye.”

Whether he took my hands, or I gave them, I do not know; but I felt them held tight against his breast, and him looking at me as if he could not part with me, or as if, before we parted, he was compelled to tell me something. But when I looked up at him we seemed of a sudden to understand everything, without need of telling. He only said four words,—“Is this my wife?” And I said “Yes.”

Then—he kissed me.

Once, I used to like reading and hearing all about love and lovers, what they said and how they looked, and how happy they were in one another. Now, it seems as if these things ought never to be read or told by any mortal tongue or pen.

When Max went away, I sat where I was, almost without stirring, for a whole hour; until Mrs. Granton came in and gave me the history of her drive, and all about Lucy Ansdell, who had died that afternoon. Poor girl—poor girl..

CHAPTER XI. HER STORY.

Here, between the locked leaves of my journal, I keep the first letter I ever had from Max. It came early in the morning, the morning after that evening which will always seem to us two, I think, something like what we read of, that “the evening and the morning were the first day.” It was indeed like the first day of a new world.

When the letter arrived, I was still fast asleep, for I had not gone and lain awake all night, which, under the circumstances, (as I told Max) it was a young lady's duty to have done: I only laid my head down with a feeling of ineffable rest—rest in heaven's kindness, which had brought all things to this end—and rest in his love, from which nothing could ever thrust me, and in the thought of which I went to sleep, as safe as a tired child; knowing I should be safe for all my life long, with him—my Max—my husband.

“Lover” was a word that did not seem to suit him—grave as he was, and so much older than I: I never expected from him anything like the behaviour of a lover—indeed, should hardly like to see him in that character; it would not look natural. But from the hour he said, “Is this my wife?” I have ever and only thought of him as “my husband.”

My dear Max! Here is his letter—which lay before my eyes in the dim dawn; it did not come by post—he must have left it himself: and the maid brought it in; no doubt thinking it a professional epistle. And I take great credit to myself for the composed matter-of-fact way in which I said “it was all right, and there was no answer,” put down my letter, and made believe to go to sleep again.

Let me laugh—it is not wrong; and I laugh still as much as ever I can; it is good for me and good for Max. He says scarcely anything in the world does him so much good as to see me merry.

It felt very strange at first to open his letter and see my name written in his hand.

Saturday night.

My dear Theodora,

I do not say "dearest," because there is no one to put in comparison with you: you are to me the one woman in the world.

My dear Theodora;—let me write it over again to assure myself that it may be written at all, which perhaps it ought not to be till you have read this letter.

Last night I left you so soon, or it seemed soon, and we said so little, that I never told you some things which you ought to have been made aware of at once; even before you were allowed to answer that question of mine. Forgive me. In my own defence let me say, that when I visited you yesterday, I meant only to have the sight of you—the comfort of your society—all I hoped or intended to win for years to come. But I was shaken out of all self-control—first by the terror of losing you, and then by a look in your sweet eyes. You know! It was to be, and it was. Theodora—gift of God!—may He bless you for shewing, just for that one moment, what there was in your heart towards me.

My feelings towards you, you can guess—a little: the rest you must believe in. I cannot write about them..

The object of this letter is to tell you something which you ought to be told before I see you again.

You may remember my once saying it was not likely I should ever marry. Such, indeed, was long my determination, and the reason was this. When I was a mere boy—just before Dallas died—there happened to me an event so awful, both in itself and its results, that it changed my whole character, darkened my life, turned me from a lively, careless, high-spirited lad, into a morbid and miserable man, whose very existence was a burthen to him for years. And though gradually, thank God! I recovered from this state, so as not to have an altogether useless life; still I never was myself again—never knew happiness, till I knew you. You came to me as unforeseen a blessing as if you had fallen from the clouds: first you interested, then you cheered me, then, in various ways, you brought light into my darkness, hope to my despair. And then I loved you.

The same cause, which I cannot now fully explain, because I must first take a journey, but you shall know everything within a week or ten days—the same cause which has oppressed my whole life prevented my daring to win you. I always believed that a man circumstanced as I was, had no right ever to think of marriage. Some words of yours led me of late to change this opinion. I resolved, at some future time, to lay my whole history before you—as to a mere friend—to ask you the question whether or not, under the circumstances, I was justified in seeking any woman for my wife, and on your answer to decide either to try and make you love me, or only to love you, as I should have loved and shall for ever.

What I then meant to tell you is still to be told. I do not dread the revelation as I once did: all things seem different to me.

I am hardly the same man that I was twelve hours ago. Twelve hours ago I had never told you what you are to me—never had you in my arms—never read the love in your dear eyes—oh, child, do not ever be afraid or ashamed of letting me see you love me, unworthy as I am. If you had not loved me, I should have drifted away into perdition—I mean, I might have lost myself altogether, so far as regards this world.

That is not likely now. You will save me, and I shall be so happy that I shall be able to make you happy. We will never be two again—only one. Already you feel like a part of me: and it seems as natural to write to you thus as if you had been mine for years. Mine. Some day you will find out all that is sealed up in the heart of a man of my age and of my disposition—when the seal is once broken.

Since, until I have taken my journey I cannot speak to your father, it seems right that my next visit to you should be only that of a friend. Whether after having read this letter, which at once confesses so much and so little, you think me worthy even of that title, your first look will decide. I shall find out, without need of your saying one word.

I shall probably come on Monday, and then not again; to meet you only as a friend, used to be sufficiently hard; to meet you with this uncertainty overhanging me, would be all but impossible. Besides, honour to your father compels this absence and silence, until my explanations are made.

Will you forgive me? Will you trust me? I think you will.

I hope you have minded my "orders," rested all evening and retired early? I hope on Monday I may see a rose on your cheeks—a tiny, delicate, winter-rose? That poor little thin cheek, it grieves my heart. You *must* get strong.

If by your manner you show that this letter has changed your opinion of me, that you desire yesterday to be altogether forgotten, I shall understand it, and obey.

Remember, whatever happens, whether you are ever my own or not, that you are the only woman I ever wished for my wife; the only one I shall ever marry.

Yours,

Max. Urquhart.

I read his letter many times over.

Then I rose and dressed myself, carefully, as if it had been my marriage morning. He loved me; I was the only woman he had ever wished for his wife. It was in truth my marriage morning.

Coming downstairs, Mrs. Granton met me, all delight at my having risen so soon.

"Such an advance! we must be sure and tell Dr. Urquhart. By the bye, did he not leave a note or message early this morning?"

"Yes; he will probably call on Monday."

She looked surprised that I did not produce the note, but made no remark. And I, two days before, I should have been scarlet and tongue-tied; but now things were quite altered. I was his chosen, his wife; there was neither hypocrisy nor deceit in keeping a secret between him and me. We belonged to one another, and the rest of the world had nothing to do with us.

Nevertheless, my heart felt running over with tenderness towards the dear old lady;—as it did towards my father and my sisters, and everything belonging to me in this wide world. When Mrs. Granton went to church,

I sat for a long time in the west parlour, reading the Bible, all alone; at least as much alone as I ever can be in this world again, after knowing that Max loves me.

It being such an exceedingly mild and warm day—wonderful for the first day of February, an idea came into my head, which was indeed strictly according to “orders;” only I never yet had had the courage to obey. Now, I thought I would. It would please him so, and Mrs. Granton too.

So I put on my out-door gear, and actually walked, all by myself, to the hill-top, a hundred yards or more. There I sat down on the familiar bench, and looked round on the well-known view. Ah me! for how many years and under how many various circumstances, have I come and sat on that bench and looked at that view!

It was very beautiful to-day, though almost death-like in its supernatural sunshiny calm: such as one only sees in these accidental fine days which come in early winter, or sometimes as a kind of spectral anti-type of spring. Such utter stillness, everywhere. The sole thing that seemed alive or moving in the whole landscape was a wreath of grey smoke, springing from some invisible cottage behind the fir-wood, and curling away upwards till it lost itself in the opal air. Hill, moorland, wood and sky, lay still as a picture, and fair as the Land of Beulah, the Celestial Country. It would hardly have been strange to see spirits walking there, or to have turned and found sitting on the bench beside me, my mother and my halfbrother Harry, who died so long ago, and whose faces in the Celestial country I shall first recognise.

My mother.—Never till now did I feel the want of her. It seems only her—only a mother—to whom I could tell, “Max loves me—I am going to be Max's wife.”

And Harry—poor Harry, whom also I never knew—whose life was so wretched, and whose death so awful; he might have been a better man, if he had only known my Max. I am forgetting, though, how old he would have been now; and how Max must have been a mere boy when my brother died.

I do not often think of Harry. It would be hardly natural that I should; all happened so long ago that his memory has never been more than a passing shadow across the family lives. But to-day, when everyone of my own flesh and blood seemed to grow nearer to me, I thought of him more than once; tried to recall the circumstances of his dreadful end; and then to think of him only as a glorified, purified spirit, walking upon those hills of Beulah. Perhaps now looking down upon me, “baby” that was, whom he was once reported, in one of his desperate visits home, to have snatched out of the cradle and kissed; knowing all that had lately happened to me, and wishing me a happy life with my dear Max.

I took out Max's letter, and read it over again, in the sunshine and open air.

O the happiness of knowing that one can make another happy—entirely happy! O how good I ought to grow!

For the events which have caused him so much pain, and which he has yet to tell papa and me—they did not weigh much on my mind. Probably there is no family in which there is not some such painful revelation to be made; we also have to tell him about poor Harry. But these things are purely accidental and external. His fear that I should “change my opinion of him” made me smile. “Max,” I said, out loud, addressing myself to the neighbouring heather-bush, which might be considered a delicate compliment to the land where he was born, “Oh, Max, what nonsense you do talk! While you are you, and I am myself, you and I are one.”

Descending the hill-top, I pressed all these my happy thoughts deep down into my heart, covered them up, and went back in the world again.

Mrs. Granton and I spent a quiet day; the quieter, that I afterwards paid for my feats on the hill-top by hours of extreme exhaustion. It was my own folly, I told her, and tried to laugh at it, saying, I should be better to-morrow.

But many a time the thought came, what if I should not be better to-morrow, nor any to-morrow? What if, after all, I should have to go away and leave him with no one to make him happy? And then I learned how precious life had grown, and tasted, in degree, what is meant by “the bitterness of death.”

But it did not last. And by this I know that our love is holy: that I can now think of either his departure or my own, without either terror or despair. I know that even death itself can never part Max and me.

Monday came. I was really better, and went about the house with Mrs. Granton all the forenoon. She asked me what time Doctor Urquhart had said he should be here; with various other questions about him. All of which I answered without confusion or hesitation; it seemed as if I had now belonged to him for a long time. But when, at last, his ring came to the hall-door, all the blood rushed to my heart, and back again into my face—and Mrs. Granton saw it.

What was I to do? to try and “throw dust” into those keen, kind eyes, to tell or act a falsehood, as if I were ashamed of myself or him? I could not. So I simply sat silent, and let her think what she chose.

Whatever she thought, the good old lady said nothing. She sighed—ah, it went to my conscience that sigh—and yet I had done no wrong either to her or Colin; then, making some excuse, she slipped out of the room, and the four walls only beheld Max and me when we met.

After we had shaken hands, we sat down in silence. Then I asked him what he had been doing with himself all yesterday, and he told me he had spent it with the poor Ansdells.

“They wished this, and I thought it was best to go.”

“Yes; I am very glad you went.”

Doctor Urquhart (of course I shall go on calling him “Doctor Urquhart,” to people in general; nobody but me has any business with his Christian name), Doctor Urquhart looked at me and smiled; then he began telling me about these friends of his; and how brokenhearted the old mother was, having lost both daughters in a few months—did I remember the night of the camp concert, and young Ansdell who sung there?

I remembered some young man being called for, as Doctor Urquhart wanted him.

“Yes—I had to summon him home; his eldest sister had suddenly died. Only a cold and fever—such as you yourself might have caught that night—you thoughtless girl. You little knew how angry you made me.”

“Did I? Something was amiss with you—I did not know what—but I saw it in your looks.”

"Could you read my looks even then, little lady?"

It was idle to deny it—and why should I, when it made him happy? Radiantly happy his face was now—the sharp lines softened, the wrinkles smoothed out. He looked ten years younger; ah! I am glad I am only a girl still; in time I shall actually make him young.

Here, the hall-bell sounded—and though visitors are never admitted to this special little parlour, still Max turned restless, and said he must go.

"Why?"

He hesitated—then said hastily:—

"I will tell you the truth; I am happier out of your sight than in it, just at present."

I made no answer.

"To-night, I mean to start—on that journey I told you of." Which was to him a very painful one, I perceived.

"Go then, and get it over. You will come back to me soon."

"God grant it." He was very much agitated.

The only woman he had ever wished for his wife. This, I was. And I felt like a wife. Talk of Penelope's long courtship—Lisabel's marriage—it was I that was, in heart and soul, the real *wife*; ay, though Max and I were never more to one another than now; though I lived as Theodora Johnston to the end of my days.

So I took courage—and since it was not allowed me to comfort him in any other way, I just stole my hand inside his, which clasped instantly and tightly round it. That was all, and that was enough. Thus we sat side by side, when the door opened—and in walked papa.

How strangely the comic and the serious are mixed up together in life, and even in one's own nature. While writing this, I have gone off into a hearty fit of laughter, at the recollection of papa's face when he saw us sitting there.

Though at the time it was no laughing matter. For a moment he was dumb with astonishment—then he said severely:—

"Doctor Urquhart, I suppose I must conclude—indeed, I can only conclude one thing. But you might have spoken to me, before addressing yourself to my daughter."

Max did not answer immediately—when he did, his voice absolutely made me start.

"Sir, I have been very wrong—but I will make amends—you shall know all. Only first—as my excuse," here he spoke out passionately, and told papa all that I was to him, all that we were to one another.

Poor papa! it must have reminded him of his own young days—I have heard he was very fond of his first wife, Harry's mother—for when I hung about his neck, mine were not the only tears. He held out his hand to Max.

"Doctor, I forgive you; and there is not a man alive on whom I would so gladly bestow this little girl, as you."

And here Max tried me—as I suppose people not yet quite familiar will be sure to try one another at first. Without saying a word, or even accepting papa's hand, he walked straight out of the room.

It was not right—even if he were ever so much unnerved; why should he be too proud to show it? and it might have seriously offended papa. I softened matters as well as I could, by explaining that he had not wished to ask me of papa till a week hence, when he should be able fully to enter into his circumstances.

"My dear," papa interrupted, "go and tell him he may communicate them at whatever time he chooses. When such a man as Doctor Urquhart honestly comes and asks me for my daughter, you may be sure the very last question I should ask him, would be about his circumstances."

With my heart brimful at papa's kindness, I went to explain this to Max. I found him alone in the library, standing motionless at the window. I touched him on the arm, with some silly coquettish speech about how he could think of letting me run after him in this fashion. He turned round.

"Oh, Max, what is the matter? Oh, Max!—" I could say no more.

"My child!"—He soothed me by calling me that and several other fond names, but all these things are between him and me alone.—"Now, good-bye. I must bid you good-bye at once."

I tried to make him understand there was no necessity—that papa desired to hear nothing, only wished him to stay with us till evening. That indeed, looking as wretched as he did, I could not and would not let him go. But in vain.

"I cannot stay. I cannot be a hypocrite. Do not ask it. Let me go—oh! my child, let me go."

And he might have gone—being very obstinate, and not in the least able to see what is good for him or for me either—had it not fortunately happened that, overpowered with the excitement of the last ten minutes, my small strength gave way. I felt myself falling—tried to save 'myself by catching hold of Max's arm, and fell. When I awoke, I was lying on the sofa, with papa and Mrs. Granton beside me.

Also Max—though I did not at first see him. He had taken his rights, or they had been tacitly yielded to him; I do not know how it was, but my head was on my betrothed husband's breast.

So he stayed. Nobody asked any questions, and he himself explained nothing. He only sat by me, all afternoon, taking care of me, watching me with his eyes of love—the love that is to last me my whole life. I know it will.

Therefore, in the evening, it was I who was the first to say, "Now, Max, you must go."

"You are quite better?"

"Yes, and it is almost dark—it will be very dark across the moors. You must go."

He rose, and shook hands mechanically with papa and Mrs. Granton. He was going to do the same by me, but I loosed my hands and clasped them round his neck. I did not care for what anybody might say or think; he was mine and I was his—they were all welcome to know it. And I wished him to know and feel that, through everything, and in spite of everything, I—his own—loved him and would love him to the last.

So he went away.

That is more than a week ago, and I have had no letter; but he did not say he would write. He would rather come, I think. Thus, any moment I may hear his ring at the door.

They—papa and Penelope—think I take things quietly. Penelope, indeed, hardly believes I care for him at all! But they do not know; oh, Max, they do not know! *You* know, or you will know, some day.

CHAPTER XII. HIS STORY.

My dear Theodora,
I trust you may never read this letter, which, as a preventive measure, I am about to write; I trust we may burn it together, and that I may tell you its contents at accidental times, after the one principal fact has been communicated.

I mean to communicate it face to face, by word of mouth. It will not seem so awful then: and I shall see the expression of your countenance on first hearing it. That will guide me as to my own conduct—and as to the manner in which it had best be broken to your father. I have hope, at times, that even after such a communication, his regard for me will not altogether fail—and it may be that his present opinions will not be invincible. He may suggest some atonement, some probation, however long or painful I care not, so that it ends in his giving me you.

But first I ought to furnish him with full information about things into which I have never yet dared to inquire. I shall do so to-morrow. Much, therefore, depends upon to-morrow. Such a crisis almost unnerves me; add to that the very sight of this place—and I went by chance to the same Inn, the White Hart, Salisbury. When you have read this letter through, you will not wonder that this is a terrible night for me. I never would have revisited this town—but in the hope of learning every particular, so as to tell you and your father the truth and the whole truth.

He will assuredly pity me. The thought of his own boy, your brother, whom you once mentioned, and whom Mr. Johnston informed me “died young” after some great dereliction—this thought may make him deal gently with me. Whether he will ever forgive me, or receive me into his family, remains doubtful. It is with the fear of this, or any other possibility which I cannot now foresee, that I write this letter; in order that whatever happens, my Theodora may be acquainted with my whole history.

My Theodora! Some day, when she comes to read a few pages which I seal up to-night, marking them with her name, and “To be delivered to her after my death,” she will understand how I have loved her. Otherwise, it never could have been found out, even by her—for I am not a demonstrative man. Only my wife would have known it.

In case this letter and those other letters do reach you, they will then be your last mementos of me. Read them and burn them; they are solely meant for you.

Should all go well, so that they become needless, we will, as I said, burn them together, read or unread, as you choose. You shall do it with your own hand, sitting by me, at our own fireside. *Our* fireside. The thought of it—the terror of losing it, makes me almost powerless to write on. Will you ever find out how I love you, my love—my love!

I begin by reminding you that I have been long aware your name is not properly Johnston. You told me yourself that the *t* had been inserted of late years. That you are not an aristocratic, but a plebeian family. My thankfulness at learning this, you will understand afterwards.

That cathedral clock—how it has startled me! Striking twelve with the same tongue as it did twenty years ago. Were I superstitious, I might fancy I heard in the coffee-room below, the clink of glasses, the tune of “Glorious Apollo,” and the “Bravo,” of that uproarious voice.

The town is hardly the least altered. Except that I came in by railway instead of by coach, it might be the very same Salisbury on that very same winter's night—the quaint, quiet English town that I stood looking at from this same window—its streets shining with rain, and its lights glimmering here and there through the general gloom. How I stared, boy-like, till *he* came behind and slapped me on the shoulder. But I have a few things to tell you before I tell you the history of that night. Let me delay it as long as I can.

You know about my father and mother, and how they both died when Dallas and I were children. We had no near kindred; we had to take care of ourselves—or rather he took care of me; he was almost as good as a father to me, from the time he was twelve years old.

Let me say a word or two more about my brother Dallas. If ever there was a perfect character on this earth, he was one. Every creature who knew him thought the same. I doubt not the memory of him still lingers in those old cloisters of St. Mary and St. Salvador, where he spent eight years, studying for the ministry. I feel sure there is not a lad who was at college with him—greyheaded lads they would be now, grave professors, or sober ministers of the Kirk, with country manses, wives, and families—not one of them but would say as I say, if you spoke to him of Dallas Urquhart.

Being five years my elder, he had almost ended his curriculum when I began mine; besides, we were at different colleges; but we went through some sessions together a time on which I look back with peculiar tenderness, as I think all boys do who have studied at St. Andrew's. You English do not altogether know us Scotch. I have seen hard-headed, possibly hard-hearted men, grim divines, stern military officers, and selfish Anglo-Indian valetudinarians, melt to the softness of a boy, as they talked of their boyish days at St Andrews.

You never saw the place, my little lady? You would like it, I know. To me, who have not seen it these twenty years, it still seems like a city in a dream. I could lead you, hand-in-hand, through everyone of its quiet old streets, where you so seldom hear the noise of either carriage or cart: could point out the notable historical corners, and tell you which professor lived in this house and which in that; could take you along the Links, to the scene of our celebrated golfing-match, calling over the names of the principal players, including his who won it—a fine fellow he was, too! What became of him, I wonder?

Also, I could show you the exact spot where you get the finest view of the Abbey and St. Kegulus' Tower, and then away back to our lodgings—Dallas's and mine—along the Scores, where, of moonlight nights, the elder and more sentimental of the college lads would be caught strolling with their sweethearts—bonnie lassies too they were at St. Andrews—or we beheld them in all the glamour of our teens, and fine havers we talked to them along those Scores, to the sound of the sea below. I can hear it now. What a roar it used to come in with, on stormy nights, against those rocks beyond the Castle, where a lad and his tutor were once both drowned!

I am forgetting myself, and all I had to tell you. It is a long time since I have spoken of those old days.

Theodora, I should like you some time to go and see St. Andrews. Go there, in any case, and take a look at the old place. You will likely find, in St. Mary's Cloisters, on the third arch to the right hand as you enter, my initials and Dallas's; and if you ask, some old janitor or librarian may still remember "the two Urquharts"—that is, if you like to name us. But, go if you can. Faithful heart! I know you will always care for anything that concerned me.

All the happy days of my life were spent at St. Andrews. They lasted until Dallas fell ill, and had to go abroad at once. I was to follow, and stay with him the winter, missing thereby one session, for he did not like to part with me. Perhaps he foresaw his end, which I, boy-like, never thought of, for I was accustomed to his being always delicate; perhaps he knew what a lad of nineteen might turn out, left to himself.

I was "left to myself," in our Scotch interpretation of the phrase; which, no doubt, originated in the stern Presbyterian belief of what human nature is, abandoned by God. *Left to himself*. Many a poor wretch's more wretched parents know what that means.

How it came about, I do not call to mind, but I found myself in London, my own master, spending money like dross; and spending what was worse, my time, my conscience, my innocence. How low I fell, God knows, for I hardly know myself! Things which happened afterwards made me oblivious even of this time. While it lasted, I never once wrote to Dallas.

A letter from him, giving no special reason for my joining him, but urging me to come, and quickly, made me recoil conscience-stricken from the Gehenna into which I was falling. You will find the letter—the last I had from him, in this packet: read it, and burn it with mine. Of course, no one has ever seen it, or will ever see it, except yourself.

I started from London immediately, in great restlessness and anguish of mind; for though I had been no worse than my neighbours, or so bad as many of them—I knew what Dallas was—and how his pure life, sanctified, though I guessed it not, by the shadow of coming death, would look beside this evil life of mine. I was very miserable; and a lad not used to misery is then in the quicksands of temptation. He is grateful to any one who will save him from himself—give him a narcotic and let his torment sleep.

I mention this only as a fact, not an extenuation. Though, in some degree, Max Urquhart the man has long since learned to pity Max Urquhart the boy.

—Here I paused, to read this over, and see if I have said all I wished therein. The narrative seems clear. You will perceive, I try as much as I can to make it a mere history as if of another person, and thus far I think I have done so. The rest I now proceed to tell you, as circumstantially and calmly as I can.

But first, before you learn any more about me, let me bid you remember how I loved you, how you permitted me to love you—how you have been mine, heart, and eyes, and tender lips; you know you were mine. You cannot alter that. If I were the veriest wretch alive, you once saw in me something worth loving, and you did love me. Not after the fashion of those lads and lassies who went courting along the Scores at St. Andrews—but solemnly—deeply—as those love who expect one day to be husband and wife. Remember, we were to have been married, Theodora.—

I found my quickest route to Pau was by Southampton to Havre. But in the dusk of the morning I mistook the coach; my luggage went direct, and I found myself, having travelled some hours, on the road—not to Southampton, but to Salisbury. This was told me after some jocularly, at what he thought a vastly amusing piece of "greenness" on my part, by the coachman. That is, the gentleman who drove the coach.

He soon took care to let me know he was a gentleman—and that, like many young men of rank and fashion at that time, he was acting Jehu only "for a spree." He talked so large, I should have taken him for a nobleman, or a baronet at least—had he not accidentally told me his name; though he explained that it was not as humble as it seemed, and expatiated much upon the antiquity, wealth, and aristocratic connections of his "family."

His conversation, though loud and coarse, was amusing; and he patronised me extremely.

I would rather not say a word more than is necessary concerning this person—he is dead. As before stated, I never knew anything of him excepting his name, which you shall have by-and-by; but I guessed that his life had not been a creditable one. He looked about thirty, or a little older.

When the coach stopped—at the very inn where I am now writing, the White Hart, Salisbury, he insisted on my stopping too, as it was a bitter cold night and the moon would not rise till two in the morning—he said that, I mind well.

Finally, he let the coach go on without us, and I heard him laying a bet to drive across Salisbury Plain, in a gig, or dog-cart, and meet it again on the road to Devizes by daybreak next morning. The landlord laughed, and advised him to give up such a mad, "neck-or-nothing" freak; but he swore, and said he always went at everything "neck-or-nothing."

I can remember to this day nearly every word he uttered, and his manner of saying it. Under any

circumstances this might have been the case, for he attracted me, bad as I felt him to be, with his bold, devil-may-care jollity, mixed with a certain English frankness, not unpleasant. He was a small, dark man, hollow-eyed and dissipated looking. His face—no, better not call up his face.

I was persuaded to stay and drink with this man and one or two others—regular toppers, as I soon found he was. He appeared poor too; the drinking was to be at my expense. I was very proud to have the honor of entertaining such a clever and agreeable gentleman.

Once, watching him, and listening to his conversation, sudden doubt seized me of what Dallas would think of my new acquaintance, and what he would say, or look—he seldom reproved aloud—were he to walk in, and find me in this present company. And, supper being done, I tried to get away, but this man held me by the shoulders, mocking me, and setting the rest on to mock me as a “milk-sop.” The good angel fled. From that moment, I believe, the devil entered both into him and me.

I got drunk. It was for the first time in my life, though more than once lately I had been “merry,” but stopped at that stage. This time I stopped at nothing. My blood was at boiling heat, with just enough of conscience left to make me snatch at any means to deaden it.

Of the details of that orgie, or of those who joined in it, except this one person—I have, as was likely, no distinct recollection. They were habitual drinkers; none of them had any pity for me, and I—I was utterly “left to myself,” as I have said. A raw, shy, Scotch lad, I soon became the butt of the company.

The last thing I remember is their trying to force me to tell my name, which, hitherto, I had not done; first, from natural reserve among strangers, and then from an instinctive feeling that I was not in the most creditable of society, and therefore the less I said about myself the better. All I had told, was that I was on my way to France, to join my brother, who was ill. They could not get any more out of me than that: a few taunts—which some English people are rather too ready to use against us Scotch—made me savage, as well as sullen. I might have deserved it, or not—I cannot tell; but the end was, they turned me out—the obstinate, drunken, infuriated lad—into the street.

I staggered through the dark, silent town, into a lane, and fell asleep on the road-side.

The next thing I call to mind is being awakened by the cut of a whip across my shoulders, and seeing a man standing over me. I flew at his throat like a wild creature; for it was he—the “gentleman” who had made me drunk, and mocked me; and whom I seemed then and there to hate with a fury of hatred that would last to my dying day. Through it all, came the thought of Dallas, sick and solitary, half way towards whom I ought to have travelled by now.

How he—the man—soothed me, I do not know, but I think it was by offering to take me towards Dallas; he had a horse and gig standing by, and said if I would mount, he would drive me to the coast, whence I could take boat to France. At least, that is the vague impression my mind retains of what passed between us. He helped me up beside him, and I dozed off to sleep again.

My next waking was in the middle of a desolate plain. I rubbed my eyes, but saw nothing except stars and sky, and this black, black plain, which seemed to have no end.

He pulled up, and told me to “tumble out,” which I did mechanically. On the other side of the gig was something tall and dark, which I took at first for a half-way inn; but perceived it was only a huge stone—a circle of stones.

“Hollo! what's this?”

“Stonehenge! comfortable lodging for man and beast; so you're all right. Good-bye, young fellow. You're such dull company, that I mean to leave you here till morning.”

This was what he said to me, laughing uproariously. At first, I thought he was in jest, and laughed too; then, being sleepy and maudlin, I remonstrated. Lastly, I got half frightened, for when I tried to mount, he pushed me down. I was so helpless, and he so strong; from this solitary place, miles and miles from any human dwelling—how should I get on to Dallas?—Dallas, who, stupefied as I was, still remained my prominent thought.

I begged, as if I had been begging for my life, that he would keep his promise, and take me on my way towards my brother.

“To the devil with your brother!” and he whipped his horse on.

The devil was in me, as I said. I sprang at him, my strength doubled and trebled with rage, and, catching him unawares, dragged him from the gig, and threw him violently on the ground; his head struck against one of the great stones—and—and—

Now, you see how it was. I murdered him. He must have died easily—instantaneously; he never moaned nor stirred once; but, for all that, it was murder.

Not with intent, God knows. So little idea had I he was dead, that I shook him as he lay, told him to “get up and fight it out:” oh, my God!—my God!

Thus I have told it, the secret, which until now has never been written or spoken to any human being. I was then nineteen—I am now nine-and-thirty; twenty years. Theodora, have pity: only think of carrying such a secret—the blood of a man, on one's conscience for twenty years!

If, instead of my telling you all this, as I may do in a few days, you should have to read it here, it will by then have become an old tale. Still, pity me.

To continue, for it is getting far on into the night.

On the first few minutes after I discovered what I had done, you will not expect me to dilate.

I was perfectly sober, now. I had tried every means in my power to revive him; and then to ascertain for certain that he was dead; I forgot to tell you I had already begun my classes in medicine, so I knew a good deal. I sat with his head on my knee, fully aware that I had killed him; that I had taken the life of a man, and that his blood would be upon me for ever and ever.

Nothing, short of the great condemnation of the last judgment-day, could parallel that horror of despair; under it my reason seemed to give way. I was seized with the delusion that, bad and cruel man as he was, he

was only shamming to terrify me. I held him up in my arms, so that the light of the gig-lamps fell full on his face.

It was a dead face—not frightful to look at, beautiful rather, as the muscles slowly settled—but dead, quite dead. I laid him down again, still resting his head against my knee, till he gradually stiffened and grew cold.

This was just at moon-rise; he had said the moon would rise at two o'clock, and so she did, and struck her first arrowy ray across the plain upon his face—that still face with its half-open mouth and eyes.

I had not been afraid of him hitherto; now I was. It was no longer a man, but a corpse, and I was the murderer.

The sight of the moon rising, is my last recollection of this night. Probably, the fit of insanity which lasted for many months after, at that instant came on, and under its influence, I must have fled, leaving him where he lay, with the gig standing by, and the horse quietly feeding beside the great stones; but I do not recollect anything. Doubtless, I had all the cunning of madness, for I contrived to gain the coast and get over to France; but how, or when, I have not the slightest remembrance to this day.

As I have told you, I never saw Dallas again. When I reached Pau, he was dead and buried. The particulars of his death were explained to me months afterwards by the good curé, who, Catholic as he was, had learned to love Dallas like a son, and who watched over me for his sake, during the long melancholy mania which, as he thought, resulted from the shock of my brother's death.

Some day I should like you, if possible, to see the spot where Dallas is buried—the church-yard of Bihères, near Pau; but his grave is not within the churchyard, as he, being a Protestant, the authorities would not allow it. You will find it just outside the hedge—the head-stone placed in the hedge—though the little mound is by this time level with the meadow outside. You know, we Presbyterians have not your English feeling about “consecrated” ground; we believe that “the whole earth is the Lord's,” and no human consecration can make it holier than it is, both for the worship of the living, and the interment of the dead. Therefore, it does not shock me that the cattle feed, and the grass grows tall, over Dallas's body. But I should like the headstone preserved—as it is; for yearly, in different quarters of the globe, I have received letters from the old curé and his successor, concerning it. You are much younger than I, Theodora; after my death I leave this charge to you. You will fulfil it for my sake, I know.

Must I tell you any more? Yes, for now comes what some might say was a crime as heavy as the first one. I do not attempt to extenuate it. I can only say that it has been expiated—such as it was, by twenty miserable years, and that the last expiation is even yet not come. Your father once said, and his words dashed from me the first hope which ever entered my mind concerning you, that he never would clasp the hand of a man who had taken the life of another. What would he say to a man who had taken a life, and *concealed the fact* for twenty years? I am that man.

How it came about, I will tell you.

For a twelvemonth after that night, I was, you will remember, not myself: in truth, a maniac, though a quiet and harmless one. My insanity was of the sullen and taciturn kind, so that I betrayed nothing; if indeed I had any remembrance of what had happened, which I believe I had not. The first dawn of recollection came through reading in an English newspaper, which the old curé brought to amuse me, an account of a man who was hanged for murder. I read it line by line—the trial—the verdict—the latter days of the criminal—who was a young lad like me—and the last day of all, when he was hanged.

By degrees, first misty as a dream, then ghastly clear, impressed on my mind with a tenacity and minuteness all but miraculous, considering the long blank which followed,—returned the events of that night. I became conscious that I too had killed a man, that if any eye had seen the act, I should have been taken, tried, and hanged, for murder.

Young as I was, and ignorant of English criminal law, I had sufficient common sense to arrive at the conclusion, that, as things stood, there was not a fragment of evidence against me individually, nor, indeed, any clear evidence to shew that the man was murdered at all. It was now a year ago—he must have long since been found and buried—probably, with little inquiry; they would conclude he had been killed accidentally through his own careless, drunken driving. But if I once confessed and delivered myself up to justice, I myself only knew, and no evidence could ever prove, that it was not a case of wilful murder. I should be hanged—hanged by the neck till I was dead—and my name—our name, Dallas's and mine, blasted for evermore.

The weeks that elapsed after my first recovery of reason, were such, that when I hear preachers thunder about the literal “worm that dieth not, and fire that is never quenched,” I could almost smile. Sufficient are the torments of a spiritual hell.

Sometimes, out of its depths, I felt as if

Satan himself had entered my soul, to rouse me into atheistic rebellion. I, a boy not twenty yet, with all my future before me, to lose it through a moment's fury against a man who must have been depraved to the core, a man against whom I had no personal grudge—of whom I knew nothing but his name. Yet I must surrender my life for his—be tried, condemned—publicly disgraced—finally die the death of a dog. I had never been a coward—yet night after night I woke, bathed in a cold sweat of terror, feeling the rope round my neck, and seeing the forty thousand upturned faces—as in the newspaper account of the poor wretch who was hanged.

Remember; I plead nothing. I know there are those who would say that the most dishonourable wretch alive, was this same man of honour—this Max Urquhart, who carries such a fair reputation; that the only thing I should have done was to go back to England, surrender myself to justice, and take all the consequences of this one act of drunkenness and ungovernable passion. However, I did it not. But my sin—as every sin must,—be sure has found me out.

Theodora, it is hardly eight hours since your innocent arms were round my neck, and your kisses on my mouth—and now! Well, it will be over soon. However I have lived, I shall not die a hypocrite.

I do not attempt to retrace the course of reasoning by which I persuaded myself to act as I did. I was only a boy; this long sleep of the mind had re-established my bodily health;—life and youth were strong within me—also the hope of honour—the dread of shame. Yet sometimes conscience struggled so fiercely with all these,

that I was half tempted to a medium course, the coward's last escape—suicide.

You must remember, religion was wanting in me—and Dallas was dead. Nay, I had for the time already forgotten him.

One day,—when, driven distracted with my doubts, I had almost made up my mind to end them in the one sharp easy way I have spoken of,—while putting my brother's papers in order, I found his Bible.—Underneath his name he had written—and the date was that of the last day of his life—my name. I looked at it, as we look at a handwriting long familiar, till of a sudden we remember that the hand is bold, that no earthly power can ever reproduce of this known writing a single line. Child, did you ever know—no, you never could have known—that total desolation, that helpless craving for the dead who return no more?

After I grew calmer, I did the only thing which seemed to bring me a little nearer to Dallas:—I read in his Bible. The chapter I opened at was so remarkable that at first I recoiled as if it had been my brother—he who being now a spirit, might, for all I could tell, have a spirit's knowledge of all things—speaking to me out of the invisible world. The chapter was Exekiel xvii.; and among other verses were these:—

“When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

“Because he considereth and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die....

“For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves and live ye.”

I turned and lived. I resolved to give a life—my own—for the life which I had taken; to devote it wholly to the saving of other lives;—and at its close, when I had built up a good name, and shown openly that after *any* crime a man might recover himself, repent and atone, I meant to pay the full price of the sin of my youth, and openly to acknowledge it before the world.—How far I was right or wrong in this decision, I cannot tell—perhaps no human judgment ever can tell: I simply state what I then resolved, and have never swerved from—till I saw you.

Of necessity, with this ultimate confession ever before me, all the pleasures of life, and all its closest ties, friendship, love, marriage—were not to be thought of. I set them aside as impossible. To me, life could never be enjoyment, but simply atonement.

My subsequent history you are acquainted with—how, after the needful term of medical study—in Britain, (I chose Dublin as being the place where I was utterly a stranger, and remained there till my four years ended), I went as an army surgeon half over the world. The first time I ever set foot in England again, was not many weeks before I saw, in the ballroom of the Cedars, that little sweet face of yours. The same face in which, two days ago, I read the look of love which stirs a man's heart to the very core. In a moment it obliterated the resolutions—conflicts—sufferings of twenty years, and restored me to a man's right and privilege of loving, wooing, marrying.—Shall we ever be married?

By the time you read this, if ever you do read it, that question will have been answered. It can do you no harm if for one little minute I think of you as my wife; no longer friend, child, mistress, but *my wife*.

Think of all that would have been implied by that name. Think of coming home, and of all that home would have been—however humble—to me who never had a home in my whole life. Think of all I would have tried to make it to you. Think of sitting by my fireside, knowing that you were the only one required to make it happy and bright; that, good and pleasant, and dear as many others might be—the only absolute necessity to each of us was one another.

Then, the years that would have followed, in which we never had to say good-bye, in which our two hearts would daily lie open, clear and plain, never to have a doubt or a secret any more.

Then—if we should not always be only two!—I think of you as my wife—the mother of my children—

I was unable to conclude this last night. Now I only add a line before going into the town to gain information about—about this person: by whom his body was found, and where buried; with that intent I have already been searching the cathedral burying-ground; but there is no sign of graves there, all is smooth green turf, with the dew upon it glittering like a sheet of diamonds in the bright spring morning.

It reminded me of you—this being your hour for rising, you early bird, you little methodical girl. You may at this moment be out on the terrace, looking up to the hill-top, or down towards your favourite cedar-trees, with that sunshiny spring morning face of yours.

Pray for me, my love, my wife, my Theodora.

I have found his grave at last.

“In memory of Henry Johnston, only son of the Reverend William Henry Johnston, of Rockmount Surrey: who met his death by an accident near this town, and was buried here. Born May 19, 1806. Died November 19, 1836.”

Farewell, Theodora.

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