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

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Release date: March 13, 2015 [EBook #48483]
Most recently updated: February 21, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Widger from page images generously provided by the Internet Archive

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. III.

London: Hurst And Blackett, Publishers,

1859

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CHAPTER I. HER STORY.

Many, many weeks, months indeed have gone by since I opened this my journal. Can I bear the sight of it even now? Yes; I think I can.

I have been sitting ever so long at the open window, in my old attitude, elbow on the sill; only with a difference that seems to come natural now, when no one is by. It is such a comfort to sit with my lips on my ring. I asked him to give me a ring, and he did so. Oh! Max, Max, Max!

Great and miserable changes have befallen us, and now Max and I are not going to be married. Penelope's marriage also has been temporarily postponed, for the same reason, though I implored her not to tell it to Francis, unless he should make very particular inquiries, or be exceedingly angry at the delay. He was not. Nor did we judge it well to inform Lisabel. Therefore, papa, Penelope, and I, keep our own secret.

Now that it is over, the agony of it smothered up, and all at Rockmount goes on as heretofore, I sometimes wonder, do strangers, or intimates, Mrs. Granton for instance, suspect anything? Or is ours, awful as it seems, no special and peculiar lot? Many another family may have its own lamentable secret, the burthen of which each member has to bear, and carry in society a cheerful countenance, even as this of mine.

Mrs. Granton said yesterday, mine was “a cheerful countenance.” If so, I am glad. Two things only could really have broken my heart—his ceasing to love me, and his changing so in *himself*, not in his circumstances, that I could no longer worthily love him. By “him,” I mean, of course Max. Max Urquhart, my betrothed husband, whom henceforward I can never regard in any other light.

How blue the hills are, how bright the moors! So they ought to be, for it is near midsummer. By this day fortnight—Penelope's marriage-day—we shall have plenty of roses. All the better; I would not like it to be a dull wedding, though so quiet; only the Trehernes and Mrs. Granton as guests, and me for the solitary bridesmaid.

“Your last appearance I hope, Dora, in that capacity,” laughed the dear old lady. “'Thrice a bridesmaid, ne'er a bride,' which couldn't be thought of, you know. No need to speak—I guess why your wedding isn't talked about yet.—The old story, man's pride, and woman's patience. Never mind. Nobody knows anything but me, and I shall keep a quiet tongue in the matter. Least said is soonest mended. All will come right soon, when the Doctor is a little better off in the world.”

I let her suppose so. It is of little moment what she or anybody thinks, so that it is nothing ill of him.

“Thrice a bridesmaid, never a bride.” Even so. Yet, would I change lots with our bride Penelope, or any other bride? No.

Now that my mind has settled to its usual level; has had time to view things calmly, to satisfy itself that nothing could have been done different from what has been done; I may, at last, be able to detail these events. For both Max's sake and my own, it seems best to do it, unless I could make up my mind to destroy my whole journal. An unfinished record is worse than none. During our lifetimes we shall both preserve our secret; but many a chance brings dark things to light; and I have my Max's honour to guard, as well as my own.

This afternoon, papa being out driving, and Penelope gone to town to seek for a maid, whom the Governor's lady will require to take out with her—they sail a month hence—I shall seize the opportunity to write down what has befallen Max and me.

My own poor Max! But my lips are on his ring; this hand is as safely kept for him as when he first held it in his breast.

Let me turn back a page, and see where it was I left off writing my journal.

I did so; and it was more than I could bear at the time. I have had to take another day for this relation, and even now it is bitter enough to recall the feelings with which I put my pen by, so long ago, waiting for Max to come in “at any minute.”

I waited ten days; not unhappily, though the last two were somewhat anxious, but it was simply lest anything might have gone wrong with him or his affairs. As for his neglecting or “treating me ill,” as Penelope suggested, such a thought never entered my head. How could he treat me ill?—he loved me.

The tenth day, which was the end of the term he had named for his journey, I of course fully expected him.' I knew if by any human power it could be managed, I should see him; he never would break his word. I rested on his love as surely as in waking from that long sick swoon I had rested on his breast. I knew he would be tender over me, and not let me suffer one more hour's suspense or pain that he could possibly avoid.

It may here seem strange that I had never asked Max where he was going, nor anything of the business he was going upon. Well, that was his secret, the last secret that was ever to be between us; so I chose not to interfere with it, but to wait his time. Also, I did not fret much about it, whatever it was. He loved me. People

who have been hungry for love, and never had it all their lives, can understand the utterly satisfied contentment of this one feeling—Max loved me.

At dusk, after staying in all day, I went out, partly because Penelope wished it, and partly for health's sake. I never lost a chance of getting strong now. My sister and I walked along silently, each thinking of her own affairs, when, at a turn in the road which led, not from the camp, but from the moorlands, she cried out, “I do believe there is Doctor Urquhart.”

If he had not heard his name, I think he would have passed us without knowing us. And the face that met mine, when he looked up—I never shall forget it to my dying day.

It made me shrink back for a minute, and then I said:—

“Oh! Max, have you been ill?”

“I do not know. Yes—possibly.”

“When did you come back?”

“I forget—oh! four days ago.”

“Were you coming to Rockmount?”

“Rockmount?—oh! no.” He shuddered, and dropped my hand.

“Doctor Urquhart seems in a very uncertain frame of mind,” said Penelope, severely, from the other side the road. “We had better leave him. Come, Dora.”

She carried me off, almost forcibly. She was exceedingly displeased. Four days, and never to have come or written! She said it was slighting me and insulting the family.

“A man, too, of whose antecedents and connections we knew nothing. He may be a mere adventurer—a penniless Scotch adventurer; Francis always said he was.”

“Francis is—” But I could not stay to speak of him, or to reply to Penelope's bitter words. All I thought was how to get back to Max, and entreat him to tell me what had happened. He would tell *me*. He loved *me*. So, without any feeling of “proper pride,” as Penelope called it, I writhed myself out of her grasp, ran hack to Doctor Urquhart, and took possession of his arm, my arm, which I had a right to.

“Is that you, Theodora?”

“Yes, it is I.” And then I said, I wanted him to go home with me, and tell me what had happened.

“Better not; better go home with your sister.”

“I had rather stay here. I mean to stay here.”

He stopped, took both my hands, and forced a smile:—“You are the determined little lady you always were; but you do not know what you are saying. You had better go and leave me.”

I was sure then some great misery was approaching us. I tried to read it in his face. “Do you—” did he still love me; I was about to ask, but there was no need. So my answer, too, was brief and plain.

“I never will leave you as long as I live.”

Then I ran back to Penelope, and told her I should walk home with Doctor Urquhart; he had something to say to me. She tried anger and authority. Both failed. If we had been summer lovers it might have been different, but now in his trouble I seemed to feel Max's right to me and my love, as I had never done before. Penelope might have lectured for everlasting, and I should only have listened, and then gone back to Max's side. As I did.

His arm pressed mine close; he did not say a second time, “Leave me.”

“Now, Max, I want to hear.”

No answer.

“You know there is something, and we shall never be quite happy till it is told. Say it outright; whatever it is, I shall not mind.”

No answer.

“Is it something very terrible?”

“Yes.”

“Something that might come between and part us?”

“Yes.”

I trembled, though not much, having so strong a belief in the impossibility of parting. Yet there must have been an expression I hardly intended in the cry “Oh, Max, tell me,” for he again stopped suddenly, and seemed to forget himself in looking at and thinking of me.

“Stay, Theodora,—you have something to tell *me* first. Are you better? Have you been growing stronger daily? You are sure?”

“Quite sure. Now—tell me.”

He tried to speak once or twice, vainly. At last he said:—

“I—I wrote you a letter.”

“I never got it.”

“No; I did not mean you should until my death. But my mind has changed. You shall have it now. I have carried it about with me, on the chance of meeting you, these four days. I wanted to give it to you—and—to look at you. Oh, my child, my child.”

After a little while, he gave me the letter, begging me not to open it till I was alone at night.

“And if it should shock you—break your heart?”

“Nothing will break my heart.”

“You are right, it is too pure and good. God will not suffer it to be broken. Now, good-bye.”

For we had reached the gate of Bock-mount. It had never struck me before that I had to bid him adieu here,

that he did not mean to go in with me to dinner; and when he refused, I felt it very much. His only answer was, for the second time, “that I did not know what I was saying.”

It was now nearly dark, and so misty that I could hardly breathe. Doctor Urquhart insisted on my going in immediately, tied my veil close under my chin, and then hastily untied it.

“Love, do you love me?”

He has told me afterwards, he forgot then for the time being, every circumstance that was likely to part us; everything in the whole world but me. And I trust I was not the only one who felt that it is those alone who? loving as we did, are everything to one another who have most strength to part.

When I came indoors, the first person I met was papa, looking quite bright and pleased; and his first question was:—

“Where is Doctor Urquhart? Penelope said Doctor Urquhart was coming here.”

I hardly know what was done during that evening, or whether they blamed Max or not.

All my care was how best to keep his secret, and literally to obey him concerning it.

Of course, I never named his letter, nor made any attempt to read it till I had bidden good night to them all, and smiled at Penelope's grumbling over my long candles and my large fire, “as if I meant to sit up all night.” Yes, I had taken all these precautions in a quiet, solemn kind of way, for I did not know what was before me, and I must not fall ill if I could help. I was Max's own personal property.

How cross she was that night, poor Penelope! It was the last time she has ever scolded me.

For some things, Penelope has felt this more than anyone could, except papa, for she is the only one of us who has a clear recollection of Harry.

Now, his name is written, and I can tell it—the awful secret I learned from Max's letter, which no one except me must ever read.

My Max killed Harry. Not intentionally—when he was out of himself and hardly accountable for what he did; in a passion of boyish fury, roused by great cruelty and wrong; but—he killed him. My brother's death, which we believed to be accidental, was by Max's hand.

I write this down calmly, now; but it was awful at the time. I think I must have read on mechanically, expecting something sad, and about Harry likewise; I soon guessed that bad man at Salisbury must have been poor Harry—but I never guessed anything near the truth till I came to the words “I *murdered* him.”

To suppose one feels a great blow acutely at the instant is a mistake—it stuns rather than wounds. Especially when it comes in a letter, read in quiet and alone, as I read Max's letter that night. And—as I remember afterwards seeing in some book, and thinking how true it was—it is strange how soon a great misery grows familiar. Waking up from the first few minutes of total bewilderment, I seemed to have been aware all these twenty years that my Max killed Harry.

O Harry, my brother, whom I never knew—no more than any stranger in the street, and the faint memory of whom was mixed with an indefinite something of wickedness, anguish, and disgrace to us all, if I felt not as I ought, then or afterwards, forgive me. If, though your sister, I thought less of you dead than of my living Max—my poor, poor Max, who had borne this awful burthen for twenty years—Harry, forgive me!

Well, I knew it—as an absolute fact and certainty—though as one often feels with great personal misfortunes, at first I could not realize it. Gradually I became fully conscious what an overwhelming horror it was, and what a fearful retributive justice had fallen upon papa and us all.

For there were some things I had not myself known till this spring, when Penelope, in the fullness of her heart at leaving us, talked to me a good deal of old childish days, and especially about Harry.

He was a spoiled child. His father never said him nay in anything—never, from the time when he sat at table, in his own ornamental chair, and drank champagne out of his own particular glass, lisping toasts that were the great amusement of everybody. He never knew what contradiction was, till, at nineteen, he fell in love, and wanted to get married, and would have succeeded, for they eloped, (as I believe papa and Harry's mother had done), but papa prevented them in time. The girl, some village lass, but she might have had a heart nevertheless, broke it, and died. Then Harry went all wrong.

Penelope remembers, how, at times, a shabby, dissipated man used to meet us children out walking, and kiss us and the nurserymaids all round, saying he was our brother Harry. Also, how he used to lie in wait for papa coming out of church, follow him into his library, where, after fearful scenes of quarrelling, Harry would go away jauntily, laughing to us, and bowing to mamma, who always showed him out and shut the door upon him with a face as white as a sheet.

My sister also remembers papa's being suddenly called away from home for a day or two, and, on his return, our being all put into mourning, and told that it was for brother Harry, whom we must never speak of any more. And once, when she was saying her geography lesson, and wanted to go and ask papa some questions about Stonehenge and Salisbury, mamma stopped her, saying she must take care never to mention these places to papa, for that poor Harry—she called him so now—had died miserably by an accident, and been buried at Salisbury.

She died the same year, and soon afterwards we came to Rockmount, living handsomely upon grandfather's money, and proud that we had already begun to call ourselves Johnston. Oh, me, what wicked falsehoods poor Harry told about his “family.” Him we never again named; not one of our neighbours here ever knew that we had a brother.

The first shock over, hour after hour of that long night I sat, trying by any means to recall him to mind, my father's son, my own flesh and blood—at least by the half-blood—to pity him, to feel as I ought concerning his death, and the one who caused it. But do as I would, my thoughts went back to Max—as they might have done, even had he not been my own Max—out of deep compassion for one who, not being a premeditated and hardened criminal, had suffered for twenty years the penalty of this single crime.

It was such, I knew. I did not attempt to palliate it, or justify him. Though poor Harry was worthless, and Max is—what he is—that did not alter the question. I believe, even then, I did not disguise from myself the

truth—that my Max had committed, not a fault, but an actual crime. But I called him my Max still. It was the only word that saved me, or I might, as he feared, have "broken my heart."

The whole history of that dreadful night, there is no need I should tell to any human being; even Max himself will never know it. God knows it, and that is enough. By my own strength, I never should have kept my life or reason till the morning.

But it was necessary, and it was better far that I should have gone through this anguish alone, guided by no outer influence, and sustained only by that Strength which always comes in seasons like these.

I seem, while stretched on the rack of those long night hours, to have been led by some supernatural instinct into the utmost depths of human and divine justice, human and divine love, in search of *the right*. At last I saw it, clung to it, and have found it my rock of hope ever since.

When the house below began to stir, I put out my candle, and stood watching the dawn creep over the grey moorlands, just as on the morning when we had sat up all night with my father—Max and I. How fond my father was of him—my poor, poor father!

The horrible conflict and confusion of mind came back. I felt as if right and wrong were inextricably mixed together, laying me under a sort of moral paralysis, out of which the only escape was madness. Then out of the deeps I cried unto Thee: O Thou whose infinite justice includes also infinite forgiveness; and Thou heardest me.

"*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?*"

I remembered these words: and unto Thee I trusted my Max's soul.

It was daylight now, and the little birds began waking up, one by one, until they broke into a perfect chorus of chirping and singing. I thought, was ever grief like this of mine? Yes—one grief would have been worse—if, this sunny summer morning, I knew he had ceased to love me, and I to believe in him—if I had lost him—never either in this world or the next, to find him more.

After a little, I thought if I could only go to sleep, though but for half an hour—it would be well. So I undressed and laid myself down, with Max's letter tight hidden in my hands.

Sleep came; but it ended in dreadful dreams, out of which I awoke, screaming, to see Penelope standing by my bedside, with my breakfast.

Now, I had already laid my plans—to tell my father all. For he must be told. No other alternative presented itself to me as possible—nor, I knew, would it to Max. When two people are thoroughly one, each guesses instinctively the other's mind; in most things always in all great things, for one faith and love includes also one sense of right. I was as sure as I was of my existence that Max meant my father to be told. Not even to make me happy would he have deceived me—and not even that we might be married, would he consent that we should deceive my father.

Thus, that my father must be told, and that I must tell him, was a matter settled and clear—but I never considered about how far must be explained to anyone else, till I saw Penelope stand there with her familiar household face, half cross, half alarmed.

"Why, child, what on earth is the matter? Here are you, staring as if you were out of your senses—and there is Doctor Urquhart, who has been haunting the place like a ghost ever since daylight. I declare, I'll send for him and give him a piece of my mind."

"Don't, don't," I gasped, and all the horror returned—vivid as daylight makes any new anguish. Penelope soothed me—with the motherliness that had come over since I was ill, and the gentleness that had grown up in her since she had been happy, and Francis loving. My miserable heart yearned to her, a woman like myself—a good woman, too, though I did not appreciate her once, when I was young and foolish, and had never known care, as she had. How it came out I cannot tell—I have never regretted it—nor did Max, for I think it saved my heart from breaking—but I then and there told my sister Penelope our dreadful story.

I see her still, sitting on the bed, listening with blanched face, gazing, not at me, but at the opposite wall. She made no outcry of grief, or horror against Max. She took all in a subdued, quiet way, which I had not expected would have been Penelope's passion of bearing a great grief. She hardly said anything, till I cried with a bitter cry:—

"Now I want Max. Let me rise and go down, for I must see Max."

Then we two women looked at one another pitifully, and my sister, my happy sister who was to be married in a fortnight, took me in her arms, sobbing,

"Oh, Dora, my poor, poor child."

All this seems years upon years ago, and I can relate it calmly enough, till I call to mind that sob of Penelope's.

Well, what happened next? I remember, Penelope came in when I was dressing, and told me, in her ordinary manner, that papa wished her to drive with him to the Cedars this morning. "Shall I go, Dora?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you will see *him* in our absence."

"I intend so."

She turned, then came back and kissed me. I suppose she thought this meeting between Max and me would be an eternal farewell. The carriage had scarcely driven off, when I received a message that Doctor Urquhart was in the parlour.

Harry—Harry, twenty years dead—my own brother killed by my husband! Let me acknowledge. Had I known this *before* he was my betrothed husband, chosen open-eyed, with all my judgment, my conscience, and my soul, loved, not merely because he loved me, but because I loved him, honoured him, and trusted him, so that even marriage could scarcely make us more entirely one than we were already—had I been aware of this before, I might not, indeed I think I never should have loved him. Nature would have instinctively

prevented me. But now it was too late. I loved him, and I could not unlove him: Nature herself forbade the sacrifice. It would have been like tearing my heart out of my bosom; he was half myself—and maimed of him, I should never have been my right self afterwards. Nor would he. Two living lives to be blasted for one that was taken unwittingly twenty years ago! Could it—ought it so to be?

The rest of the world are free to be their own judges in the matter; but God and my conscience are mine.

I went downstairs steadfastly, with my mind all clear. Even to the last minute, with my hand on the parlor-door, my heart—where all throbs of happy love seemed to have been long, long forgotten—my still heart prayed.

Max was standing by the fire—he turned round. He, and the whole sunshiny room swam before my eyes for an instant,—then I called up my strength and touched him. He was trembling all over.

“Max, sit down.” He sat down.

I knelt by him. I clasped his hands close, but still he sat as if he had been a stone. At last he muttered:—

“I wanted to see you, just once more, to know how you bore it—to be sure I had not killed you also—oh, it is horrible, horrible!”

I said it was horrible—but that we would be able to bear it.

“We?”

“Yes—we.”

“You cannot mean *that?*”

“I do. I have thought it all over, and I do.” Holding me at arm's length, his eyes questioned my inmost soul.

“Tell me the truth. It is not pity—not merely pity, Theodora?”

“Ah, no, no!”

Without another word—the first crisis was past—everything which made our misery a divided misery.—He opened his arms and took me once more into my own place—where alone I ever really rested, or wish to rest until I die.

Max had been very ill, he told me, for days, and now seemed both in body and mind as feeble as a child. For me, my childishness or girlishness, with its ignorance and weakness, was gone for evermore.

I have thought since, that in all women's deepest loves, be they ever so full of reverence, there enters sometimes much of the motherly element, even as on this day I felt as if I were somehow or other in charge of Max, and a great deal older than he. I fetched a glass of water, and made him drink it—bathed his poor temples and wiped them with my handkerchief—persuaded him to lean back quietly and not speak another word for ever so long. But more than once, and while his head lay on my shoulder, I thought of his mother, my mother who might have been—and how, though she had left him so many years, she must, if she knew of all he had suffered, be glad to know there was at last one woman found who would, did Heaven permit, watch over him through life, with the double love of both wife and mother, and who, in any case, would be faithful to him till death.

Faithful till death. Yes,—I here renewed that vow, and had Harry himself come and stood before me, I should have done the same. Look you, any one who after my death may read this;—there are two kinds of love, one, eager only to get its desire, careless of all risks and costs, in defiance almost of Heaven and earth; the other, which in its most desperate longing has strength to say, “If it be right and for our good—if it be according to the will of God.” This only, I think, is the true and consecrated love, which therefore is able to be faithful till death.

Max and I never once spoke about whether or not we should be married—we left all that in Higher hands. We only felt we should always be true to one another—and that, being what we were, and loving as we did, God himself could not will that any human will or human justice should put us asunder.

This being clear, we set ourselves to meet what was before us. I told him poor Harry's history, so far as I knew it myself; afterwards we began to consider how best the truth could be broken to my father.

And here let me confess something, which Max has long forgiven, but which I can yet hardly forgive myself. Max said, “And when your father is told, he shall decide what next is to be.”

“How do you mean?” I cried.

“If he requires atonement, he must have it, even at the hands of the law.”

Then, for the first time, it struck me that, though Max was safe so long as he made no confession, for the peculiar circumstances of Harry's death left no other evidence against him, still, this confession once public (and it was, for had I not told Penelope?) his reputation, liberty, life itself, were in the hands of my sister and my father. A horror as of death fell upon me. I clung to him who was my all in this world, dearer to me than father, mother, brother, or sister; and I urged that we should both, then and there, fly—escape together anywhere, to the very ends of the earth, out of reach of justice and my father.

I must have been almost beside myself before I thought of such a thing. I hardly knew all it implied, until Max gravely put me from him.

“It cannot be you who says this. Not Theodora.”

And suddenly, as unconnected and even incongruous things will flash across one in times like these, I called to mind the scene in my favourite play, when, the alternative being life or honour, the woman says to her lover, “*No, die!*” Little I dreamed of ever having to say to my Max almost the same words.

I said them, kneeling by him, and imploring his pardon for having wished him to do such a thing even for his safety and my happiness.

“We could not have been happy, child,” he said, smoothing my hair, with a sad, fond smile. “You do not know what it is to have a secret weighing like lead upon your soul. Mine feels lighter now than it has done for years. Let us decide: what hour to-night shall I come here and tell your father?” Saying this, Max turned white to the very lips, but still he comforted me.

“Do not be afraid, my child. I am not afraid. Nothing can be worse than what has been—to me. I was a coward once, but then I was only a boy, hardly able to distinguish right from wrong. Now I see that it would have been better to have told the whole truth at once, and taken all the punishment. It might not have been death, or if it were, I could but have died.”

“Max, Max!”

“Hush!” and he closed my lips so that they could not moan. “The truth is better than life, better even than a good name. When your father knows the truth, all else will be clear. I shall abide by his decision, whatever it be; he has a right to it. Theodora,” his voice faltered, “make him understand, some day, that if I had married you, he never should have wanted a son,—your poor father.”

These were almost the last words Max said on this, the last hour that we were together by ourselves. For minutes and minutes he held me in his arms, silently; and I shut my eyes, and felt, as if in a dream, the sunshine and the flower-scents, and the loud singing of the two canaries in Penelope's greenhouse. Then,-with one kiss, he put me down softly from my place, and left me alone.

I have been alone ever since; God only, knows *how* alone.

The rest I cannot tell to-day.

CHAPTER II. HIS STORY.

This is the last, probably, of those “letters never sent,” which may reach you one day; when or how, we know not. All that is, is best.

You say you think it advisable that there should be an accurate written record of all that passed between your family and myself on the final day of parting, in order that no further conduct of mine may be misconstrued or misjudged. Be it so. My good name is worth preserving; for it must never be any disgrace to you that Max Urquhart loved you.

Since this record is to be minute and literal, perhaps it will be better I should give it impersonally, as a statement rather than a letter.

On February 9th, 1857, I went to Rockmount, to see Theodora Johnston, for the first time after she was aware that I had, long ago, taken the life of her half-brother, Henry Johnston, not intentionally, but in a fit of drunken rage. I came, simply to look at her dear face once more, and to ask her in what way her father would best bear the shock of this confession of mine, before I took the second step of surrendering myself to justice, or of making atonement in any other way that Mr. Johnston might choose. To him and his family my life was owed, and I left them to dispose of it or of me in any manner they thought best.

With these intentions, I went to Theodora. I knew her well. I felt sure she would pity me, that she would not refuse me her forgiveness, before our eternal separation; that though the blood upon my hands was half her own, she would not judge me the less justly, or mercifully, or Christianly. As to a Christian woman, I came to her—as I had come once before, in a question of conscience; also, as to the woman who had been my friend, with all the rights and honours of that name, before she became to me anything more and dearer. And I was thankful that the lesser tie had been included in the greater, so that both need not be entirely swept away and disannulled.

I found not only my friend, upon whom, above all others, I could depend, but my own, my love, the woman above all women who was mine; who, loving me before this blow fell, clung to me still, and believing that God Himself had joined us together suffered nothing to put us asunder.

How she made me comprehend this I shall not relate, as it concerns ourselves alone. When at last I knelt by her and kissed her blessed hands—my saint! and yet all woman, and all my own—I felt that my sin was covered, that the All-merciful had had mercy upon me. That while, all these years, I had followed miserably my own method of atonement, denying myself all life's joys, and cloaking myself with every possible ray of righteousness I could find, He had suddenly led me by another way, sending this child's love, first to comfort and then, to smite me, that, being utterly bruised, broken, and humbled, I might be made whole.

Now, for the first time, I felt like a man to whom there is a possibility of being made whole. Her father might hunt me to death, the law might lay hold on me, the fair reputation under which I had shielded myself might be torn and scattered to the winds; but for all that I was safe, I was myself, the true Max Urquhart, a grievous sinner; yet no longer unforgiven or hopeless.

“*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*.”

That line struck home. Oh, that I could strike it home to every miserable heart as it went to mine. Oh! that I could carry into the utmost corners of the earth the message, the gospel which Dallas believed in, the only one which has power enough for the redemption of this sorrowful world—the gospel of the forgiveness and remission of sins.

While she talked to me—this my saint, Theodora—Dallas himself might have spoken, apostle-like, through her lips. She said, when I listened in wonder to the clearness of some of her arguments, that she hardly knew how they had come into her mind, they seemed to come of themselves; but they were there, and she was *sure* they were true. She was sure, she added, reverently, that if the Christ of Nazareth were to pass by Rockmount door this day, the only word He would say unto me, after all I had done, would be:—“Thy sins are forgiven thee—rise up and walk.”

And I did so. I went out of the house an altered man. My burthen of years had been lifted off me for ever

and ever. I understood something of what is meant by being “born again.” I could dimly guess at what they must have felt-who sat at the Divine feet, clothed and in their right mind, or who, across the sunny plains of Galilee, leaped, and walked, and ran, praising God.

I crossed the moorland, walking erect, with eyes fixed on the blue sky, my heart tender and young as a child's. I even stopped, child-like, to pluck a stray primrose under a tree in a lane, which had peeped out, as if it wished to investigate how soon spring would come. It seemed to me so pretty—I might never have seen a primrose since I was a boy.

Let me relate the entire truth—she wishes it. Strange as it may appear, though hour by hour brought nearer the time when I had fixed to be at Rockmount, to confess unto a father that I had been the slayer of his only son—still that day was not an unhappy day. I spent it chiefly out of doors on the moorlands, near a way-side public-house, where I had lodged some nights, drinking in large draughts of the beauty of this external world, and feeling even outer life sweet, though nothing to that renewed life which I now should never lose again. Never—even if I had to go next day to prison and trial, and stand before the world a convicted homicide. Nay, I believe I could have mounted the scaffold amidst those gaping thousands that were once my terror, and die peacefully in spite of them, feeling no longer either guilty or afraid.

So much for myself, which will explain a good deal that followed in the interview which I have now to relate.

Theodora had wished to save me by herself, explaining all to her father; but I would not allow this, and at length she yielded. However, things fell out differently from both our intentions: he learned it first from his daughter Penelope. The moment I entered his study I was certain Mr. Johnston knew.

Let no sinner, however healed, deceive himself that his wound will never smart again. He is not instantly made a new man of, whole and sound: he must grow gradually, even through many a returning pang, into health and cure. If anyone thinks I could stand in the presence of that old man without an anguish sharp as death, which made me for the moment wish I had never been born, he is mistaken.

But alleviations came. The first was to see the old man sitting there alive and well, though evidently fully aware of the truth, and having been so for some time, for his countenance was composed, his tea was placed beside him on the table, and there was an open Bible before him, in which he had been reading. His voice, too, had nothing unnatural or alarming in it, as, without looking at me, he bade the maid-servant “give Doctor Urquhart a chair and say, if anyone interrupted, that we were particularly engaged.” So the door was shut upon us, leaving us face to face.

But it was not long before he raised his eyes to him. It is enough, once in a lifetime, to have borne such a look.

“Mr. Johnston,”—but he shut his ears.

“Do not speak,” he said; “what you have come to tell me I know already. My daughter told me this morning. And I have been trying ever since to find out what my church says to the shedder of blood; what she would teach a father to say to the murderer of his child. My Harry, my only son! And you murdered him!”

Let the words which followed be sacred. If in some degree they were unjust, and overstepped the truth, let me not dare to murmur. I believe the curses he heaped upon me in his own words and those of the Holy Book, will not come, for its other and diviner words, which his daughter taught me, stand as a shield between me and him. I repeated them to myself in my silence, and so I was able to endure.

When he paused and commanded me to speak, I answered only a few words, namely, that I was here to offer my life for his son's life; that he might do with me what he would.

“Which means, that I should give you up to justice, have you tried, condemned, executed. You, Doctor Urquhart, whom the world thinks so well of. I might live to see you hanged.”

His eyes glared, his whole frame was convulsed. I entreated him to calm himself, for his own health's sake, and the sake of his children.

“Yes, I will. Old as I am, this shall not kill me. I will live to exact retribution. My boy, my poor murdered Harry—murdered—murdered.”

He kept repeating and dwelling on the word, till at length I said:—

“If you know the whole truth, you must be aware that I had no intention to murder him.”

“What, you extenuate? You wish to escape? But you shall not. I will have you arrested now, in this very house.”

“Be it so, then.”

And I sat down.

So, the end had come. Life, and all its hopes, all its work, were over for me. I saw, as in a second of time, everything that was coming—the trial, the conviction, the newspaper clatter over my name, my ill deeds exaggerated, my good deeds pointed at with the finger of scorn, which perhaps was the keenest agony of all—save one.

“Theodora!”

Whether I uttered her name, or only thought it, I cannot tell. However, it brought her. I felt she was in the room, though she stood by her sister's side, and did not approach me.

Again, I repeat, let no man say that sin does not bring its wages, which *must* be paid. Whosoever doubts it, I would he could sit as I sat, watching the faces of father and daughters, and thinking of the dead face which lay against my knee, that midnight, on Salisbury plain.

“Children,” I heard Mr. Johnston saying, “I have sent for you to be my witnesses in what I am about to do. Not out of personal revenge—which were unbecoming a clergyman—but because God and man exact retribution for blood. There is the man who murdered Harry. Though he were the best friend I ever had, though I esteemed him ever so much, which I did,—still, discovering this, I must have retribution.

“How, father?” Not *her* voice, but her sister's. .

Let me do full justice to Penelope Johnston. Though it was she who told my secret to her father, she did it out of no malice. As I afterwards learnt, chance led their conversation into such a channel, that she could only escape betraying the truth by a direct lie. And with all her harshnesses, the prominent feature of her character is its truthfulness, or rather its abhorrence of falsehood. Nay, her fierce scorn of any kind of duplicity is such, that she confounds the crime with the criminal, and, once deceived, never can forgive,—as in the matter of Lydia Cartwright, my acquaintance with which gave me this insight into Miss Johnston's peculiarity.

Thus, though it fell to her lot to betray my confession, I doubt not she did so with most literal accuracy; acting towards me neither as a friend nor foe, but simply as a relater of facts. Nor was there any personal enmity towards me in her question to her father.

It startled him a little.

“How did you say? By the law, I conclude. There is no other way.”

“And if so, what will be the result? I mean what will be done to him?”

“I cannot tell—how should I?”

“Perhaps I can; for I have thought over and studied the question all day,” answered Miss Johnston, still in the same cold, clear, impartial voice. “He will be tried, of course. I find from your 'Taylor on Evidence,' father, that a man can be tried and convicted, solely on his own confession. But in this case, there being no corroborating proof, and all having happened so long ago, it will scarcely prove a capital crime. I believe no jury would give a stronger verdict than manslaughter. He will be imprisoned, or transported beyond seas; where, with his good character, he will soon work his liberty, and start afresh in another country, in spite of us. This, I think, is the common-sense view of the matter.”

Astonished as Mr. Johnston looked, he made no reply.

His daughter continued:—

“And for this, you and we shall have the credit of having had arrested in our own house, a man who threw himself on our mercy, who, though he concealed, never denied his guilt; who never deceived us in any way. The moment he discovered the whole truth, dreadful as it was, he never shirked it, nor hid it from us; but told us outright, risking all the consequences. A man, too, against whom, in his whole life, we can prove but this one crime.”

“What, do you take his part?”

“No,” she said; “I wish he had died before he set foot in this house—for I remember Harry. But I see also that after all this lapse of years Harry is not the only person whom we ought to remember.”

“I remember nothing but the words of this Book,” cried the old man, letting his hand drop heavily upon it. “'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' What have you to say for yourself, *murderer?*”

All this time, faithful to her promise to me, she had not interfered—she, my love, who loved me; but when she heard him call me *that*, she shivered all over, and looked towards me. A pitiful, entreating look, but, thank God, there was no doubt in it—not the shadow of change. It nerved me to reply, what I will here record, by her desire and for her sake.

“Mr. Johnston, I have this to say. It is written,—'Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer,' and in that sense, I am one,—for I did hate him at the time; but I never meant to kill him—and the moment afterwards I would have given my life for his. If now, my death could restore him to you, alive again, how willingly I would die.”

“Die, and face your Maker? an unpardoned man-slayer, a lost soul?”

“Whether I live or die,” said I, humbly, “I trust my soul is not lost. I have been very guilty; but I believe in One who brought to every sinner on earth the gospel of repentance and remission of sins.”

At this, burst out the anathema—not merely of the father, but the clergyman,—who mingled the Jewish doctrine of retributive vengeance during this life with the Christian belief of rewards and punishments after death, and confounded the Mosaic gehenna with the Calvinistic hell. I will not record all this—it was very terrible; but he only spoke as he believed, and as many earnest Christians do believe. I think, in all humility, that the Master Himself preached a different gospel.

I saw it, shining out of her eyes—my angel of peace and pardon. O Thou, from whom all love comes, was it impious if the love of this Thy creature towards one so wretched, should come to me like an assurance of Thine?

At length her father ceased speaking—took up a pen and began hastily writing. Miss Johnston went and looked over his shoulder.

“Papa, if that is a warrant you are making-out, better think twice about it; for, as a magistrate, you cannot retract. Should you send Dr. Urquhart to trial, you must be prepared for the whole truth to come out. He must tell it; or, if he calls Dora and me as witnesses—she having already his written confession in full—*we* must.”

“You must tell—what?”

“The provocation Doctor Urquhart received—how Harry enticed him, a lad of nineteen, to drink—made him mad, and taunted him. Everything will be made public—how Harry was so degraded that from the hour of his death we were thankful to forget that he had ever existed—how he died as he had lived—a boaster, a coward, spunging upon any one from whom he could get money, using his talents only to his shame, devoid of one spark of honesty, honour, and generosity. It is shocking to have to say this of one's own brother; but, father, you know it is the truth—and, as such, it must be told.”

Amazed—I listened to her—this eldest sister, who I knew disliked me.

Her father seemed equally surprised,—until, at length, her arguments apparently struck him with uneasiness.

“Have you any motive in arguing thus?” said he, hurriedly and not without agitation; “why do you do it,

Penelope!”

“A little, on my own account, though the great scandal and publicity will not much affect Francis and me—we shall soon be out of England. But for the family's sake,—for Harry's sake,—when all his wickednesses and our miseries have been safely covered up these twenty years—consider, father!”

She stung him deeper than she knew. I had guessed it before, when I was almost a stranger to him—but now the whole history of that old man's life was betrayed in one groan, which burst from the very depth of the father's soul.

“Eli—the priest of the Lord—his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. Therefore they died in one day, both of them. It was the will of the Lord.”

The respectful silence which ensued, no one dared to break.

He broke it himself at last, pointing to the door. “Go! murderer, or man-slayer, or whatever you are, you must go free. Moreover, I must have your promise—no, your oath—that the secret you have kept so long, you will now keep for ever.”

“Sir,” I said; but he stopped me fiercely.

“No hesitations—no explanations—I will have none and give none. As you said, your life is mine—to do with it as I choose. Better you should go unpunished, than that I and mine should be disgraced. Obey me. Promise.”

I did.

Thus, in another and still stranger way, my resolutions were broken, my fate was decided for me, and I have to keep this secret unconfessed to the end.

“Now, go. Put half the earth between us if you can—only go.”

Again I turned to obey. Blind obedience seemed the only duty left me. I might even have quitted the house, with a feeling of total irresponsibility and indifference to all things, had it not been for a low cry which I heard, as in a dream.

So did her father. “Dora—I had forgotten. There was some sort of fancy between you and Dora. Daughter, bid him farewell, and let him go.”

Then she said—my love said, in her own soft, distinct voice: “No, papa, I never mean to bid him farewell—that is, finally—never as long as I live.”

Her father and sister were both so astounded, that at first they did not interrupt her, but let her speak on.

“I belonged to Max before all this happened. If it had happened a year hence, when I was his wife, it would not have broken our marriage. It ought not now. When any two people are to one another what we are, they are as good as married; and they have no right to part, no more than man and wife have, unless either grows wicked, or both change. I never mean to part from Max Urquhart.”

She spoke meekly, standing with hands folded and head drooping; but as still and steadfast as a rock. My darling—my darling!

Steadfast! She had need to he. What she bore during the next few minutes she would not wish me to repeat, I feel sure.

She knows it, and so do I. She knows also that every stab with which I then saw her wounded for my sake, is counted in my heart, as a debt to be paid one day, if between those who love there can be any debts at all. She says not. Yet, if ever she is my wife.—People talk of dying for a woman's sake—but to live—live for her with the whole of one's being—to work for her, to sustain and cheer her—to fill her daily existence with tenderness and care—if ever she is my wife, she will find out what I mean.

After saying all he well could say, Mr. Johnston asked her how she dared think of me—me, laden with her brother's blood and her father's curse.

She turned deadly pale, but never faltered: “The curse causeless shall not come,” she said, “For the blood upon his hand, whether it were Harry's or a stranger's, makes no difference; it is washed out. He has repented long ago. If God has forgiven him, and helped him to be what he is, and lead the life he has led all these years, why should I not forgive him? And if I forgive, why not love him?—and if I love him, why break my promise, and refuse to marry him?”

“Do you mean, then, to marry him?” said her sister.

“Some day—if he wishes it—yes!”

From this time, I myself hardly remember what passed; I can only see her standing there, her sweet face white as death, making no moan, and answering nothing to any accusations that were heaped upon her, except when she was commanded to give me up, entirely and for ever and ever.

“I cannot, father. I have no right to do it. I belong to him; he is my husband.”

At last, Miss Johnston said to me—rather gently than not, for her: “I think, Doctor Urquhart, you had better go.”

My love looked towards me, and afterwards at her poor father; she too said, “Yes, Max, go.” And then they wanted her to promise she would never see me, nor write to me; but she refused.

“Father, I will not marry him for ever so long, if you choose—but I cannot forsake him. I must write to him. I am his very own, and he has only me. Oh, papa, think of yourself and my mother.” And she sobbed at his knees.

He must have thought of Harry's mother, not hers, for this exclamation only hardened him.

Then Theodora rose, and gave me her little hand.—“It can hold firm, you will find. You have my promise. But whether or no, it would have been all the same. No love is worth having that could not, with or without a promise, keep true till death. You may trust me. Now, goodbye. Good-bye, my Max.”

With that one clasp of the hand, that one look into her fond, faithful eyes, we parted. I have never seen her since.

This statement, which is as accurate as I can make it, except in the case of those voluntary omissions which I believe you yourself would have desired, I here seal up, to be delivered to you with those other letters in case I should die while you are still Theodora Johnston.

I have also made my will, leaving you all my effects, and appointing you my sole executrix; putting you, in short, in exactly the same position as if you had been my wife. This is best, in order that by no chance should the secret ooze out through any guesses of any person not connected with your family; also because I think it is what you would wish yourself. You said truly, I have only you.

Another word, which I do not name in my ordinary letters, lest I might grieve you by what may prove to be only a fancy of mine.

Sometimes, in the hard work of this my life here, I begin to feel that I am no longer a young man, and that the reaction after the great strain, mental and bodily, of the last few months, has left me not so strong as I used to be. Not that I think I am about to die, far from it. I have a good constitution, which has worn well yet, and may wear on for some time, though not for ever, and I am nearly fifteen years older than you.

It is very possible that before any change can come, I may leave you, never a wife, and yet a widow. Possible, among the numerous fatalities of life, that we may never be married—never even see one another again.

Sometimes, when I see two young people married and happy, taking it all as a matter of course, scarcely even recognising it as happiness—-just like Mr. and Mrs. Treherne, who hunted me out lately, and insisted on my visiting them—I think of you and me, and it seems very bitter, and I look on the future with less faith than fear. It might not be so if I could see you now and then—but oftentimes this absence feels like death.

Theodora, if I should die before we are married, without any chance of writing down my last words, take them here.

No, they will not come. I can but crush my lips upon this paper—only thy name, not thee, and call thee “my love, my love!” Remember, I loved thee—all my soul was full of the love of thee. It made life happy, earth beautiful, and Heaven nearer. It was with me day and night, in work or rest—as much a part of me as the hand I write with, or the breath I draw. I never thought of myself, but of “us.” I never prayed but I prayed for two. Love, my love, so many miles away—O my God, why not grant me a little happiness before I die!

Yet, as once I wrote before, and as she says always in all things, *Thy will be done.*

CHAPTER III. HER STORY.

Friday night.

My Dear Max,

You have had your Dominical letter, as you call it, so regularly, that you must know all our doings at Rockmount almost as well as ourselves. If I write foolishly, and tell you all sorts of trivial things, perhaps some of them twice over, it is just because there is nothing else to tell. But, trivial or not, I have a feeling that you like to hear it—you care for everything that concerns me.

So, first, in obedience to orders, I am quite well, even though my hand-writing is “not so pretty as it used to be.” Do not fancy the hand shakes, or is nervous or uncertain. Not a bit of it. I am never nervous, nor weak either—now. Sometimes, perhaps, being only a woman after all, I feel things a little more keenly than I ought to feel; and then, not being good at concealment, at least not with you, this fact peeps out in my letters. For the home-life has its cares, and I feel very weary sometimes—and then, I have not you to rest upon—visibly, that is—though in my heart I do always. But I am quite well, Max, and quite content. Do not doubt it. He who has led us through this furnace of affliction, will lead us safely to the end.

You will be glad to hear that papa is every day less and less cold to me—poor papa! Last Sunday, he even walked home from church with me, talking about general subjects, like his old self, almost. Penelope has been always good and kind.

You ask if they ever name you? No.

Life at Rockmount moves slowly, even in the midst of marriage preparations. Penelope is getting a large store of wedding presents. Mrs. Granton brought a beautiful one last night from her son Colin.

I was glad you had that long friendly letter from Colin Granton—glad also that, his mother having let out the secret about you and me, he was generous enough to tell you himself that other secret, which I never told. Well, your guess was right; it was so. But I could not help it; I did not know it.—For me—how could any girl, feeling as I then did towards you, feel anything towards any other man but the merest kindliness?—That is all: we will never say another word about it; except that I wish you always to be specially kind to Colin, and to do him good whenever you can—he was very good to me.

Life at Rockmount, as I said, is dull. I rise sometimes, go through the day, and go to bed at night, wondering what I have been doing during all these hours. And I do not always sleep soundly, though so tired. Perhaps it is partly the idea of Penelope's going away so soon; far away, across the sea, with no one to love

her and take care of her, save Francis.

Understand, this is not with any pitying of my sister for what is a natural and even a happy lot, which no woman need complain of; but simply because Francis is Francis—accustomed to think only of himself, and for himself. It may be different when he is married.

He was staying with us here a week; during which I noticed him more closely than in his former fly-away visits. When one lives in the house with a person—a dull house too, like ours, how wonderfully odds and ends of character “crop out,” as the geologists say. Do you remember the weeks when you were almost continually in our house? Francis had what we used then to call 'the Doctor's room.' He was pleasant and agreeable enough, when it pleased him to be-so; but, for all that, I used to say to myself, twenty times a-day, “My dear Max!”

This merely implies that by a happy dispensation of Providence, I, Theodora Johnston, have not the least desire to appropriate my sister's husband, or, indeed, either of my sisters' husbands.

By-the-by—in a letter from Augustus to papa, which reached me through Penelope, he names his visit to you; I am glad—glad he should show you such honour and affection, and that they all should see it. Do not give up the Trehernes; go there sometimes—for my sake. There is no reason why you should not. Papa knows it; he also knows I write to you—but he never says a word, one way or other. We must wait—wait and hope—or rather, trust. As you say, the difference between young and older people is, the one hopes, the other trusts.

I seem, from your description, to have a clear idea of the gaol, and the long, barren breezy flat amidst which it lies, with the sea in the distance. I often sit and think of the view outside, and of the dreary inside, where you spend so many hours; the corridors, the exercise-yards, and the cells; also your own two rooms, which you say are almost as silent and solitary, except when you come in and find my letter waiting you. I wish it was me!—pardon grammar—but I wish it was me—this living me. Would you be glad to see me? Ah, I know!

Look! I am not going to write about ourselves—it is not good for us. We know it all; we know our hearts are nigh breaking sometimes—mine is. But it shall not. We will live and wait.

What was I telling you about?—oh, Francis. Well, Francis spent a whole week at Rockmount, by papa's special desire, that they might discuss business arrangements, and that he might see a little more of his intended son-in-law than he has done of late years. Business was soon dispatched—papa gives none of us any money during his life-time; what will come to us afterwards we have never thought of inquiring. Francis did, though—which somewhat hurt Penelope—but he accounted for it by his being so “poor.” A relative phrase; why, I should think 500L. a-year, certain, a mine of riches—and all to be spent upon himself. But as he says, a single man has so many inevitable expenses, especially when he lives in society, and is the nephew of Sir William Treherne, of Treherne Court. All “circumstances'!” Poor Francis; whatever goes wrong he is sure to put between himself and blame the shield of “circumstances.” Now, if I were a man, I would fight the world bare-fronted, any how. One would but be killed at last.

Is it wrong of me to write to you so freely about Francis? I hope not. All mine are yours, and yours mine; you know their faults and virtues as well as I do, and will judge them equally, as we ought to judge those, who, whatever they are, are permanently our own. I have tried hard, this time, to make a real brother of Francis Charteris; and he is, for many things, exceedingly likeable—nay loveable. I see, sometimes, clearly enough, the strange charm which has made Penelope so fond of him all these years. Whether, besides loving him, she can trust him—can look on his face and feel that he would not deceive her for the world—can believe every line he writes, and every word he utters, and know that whatever he does, he will do simply from his sense of right, no meaner motive interfering—oh, Max, I would give much to be certain Penelope had this sort of love for her future husband!

Well, they have chosen their lot, and must make the best of one another. Everybody must, you know.

Heigho! what a homily I am giving you, instead of this week's history, as usual—from Saturday to Saturday.

The first few days there really was nothing to tell. Francis and Penelope took walks together, paid visits, or sat in the parlour talking—not banishing me, however, as they used to do when they were young. On Wednesday, Francis went up to London for the day, and brought back that important article, the wedding-ring. He tried it on at supper-time, with a diamond keeper, which he said would be just the thing for “the governor's lady.”

“Say wife at once,” grumbled I, and complained of the modern fashion of slurring over that word, the dearest and sacredest in the language.

“Wife, then,” whispered Francis, holding the ring on my sister's finger, and kissing it.

Tears started to Penelope's eyes; in her agitation she looked almost like a girl again, I thought; so infinitely happy. But Francis, never happy, muttered bitterly some regret for the past, some wish that they had been married years ago. Why were they not? It was partly his fault, I am sure.

The day after this he left, not to return till he comes to take her away finally. In the meanwhile, he will have enough to do, paying his adieux to his grand friends, and his bills to his tradespeople, prior to closing his bachelor establishment for ever and aye—how glad he must be.

He seemed glad, as if with a sense of relief that all was settled, and no room left for hesitation. It costs Francis such a world of trouble to make up his own mind—which trouble Penelope will save him for the future. He took leave of her with great tenderness, calling her “his good, faithful girl,” and vowing—which one would think was quite unnecessary under the circumstances—to be faithful to her all the days of his life.

That night, when she came into my room, Penelope sat a long time on my bed talking; chiefly of old days, when she and Francis were boy and girl together—how handsome he was, and how clever—till she seemed almost to forget the long interval between. Well, they are both of an age—time runs equally with each; she is at least no more altered than he.

Here, I ought to tell you something, referring to that which, as we agreed, we are best not speaking of, even between ourselves. It is all over and done—cover it over, and let it heal.

My dear Max, Penelope confessed a thing, for which I am very sorry, but it cannot be helped now.

I told you they never name you here. Not usually, but she did that night. Just as she was leaving me, she exclaimed, suddenly:—

“Dora, I have broken my promise—Francis knows about Doctor Urquhart.”

“What!” I cried.

“Don't be terrified—not the whole. Merely that he wanted to marry you, but that papa found out he had done something wrong in his youth, and so forbade you to think of him.”

I asked her, was she sure no more had escaped her? Not that I feared much; Penelope is literally accurate, and scrupulously straight forward in all her words and ways. But still, Francis being a little less so than she, might have questioned her.

“So he did, and I refused point-blank to tell him, saying it would be a breach of trust. He was very angry; jealous, I think,” and she smiled, “till I informed him that it was not my own secret—all my own secrets I had invariably told him, as he me. At which, he said, 'Yes, of course,' and the matter ended. Are you annoyed? Do you doubt Francis's honour?”

No. For all that, I have felt anxious, and I cannot choose but tell Max; partly because he has a right to all my anxieties, and, also, that he may guard against any possibility of harm. None is likely to come though; we will not be afraid.

Augustus, in his letter, says how highly he hears you spoken of in Liverpool already; how your duties at the gaol are the least of your work, and that whatever you do, or wherever you go, you leave a good influence behind you. These were his very words. I was proud, though I knew it all before.

He says you are looking thin, as if you were overworked. Max, my Max, take care. Give all due energy to the work you have to do, but remember me likewise; remember what is mine. I think, perhaps, you take too long walks between the town and the gaol, and that maybe, the prisoners themselves get far better and more regular meals than the doctor does. See to this, if you please, Doctor Urquhart.

Tell me more about those poor prisoners, in whom you take so strong an interest—your spiritual as well as medical hospital. And give me a clearer notion of your doings in the town, your practice and schemes, your gratis patients, dispensaries, and so on. Also, Augustus said you were employed in drawing up reports and statistics about reformatories, and on the general question now so much discussed,—What is to be done with our criminal classes? How busy you must be! Cannot I help you? Send me your MSS. to copy. Give me some work to do.

Max, do you remember our talk by the pond-side, when the sun was setting, and the hills looked so still, and soft, and blue? I was there the other day and thought it all over. Yes, I could have been happy, even in the solitary life we both then looked forward to, but it is better to belong to you as I do now.

God bless you and keep you safe!

Yours,

Theodora.

P.S. I leave a blank page to fill up after

Penelope and I come home. We are going into town together early to-morrow, to enquire about the character of the lady's maid that is to be taken abroad, but we shall be back long before post-time. However, I have written all this overnight to make sure.

Sunday.

P.S. You will have missed your Sunday letter to-day, which vexes me sore. But it is the first time you have ever looked for a letter and “wanted” it, and I trust it will be the last. Ah! now I understand a little of what Penelope must have felt, looking day after day for Francis's letters, which never came; how every morning before post-time she would go about the house as blithe as a lark, and afterwards turn cross and disagreeable, and her face would settle into the sharp, hard-set expression, which made her look so old even then. Poor Penelope! if she could have trusted him the while, it might have been otherwise—men's ways and lives are so different from women's—but it is this love without perfect trust which has been the sting of Penelope's existence.

I try to remember this when she makes me feel angry with her, as she did on Saturday. It was through her fault you missed your Sunday letter.

You know I always post them myself, in the town; our village post-office would soon set all the neighbours chattering about you and me. And besides, it is pleasant to walk through the quiet lanes we both know well with Max's letter in my hand, and think that it will be in his hand to-morrow. For this I generally choose the 'time when papa rests before dinner, with one or other of us reading to him, and Penelope has hitherto, without saying anything, always taken my place and set me free on a Saturday. A kindness I felt more than I expressed, many a time. But to-day she was unkind; shut herself up in her room the instant we returned from town; then papa called me and detained me till after post-time.

So you lost your letter; a small thing, you will say, and this was a foolish girl to vex herself so much about it. Especially as she can make it longer and more interesting by details of our adventures in town yesterday.

It was not altogether a pleasant day, for something happened about the servant which I am sure annoyed Penelope; nay, she being over-tired and over-exerted already, this new vexation, whatever it was, made her quite ill for the time, though she would not allow it, and when I ventured to question, bade me sharply, “let her alone.” You know Penelope's ways, and may have seen them reflected in me sometimes. I am afraid, Max, that, however good we may be (of course!) we are not exactly what would be termed “an amiable family.”

We were amiable when we started, however; my sister and I went up to town quite merrily. I am merry sometimes, in spite of all things. You see, to have everyone that belongs to one happy and prosperous, is a great element in one's personal content. Other people's troubles weigh heavily, because we never know exactly how they will bear them, and because, at best, we can only sit by and watch them suffer, so little help being possible after all. But our own troubles we can always bear.

You will understand all I mean by “our own.” I am often very, sad for you, Max; but never afraid for you,

never in doubt about you, not for an instant. There is no sting even in my saddest' thought concerning you. I trust you, I feel certain that whatever you do, you will do right; that all you have to endure will be borne nobly and bravely. Thus, I may grieve over your griefs, but never over you. My love of you, like my faith in you, is above all grieving. Forgive this long digression; to-day is Sunday, the best day in all the week, and my day for thinking most of you.

To return. Penelope and I were both merry, as we started by the very earliest train, in the soft May morning; we had so much business to get through. *You* can't understand it, of course, so I omit it, only confiding to you our last crowning achievement—the dress. It is white *moire antique*; Doctor Urquhart has not the slightest idea what that is, but no matter; and it has lace flounces, half a yard deep, and it is altogether a most splendid affair. But the governor's lady—I beg my own pardon—the governor's wife, must be magnificent, you know.

It was the mantua-maker, a great West-end personage employed by the grand family to whom, by Francis's advice, Lydia Cartwright was sent, some years ago, (by-the-by, I met Mrs. Cartwright to-day, who asked after you, and sent her duty, and wished you would know that she had heard from Lydia),—this mantua-maker it was who recommended the lady's-maid, Sarah Enfield, who had once been a workwoman of her own. We saw the person, who seemed a decent young woman, but delicate-looking; said her health was injured with the long hours of millinery-work, and that she should have died, she thought, if a friend of hers, a kind young woman, had not taken her in and helped her. She was lodging with this friend now.

On the whole, Sarah Enfield sufficiently pleased us to make my sister decide on engaging her, if only Francis could see her first. We sent a message to his lodgings, and were considerably surprised to have the answer that he was not at home, and had not been for three weeks; indeed, he hardly ever was at home. After some annoyance, Penelope resolved to make her decision without him.

Hardly ever at home! What a lively life Francis must lead: I wonder he does not grow weary of it. Once, he half owned he was, but added, “that he must float with the stream—it was too late now—he could not stop himself.” Penelope will, though.

As we drove through the Park, to the address Sarah Enfield had given us—somewhere about Kensington—Penelope wishing to see the girl once again and engage her—my sister observed, in answer to my remark, that Francis must have many invitations.

“Of course he has. It shows how much he is liked and respected. It will be the same abroad. We shall gather round us the very best society in the island. Still, he will find it a great change from London.”

I wonder, is she at all afraid of it, or suspects that he once was? that he shrank from being thrown altogether upon his wife's society—like the Frenchman who declined marrying a lady he had long visited because “where should he spend his evenings?” O, me! what a heart-breaking thing to feel that one's husband needed somewhere to spend his evenings.

We drove past Holland Park—what a bonnie place it is (as you would say); how full the trees were of green leaves and birds. I don't know where we went next—I hardly know anything of London, thank goodness!—but it was a pretty, quiet neighbourhood, where we had the greatest difficulty in finding the house we wanted, and at last had recourse to the post-office.

The post-mistress—who was rather grim—“knew the place, that is, the name of the party as lived there—which was all she cared to know. She called herself Mrs. Chaytor, or Chater, or something like it,” which we decided must be Sarah Enfield's charitable friend, and accordingly drove thither.

It was a small house, a mere cottage, set in a pleasant little garden, through the palings of which I saw, walking about, a young woman with a child in her arms. She had on a straw hat with a deep lace fall that hid her face, but her figure was very graceful, and she was extremely well dressed. Nevertheless, she looked not exactly “the lady.” Also, hearing the gate bell, she called out, “Arriet,” in no lady's voice.

Penelope glanced at her, and then sharply at me.

“I wonder—” she began; but stopped—told me to remain in the carriage while she went in, and she would fetch me if she wanted me.

But she did not. Indeed, she hardly stayed two minutes. I saw the young woman run hastily in-doors, leaving her child—such a pretty boy! screaming after his “mammy,”—and Penelope came back, her face the colour of scarlet.

“What? Is it a mistake?” I asked.

“No—yes,” and she gave the order to drive on.

Again I enquired if anything were the matter, and was answered, “Nothing—nothing that I could understand.” After which she sat with her veil down, cogitating; till, all of a sudden, she sprang up as if some one had given her a stab at her heart. I was quite terrified, but she again told me it was nothing, and bade me “let her alone.” Which as you know, is the only thing one can do with my sister Penelope.

But at the railway-station we met some people we knew, and she was forced to talk;—so that by the time we reached Rockmount she seemed to have got over her annoyance, whatever it was, concerning Sarah Enfield, and was herself again. That is, herself in one of those moods when, whether her ailment be mental or physical, the sole chance of its passing away is, as she says, “to leave her alone.”

I do not say this is not trying—doubly so now, when, just as she is leaving, I seem to understand my sister better and love her more than ever I did in my life. But I have learned at last not to break my heart over the peculiarities of those I care for; but try to bear with them as they must with mine, of which I have no lack, goodness knows!

I saw a letter to Francis in the post-bag this morning, so I hope she has relieved her mind by giving him the explanation which she refused to me. It must have been some deception practised on her by this Sarah Enfield, and Penelope never forgives the smallest deceit.

She was either too much tired or too much annoyed to appear again yesterday, so papa and I spent the afternoon and evening alone. But she went to church with us, as usual, to-day—looking pale and tired—the ill

mood—“the little black dog on her shoulder,” as we used to call it, not having quite vanished.

Also, I noticed an absent expression in her eyes, and her voice in the responses was less regular than usual. Perhaps she was thinking this would almost be her last Sunday of sitting in the old pew, and looking up to papa's white hair, and her heart being fuller, her lips were more silent than usual.

You will not mind my writing so much about my sister Penelope? You like me to talk to you of what is about me, and uppermost in my thoughts, which is herself at present. She has been very good to me, and Max loves everyone whom I love, and everyone who loves me.

I shall have your letter to-morrow morning. Good night!

Theodora.

CHAPTER IV. HIS STORY.

My dear Theodora:—

This is a line extra, written on receipt of yours, which was most welcome. I feared something had gone wrong with my little methodical girl.

Do not keep strictly to your Dominical letter just now—write any day that you can. Tell me everything that is happening to you—you must, and ought. Nothing must occur to you or yours that I do not know. You are mine.

Your last letter I do not answer in detail till the next shall come: not exactly from press of business; I would make time if I had it not; but from various other reasons, which you shall have by-and-by.

Give me, if you remember it, the address of the person with whom Sarah Enfield is lodging. I suspect she is a woman of whom, by the desire of her nearest relative, I have been in search of for some time. But, should you have forgotten, do not trouble your sister about this. I will find out all I wish to learn some other way. Never apologise for, or hesitate at, writing to me about your family—all that is yours is mine. Keep your heart up about your sister Penelope: she is a good woman, and all that befals her will be for her good. Love her, and be patient with her continually. All your love for her and the rest takes nothing from what is mine, but adds thereto.

Let me hear soon what is passing at Rockmount. I cannot come to you, and help you—would I could! My love! my love!

Max Urquhart.

There is little or nothing to say of myself this week, and what there was you heard yesterday.

CHAPTER V. HER STORY.

My Dear Max:—

I write this in the middle of the night; there has been no chance for me during the day; nor, indeed, at all—until now. To-night, for the first time, Penelope has fallen asleep. I have taken the opportunity of stealing into the next room, to comfort—and you.

My dear Max! Oh, if you knew! oh, if I could but come to you for one minute's rest, one minute's love!—There—I will not cry any more. It is much to be able to write to you; and blessed, infinitely blessed to know you are—what you are.

Max, I have been weak, wicked of late; afraid of absence, which tries me sore, because I am not strong, and cannot stand up by myself as I used to do; afraid of death, which might tear you from me, or me from you, leaving the other to go mourning upon earth for ever. Now I feel that absence is nothing—death itself nothing, compared to one loss—that which has befallen my sister, Penelope.

You may have heard of it, even in these few days—ill news spreads fast. Tell me what you hear; for we wish to save my sister as much as we can. To our friends generally, I have merely written that, “from unforeseen differences,” the marriage is broken off. Mr. Charteris may give what reasons he likes at Treherne Court. We will not try to injure him with his uncle.

I have just crept in to look at Penelope; she is asleep still, and has never stirred. She looks so old—like a woman of fifty, almost. No wonder. Think—ten years—all her youth to be crushed out at once. I wonder, will it kill her? It would me.

I wanted to ask you—do you think, medically, there is any present danger in her state? She lies quiet enough; taking little notice of me or anybody—with her eyes shut during the day-time, and open, wide-staring, all night long. What ought I to do with her? There is only me, you know. If you fear anything, send me a telegram at once. Do not wait to write.

But, that you may the better judge her state, I ought just to give you full particulars, beginning where my last letter ended.

That “little black dog on her shoulder,” which I spoke of so lightly!—God forgive me! also for leaving her the whole of that Sunday afternoon with her door locked, and the room as still as death; yet never once knocking to ask, “Penelope, how are you?” On Sunday night, the curate came to supper, and papa sent me to summon her; she came downstairs, took her place at table, and conversed. I did not notice her much, except that she moved about in a stupid, stunned-like fashion, which caused papa to remark more than once, “Penelope, I think you are half asleep.” She never answered.

Another night, and the half of another day, she must have spent in the same manner. And I let her do it without enquiry! Shall I ever forgive myself?

In the afternoon of Monday, I was sitting at work, busy finishing her embroidered marriage handkerchief, alone in the sunshiny parlour, thinking of my letter, which you would have received at last; also thinking it was rather wicked of my happy sister to sulk for two whole days, because of a small disappointment about a servant—if such it were. I had almost determined to shake her out of her ridiculous reserve, by asking boldly what was the matter, and giving her a thorough scolding if I dared; when the door opened, and in walked Francis Charteris.

Heartily glad to see him, in the hope his coming might set Penelope right again, I jumped up and shook hands, cordially. Nor till afterwards did I remember how much this seemed to surprise and relieve him.

“Oh, then, all is right!” said he. “I feared, from Penelope's letter, that she wa a little annoyed with me. Nothing new that, you know.”

“Something did annoy her, I suspect,” and I was about to blurt out as much as I knew or guessed of the foolish mystery about Sarah Enfield, but some instinct stopped me. “You and Penelope had better settle your own affairs,” said I, laughing. “I'll go and fetch her.”

“Thank you.” He threw himself down on the velvet arm-chair—his favourite lounge in our house for the last ten years. His handsome profile turned up against the light, his fingers lazily tapping the arm of the chair, a trick he had from his boyhood,—this is my last impression of Francis—as *our* Francis Charteris.

I had to call outside Penelope's door three times, “Francis is here.”

“Francis is waiting.”

“Francis wants to speak to you,” before she answered or appeared; and then, without taking the slightest notice of me, she walked slowly downstairs, holding by the wall as she went.

So, I thought, it is Francis who has vexed her after all, and determined to leave them to fight it out and make it up again—this, which would be the last of their many lovers' quarrels. Ah! it was.

Half an hour afterwards, papa sent for me to the study, and there I saw Francis Charteris standing, exactly where you once stood—you see, I am not afraid of remembering 'it myself, or of reminding you. No, my Max! Our griefs are nothing, nothing!

Penelope also was present, standing by my father, who said, looking round at us with a troubled, bewildered air:—

“Dora, what is all this? Your sister comes here and tells me she will not marry Francis. Francis rushes in after her, and says, I hardly can make out what. Children, why do you vex me so? Why cannot you leave an old man in peace?”

Penelope answered:—“Father, you shall be left in peace, if you will only confirm what I have said to that—that gentleman, and send him out of my sight.”

Francis laughed:—“To be called back again presently. You know you will do it, as soon as you have come to your right senses, Penelope. You will never disgrace us in the eyes of the world—set everybody gossipping about our affairs, for such a trifle.”

My sister made him no answer. There was less even of anger than contempt—utter, measureless contempt-!—in the way she just lifted up her eyes and looked at him—looked him over from head to heel, and turned again to her father.

“Papa, make him understand—I cannot—that I wish all this ended; I wish never to see his face again.”

“Why?” said papa, in great perplexity.

“He knows why.”

Papa and I both turned to Francis, whose careless manner changed a little: he grew red and uncomfortable. “She may tell if she chooses; I lay no embargo of silence upon her. I have made all the explanations possible, and if she will not receive them, I cannot help it. The thing is done, and cannot be undone. I have begged her pardon, and made all sorts of promises for the future—no man can do more.”

He said this sullenly, and yet as if he wished to make friends with her, but Penelope seemed scarcely even to hear.

“Papa,” she repeated, still in the same stony voice, “I wish you would end this scene; it is killing me. Tell him, will you, that I have burnt all his letters, every one. Insist on his returning mine. His presents are all tied up in a parcel in my room, except this; will you give it back to him?”

She took off her ring, a small common turquoise which Francis had given her when he was young and poor, and laid it on the table. Francis snatched it up, handled it a minute, and then threw it violently into the fire.

“Bear witness, Mr. Johnston, and you too, Dora, that it is Penelope, not I, who breaks our engagement. I would have fulfilled it honourably—I would have married her.”

“Would you?” cried Penelope, with flashing eyes, “no—not that last degradation—no!”

“I would have married her,” Francis continued, “and made her a good husband too. Her reason for refusing me is puerile—perfectly puerile. No woman of sense, who knows anything of the world, would urge it for a moment. Nor man either, unless he was your favourite—who I believe is at the bottom of this, who, for all you know, may be doing exactly as I have done—Doctor Urquhart.”

Papa started and said hastily, “Confine yourself to the subject on hand, Francis. Of what is this that my daughter accuses you? Tell me, and let me judge.”

Francis hesitated, and then said, “Send away these girls, and you shall hear.”

Suddenly, it flashed upon me *what* it was. How the intuition came, how little things, before unnoticed, seemed to rise and put themselves together, including Saturday's story—and the shudder that ran through Penelope from head to foot, when on Sunday morning old Mrs. Cartwright curtsied to her at the churchdoor—all this I cannot account for, but I seemed to know as well as if I had been told everything. I need not explain, for evidently you know it also, and it is so dreadful, so unspeakably dreadful.

Oh, Max, for the first minute or so, I felt as if the whole world were crumbling from under my feet—as I could trust nobody, believe in nobody—until I remembered you. My dear Max, my own dear Max! Ah, wretched Penelope!

I took her hand as she stood, but she twisted it out of mine again. I listened mechanically to Francis, as he again began rapidly and eagerly to exculpate himself to my father.

“She may tell you all, if she likes. I have done no worse than hundreds do in my position, and under my unfortunate circumstances, and the world forgives them, and women too. How could I help it? I was too poor to marry. And before I married I meant to do everyone justice—I meant—”

Penelope covered her ears. Her face was so ghastly,-that papa himself said, “I think Francis, explanations are idle. You had better defer them and go.”

“I will take you at your word,” he replied haughtily. “If you or she think better of it, or of me, I shall be at any time ready to fulfil my engagement—honourably, as a gentleman should. Good-bye; will you not shake hands with me, Penelope?”

He walked up to her, trying apparently to carry things off with a high air, but he was not strong enough, or hardened enough. At sight of my sister sitting there, for she had sank down at last, with a face like a corpse, only it had not the peace of the dead, Francis trembled. .

“Forgive me, if I have done you any harm. It was all the result of circumstances. Perhaps, if you had been a little less rigid—had scolded me less and studied me more.—But you could not help your nature, nor I mine. Good-bye, Penelope.”

She sat, impassive; even when with a sort of involuntary tenderness, he seized and kissed her hand; but the instant he was gone—fairly gone—with the door shut upon him and his horse clattering down the road—I heard it plainly—Penelope started up with a cry of “Francis—Francis!”—O the anguish of it!—I can hear it now.

But it was not this Francis she called after—I was sure of that—I saw it in her eyes. It was the Francis of ten years ago—the Francis she had loved—now as utterly dead and buried, as if she had seen the stone laid over him, and his body left to sleep in the grave.

Dead and buried—dead and buried. Do you know, I sometimes wish it were so; that she had been left, peacefully widowed—knowing his soul was safe with God. I thought, when papa and I—papa who that night kissed me, for the first time since one night you know—sat by Penelope's bed, watching her—“If Francis had only died!”

After she was quiet, and I had persuaded papa to go to rest, he sent for me and desired me to read a psalm, as I used to do when he was ill—you remember? When it was ended, he asked me, had I any idea what Francis had done that Penelope could not pardon?

I told him, difficult and painful as it was to do it, all I suspected—indeed, felt sure of. For was it not the truth?—the only answer I could give. For the same reason I write of these terrible things to you without any false delicacy—they are the truth, and they must be told.

Papa lay for some time, thinking deeply. At last he said:—

“My dear, you are no longer a child, and I may speak to you plainly. I am an old man, and your mother is dead. I wish she were with us now, she might help us: for she was a good woman, Dora. Do you think—take time to consider the question—that your sister is acting right?”

I said, “quite right.”

“Yet, I thought you held that doctrine, 'the greater the sinner the greater the saint;' and believed every crime a man can commit may be repented, atoned, and pardoned?”

“Yes, father; but Francis has never either repented or atoned.”

No; and therefore I feel certain my sister is right. Ay, even putting aside the other fact, that the discovery of his long years of deception must have so withered up her love,—scorched it at the root, as with a stroke of lightning—that even if she pitied him, she must also despise. Fancy, despising one's *husband!* Besides, she is not the only one wronged. Sometimes, even sitting by my sister's bedside, I see the vision of that pretty young creature—she was so pretty and innocent when she first came to live at Rockmount,—with her boy in her arms; and my heart feels like to burst with indignation and shame, and a kind of shuddering horror at the wickedness of the world—yet with a strange feeling of unutterable pity lying at the depth of all.

Max, tell me what you think—you who are so much the wiser of us two; but I think that even if she wished it still, my sister *ought not* to marry Francis Charteris.

Ah me! papa said truly I was no longer a child. I feel hardly even a girl, but quite an old woman—familiar with all sorts of sad and wicked things, as if the freshness and innocence had gone out of life, and were nowhere to be found. Except when I turn to-you, and lean my poor sick heart against you—as I do now. Max, comfort me!

You will, I know, write immediately you receive this. If you could have come—-but that is impossible.

Augustus you will probably see, if you have not done so already—for he already looks upon you as the friend of the family, though in no other light as yet; which is best. Papa wrote to Sir William, I believe; he said he considered some explanation a duty, on his daughter's account; further than this, he wishes the matter kept quiet. Not to disgrace Francis, I thought; but papa told me one-half the world would hardly consider it any

disgrace at all. Can this be so? Is it indeed such a wicked, wicked world?

—Here my letter was stopped by hearing a sort of cry in Penelope's room. I ran in, and found her sitting up in her bed, her eyes starting, and every limb convulsed. Seeing me, she cried out:—

“Bring a light;—I was dreaming. But it's not true. Where is Francis?”

I made no reply, and she slowly sank down in her bed again. Recollection had come.

“I should not have gone to sleep. Why did you let me? Or why cannot you put me to sleep for ever and ever, and ever and ever,” repeating the word many times. “Dora!” and my sister fixed her piteous eyes on my face, “I should be so glad to die. Why won't you kill me?”

I burst into tears.

Max, you will understand the total helplessness one feels in the presence of an irremediable grief like this: how consolation seems cruel, and reasoning vain. “Miserable comforters are ye all,” said Job to his three friends; and a miserable comforter I felt to this my sister, whom it had pleased the Almighty to smite so sore, until I remembered that He who smites can heal.

I lay down outside the bed, put my arm over her, and remained thus for a long time, not saying a single word—that is, not with my lips. And since our weakness is often our best strength, and when we wholly relinquish a thing, it is given back to us many a time in double measure, so, possibly, those helpless tears of mine did Penelope more good than the wisest of words.

She lay watching me—saying more than once:—

“I did not know you cared so much for me, Dora.”

It then came into my mind, that as wrecked people cling to the smallest spar, if, instead of her conviction that in losing Francis she had lost her all, I could by any means make Penelope feel that there were others to cling to, others who loved her dearly, and whom she ought to try and live for still—it might save her. So, acting on the impulse, I told my sister how good I thought her, and how wicked I myself had been for not long since discovering her goodness. How, when at last I learned to appreciate her, and to understand what a sorely-tried life hers had been, there came not only respect, but love. Thorough sisterly love; such as people do not necessarily feel even for their own flesh and blood, but never, I doubt, except to them. (Save, that in some inexplicable way, fondly reflevted, I have something of the same sort of love for your brother Dallas.)

Afterwards, she lying still and listening, I tried to make my sister understand what I had myself felt when she came to my bedside and comforted me that morning, months ago, when I was so wretched; how no wretchedness of loss can be altogether unendurable, so long as it does not strike at the household peace, but leaves the sufferer a little love to rest upon at home.

And at length I persuaded her to promise that, since it made both papa and me so very miserable to see her thus,—and papa was an old man too. we must not have him with us many years—she would, for our sakes, try to rouse herself, and see if life were not tolerable for a little longer.

“Yes,” she answered, closing her heavy eyes, and folding her hands in a pitiful kind of patience, very strange in our quick, irritable Penelope. “Yes—just a little longer. Still, I think I shall soon die. I believe it will kill me.”

I did not contradict her, but I called to mind your words, that, Penelope, being a good woman, all would happen to her for good. Also, it is usually not the good people who are killed by grief: while others take it as God's vengeance, or as the work of blind chance, they receive it humbly as God's chastisement, live on, and endure. I do not think my sister will die—whatever she may think or-desire just now. Besides, we have only to deal with the present, for how can we look forward a single day? How little we expected all this only a week ago?

It seems strange that Francis could have deceived us for so long; years, it must have been; but we have lived so retired, and were such a simple family for many things. How far Penelope thinks we know—papa and I—I cannot guess: she is totally silent on the subject of Francis. Except in that one outcry, when she was still only half awake, she has never mentioned his name.

There was one thing more I wanted to tell you, Max; you know I tell you everything.

Just as I was leaving my sister, she, noticing I was not undressed, asked me if I had been sitting up all night, and reproached me for doing so.

I said, “I was not weary; that I had been quietly occupying myself in the next room.”

“Reading?”

“No”

“What were you doing?” with sharp suspicion.

I answered without disguise:—

“I was writing to Max.”

“Max who?—Oh, I had forgotten his name.”

She turned from me, and lay with her face to the wall, then said:—

“Do you believe in him?”

“Yes, I do.”

“You had better not. You will live to repent it. Child, mark my words. There may be good women—one or two, perhaps—but there is not a single good man in the whole world.”

My heart rose to my lips; but deeds speak louder than words. I did not attempt to defend you. Besides, no wonder she should think thus.

Again she said, “Dora, tell Doctor Urquhart he was innocent comparatively; and that I say so. He only killed Harry's body, but those who deceive us are the death of one's soul. Nay,” and by her expression I felt sure it was not herself and her own wrongs my sister was thinking of—“there are those who destroy both body and soul.”

I made no answer; I only covered her up, kissed her and left her; knowing that in one sense I did not leave her either forsaken or alone.

And now, I must leave you too, Max; being very weary in body, though my mind is comforted and refreshed; ay, ever since I began this letter. So many of your good words have come back to me while I wrote—words which you have let fall at odd times, long ago, even when we were mere acquaintances. You did not think I should remember them? I do, every one.

This is a great blow, no doubt. The hand of Providence has been heavy upon us and our house, lately. But I think we shall be able to bear it. One always has courage to bear a sorrow which shows its naked face, free from suspense or concealment; stands visibly in the midst of the home, and has to be met and lived down patiently, by every member therein.

You once said that we often live to see the reason of affliction; how all the events of life hang so wonderfully together, that afterwards we can frequently trace the chain of events, and see in humble faith and awe, that out of each one has been evolved the other, and that everything, bad and good, must necessarily have happened exactly as it did. Thus, I begin to see—you will not be hurt, Max?—how well it was, on some accounts, that we were not married, that I should still be living at home with my sister; and that, after all she knows, and she only, of what has happened to me this year, she cannot reject any comfort I may be able to offer her on the ground that I myself know nothing of sorrow.

As for me personally, do not fear; I have *you*. You once feared that a great anguish would break my heart: but it did not. Nothing in this world will ever do that—while I have *you*.

Max, kiss me—in thought, I mean—as friends kiss friends who are starting on a long and painful journey, of which they see no end, yet are not afraid. Nor am I. Goodbye, my Max.

Yours, only and always,

Theodora Johnston.

CHAPTER VI. HIS STORY.

My dear Theodora:—

You will have received my letters regularly; nor am I much surprised that they have not been answered. I have heard, from time to time, in other ways, all particulars of your sister's illness and of you. Mrs. Granton says you keep up well, but I know that, could I see it now, it would be the same little pale face which used to come stealing to me from your father's bedside, last year.

If I ask you to write, my love, believe it is from no doubt of you, or jealousy of any of your home-duties; but because I am wearying for a sight of your handwriting, and an assurance from yourself that you are not failing in health, the only thing in which I have any fear of your failing.

To answer a passage in your last, which I have hitherto let be, there was so much besides to write to you about—the passage concerning friends parting from friends. At first I interpreted it that in your sadness of spirit and hopelessness of the future, you wished me to sink back into my old place, and be only your friend. It was then no time to argue the point, nor would it have made any difference in my letters, either way; but now let me say two words concerning it.

My child, when a man loves a woman, before he tries to win her, he will have, if he loves unselfishly and generously, many a doubt concerning both her and himself. In fact, as I once read somewhere, “When a man truly loves a woman, he would not marry her upon any account, unless he was quite certain he was the best person she could possibly marry.” But as soon as she loves him, and he knows it, and is certain that, however unworthy he may be, or however many faults she may possess—I never told you you were an angel, did I, little lady?—they have cast their lot together, chosen one another, as your church says, “for better, for worse,”—then the face of things is entirely changed. He has his rights, close and strong as no other human being can have with regard to her—she has herself given them to him—and if he has any manliness in him he never will let them go, but hold her fast for ever and ever.

My dear Theodora, I have not the slightest intention of again subsiding into your friend. I am your lover and your betrothed husband. I will wait for you any number of years, till you have fulfilled all your duties, and no earthly rights have power to separate us longer. But in the meantime I hold fast to *my* rights. Everything that lover or future husband can be to you, I must be. And when I see you, for I am determined to see you at intervals, do not suppose that it will be a friend's kiss—if there be such a thing—that—But I have said enough—it is not easy for me to express myself on this wise.

My love, this letter is partly to consult you on a matter which is somewhat on my mind. With any but you I might hesitate, but I know your mind almost as I know my own, and can speak to you, as I hope I always shall—frankly and freely as a husband would to his wife.

About your sister Penelope and her great sorrow I have already written fully. Of her ultimate recovery, mentally as well as bodily, I have little doubt: she has in her the foundations of all endurance—a true upright nature and a religious mind. The first blow over, a certain little girl whom I know will be to her a saving angel; as she has been to others I could name. Fear not, therefore—“Fear God, and have no other fear:” you will bring your sister safe to land.

But, you are aware, Penelope is not the only person who has been shipwrecked.

I should not intrude this side of the subject at present, did I not feel it to be in some degree a duty, and one

that, from certain information that has reached me, will not bear deferring. The more so, because my occupation here ties my own hands so much. You and I do not live for ourselves, you know—nor indeed wholly for one another. I want you to help me, Theodora.

In my last, I informed you how the story of Lydia Cartwright came to my knowledge, and how, beside her father's coffin, I was entreated by her old mother to find her out, and bring her home if possible. I had then no idea who the “gentleman” was; but afterwards was led to suspect it might be a friend of Mr. Charteris. To assure myself, I one day put some questions to him—point-blank, I believe, for I abhor diplomacy, nor had I any suspicion of him personally. In the answer, he gave me a point-blank and insulting denial of any knowledge on the subject.

When the whole truth came out, I was in doubt what to do consistent with my promise to the poor girl's mother. Finally, I made inquiries; but heard that the Kensington cottage had been sold up, and the inmates removed. I then got the address of Sarah Enfield—that is, I commissioned my old friend, Mrs. Ansdell, to get it, and sent it to Mrs. Cartwright, without either advice or explanation, except that it was that of a person who knew Lydia. Are you aware that Lydia has more than once written to her mother, sometimes enclosing money, saying she was well and happy, but nothing more?

I this morning heard that the old woman, immediately on receiving my letter, shut up her cottage, leaving the key with a neighbour, and disappeared. But she may come back, and not alone; I hope, most earnestly, it will not be alone. And therefore I write, partly to prepare you for this chance, that you may contrive to keep your sister from any unnecessary pain, and also from another reason.

You may not know it,—and it is a hard thing to have to enlighten my innocent love, but your father is quite right; Lydia's story is by no means rare, nor is it regarded in the world as we view it. There are very few—especially among the set to which Mr. Charteris belonged—who either profess or practice the Christian doctrine, that our bodies also are the temples of the Holy Spirit,—that a man's life should, be as pure as a woman's, otherwise no woman, however she may pity, can, or ought to respect him, or to marry him. This, it appears to me, is the Christian principle of love and marriage—the only one by which the one can be made sacred, and the other “honorable to all.” I have tried, invariably, in every way to set this forth; nor do I hesitate to write of it to my wife that will be—whom it is my blessing to have united with me in every work which my conscience once compelled as atonement and my heart now offers in humblest thanksgiving.

But enough of myself.

While this principle, of total purity being essential for both man and woman, cannot be too sternly upheld, there is also another side to the subject, analagous to one of which you and I have often spoken. You will find it in the seventh chapter of Luke and eighth of John: written, I conclude, to be not only read, but acted up to by all Christians who desire to have in them “the mind of Christ.”

Now, my child, you see what I mean-how the saving command, “*Go and sin no more*” applies to this-sin also.

You know much more of what Lydia Cartwright used to be than I do; but it takes long for any one error to corrupt the entire character; and her remembrance of her mother, as well as her charity to Sarah Enfield, imply that there must be much good left in the girl still. She is young. Nor have I heard of her ever falling lower than this once. But she may fall; since, from what I know of Mr. Charteris's present circumstances, she must now, with her child, be left completely destitute. It is not the first similar case, by many, that I have had to do with; but my love never can have met with the like before. Is she afraid? does she hesitate to hold out her pure right hand to a poor creature who never can be an innocent girl again; who also, from the over severity of Rockmount, may have been let slip a little too readily, and so gone wrong?

If you do hesitate, say so; it will not be unnatural nor surprising. If you do not, this is what I want: being myself so placed that though I feel the thing ought to be done, there seems no way of doing it, except through you. Should the Cartwrights reappear in the village, persuade your father not altogether to set his face against them, or have them expelled the neighbourhood. They must leave—it is essential for your sister that they should; but the old woman is very poor. Do not have them driven away in such a manner as will place no alternative between sin and starvation. Besides, there is the child—how a man can ever desert his own child! —but I will not enter into that part of the subject. This a strange “love” letter; but I write it without hesitation —my love will understand.

You will like to hear something of me; but there is little to tell. The life of a gaol surgeon is not unlike that of a horse in a mill; and, for some things, nearly as hopeless; best fitted, perhaps, for the old and the blind. I have to shut my eyes to so much that I cannot remedy, and take patiently so much to fight against which would be like knocking down the Pyramids of Egypt with one's head as a battering-ram, that sometimes my courage fails.

This great prison is, you know, a model of its kind, on the solitary, sanitary, and moral improvement system; excellent, no doubt, compared with that which preceded it. The prisoners are numerous,-and as soon as many of them get out they take the greatest pains to get in again; such are the comforts of gaol life contrasted with that outside. Yet they seem to me often like a herd of brute beasts, fed and stalled by rule in the manner best to preserve their health, and keep them from injuring their neighbours; their bodies well looked after, but their souls—they might scarcely have any! They are simply Nos. 1, 2, 3, and so on, with nothing of human individuality or responsibility about them. Even their faces grow to the same pattern, dull, fat, clean, and stolid. During the exercising hour, I sometimes stand and watch them, each pacing his small bricked circle, and rarely catch one countenance which has a ray of expression or intelligence.

Good as many of its results are, I have my doubts as to this solitary system; but they are expressed on paper in the M.S. you asked for, my kind little lady! so I will not repeat them here.

Yet it will be a change of thought from your sister's sick-room for you to think of me in mine—not a sick-room though, thank God! This is a most healthy region: the sea-wind sweeps round the prison-walls, and shakes the roses in the governor's garden till one can hardly believe it is so dreary a place inside. Dreary enough sometimes to make one believe in that reformer who offered to convert some depraved region into a perfect Utopia, provided the males above the age of fourteen were all summarily hanged.

Do you smile, my love, at this compliment to your sex at the expense of mine? Yet I see wretches here,

whom I cannot hardly believe share the same common womanhood as my Theodora. Think over carefully what I asked you about Lydia Cartwright; it is seldom suddenly, but step by step, that this degradation comes. And at every step there is hope; at least, such is my experience.

Do not suppose, from this description, that I am disheartened at my work here; besides rules and regulations, there is still much room for personal influence, especially in hospital. When a man is sick or dying, unconsciously his heart is humanized—he thinks of God. From this simple cause, my calling has a great advantage over all others; and it is much to have physical agencies on one's side, as I do not get them in the streets and towns. To-day, looking up from a clean, tidy, airy cell, where the occupant had at least a chance of learning to read if he chose; and, seeing through the window the patch of bright blue sky, fresh and pure as ever sky was, I thought of two lines you once repeated to me out of your dear head, so full of poetry:

“God's in His heaven;
All's right with the world.”

Yesterday I had a holiday. I took the railway to Treherne Court, wishing to learn something of Rockmount. You said it was your desire I should visit your brother-in-law and sister sometimes.

They seemed very happy—so much as to be quite independent of visitors, but they received me warmly, and I gained tidings of you. They escorted me back as far as the park-gates, where I left them standing, talking and laughing together, a very picture of youth and fortune, and handsome looks; a picture suited to the place, with its grand ancestral trees branched down to the ground; its green slopes, and its herds of deer racing about—while the turrets of the magnificent house which they call “home,” shone whitely in the distance.

You see I am taking a leaf out of your book, growing poetical and descriptive; but this brief contrast to my daily life made the impression particularly strong.

You need have no anxiety for your youngest sister; she looked in excellent health and spirits. The late sad events do not seem to have affected her. She merely observed, “She was glad it was over, she never liked Francis much. Penelope must come to Treherne Court for change, and no doubt she would soon make a far better marriage.” Her husband said, “He and his father had been both grieved and annoyed—indeed, Sir. William had quite disowned his nephew—such ungentlemanly conduct was a disgrace to the family.” And then Treherne spoke about his own happiness—how his father and Lady Augusta perfectly adored his wife, and how the hope and pride of the family were-entered in her, with more to the same purport. Truly this young couple have their cup brimming over with life and its joys.

My love, good-bye; which means only “God be with thee!” nor in any way implies “farewell.”—Write soon. Your words are, as the Good Book expresses it, “sweeter than honey and the honey-comb,” to me unworthy.

Max Urquhart.

I should add, though you would almost take it for granted, that in all you do concerning Mrs. Cartwright or her daughter, I wish you to do nothing without your father's knowledge and consent.

CHAPTER VII. HER STORY.

Another bright, dazzlingly-bright summer morning, on which I begin writing to my dear Max. This seems the longest-lasting, loveliest summer I ever knew, outside the house. Within, all goes on much in the same way, which you know.

My moors are growing all purple, Max; I never remember the heather so rich and abundant; I wish you could see it! Sometimes I want you so! If you had given me up, or were to do so now, from hopelessness, pride, or any other reason, what would become of me! Max, hold me fast. Do not let me go.

You never do. I can see how you carry me in your heart continually; and how you are for ever considering how you can help me and mine. And if it were not become so natural to feel this, so sweet to depend upon you, and accept everything from you without even saying “thank you,” I might begin to express “gratitude;” but the word would make you smile.

I amused you once, I remember, by an indignant disclaimer of obligations between such as ourselves; how everything given and received ought to be free as air, and how you ought to take me as readily if I were heiress to ten thousand a-year, as I would you if you were the Duke of Northumberland. No, Max; those are not these sort of things that give me, towards you, the feeling of “gratitude,”—it is the goodness, the thoughtfulness, the tender love and care. I don't mean to insult your sex by saying no man ever loved like you; but few men love in that special way, which alone could have satisfied a restless, irritable girl like me, who finds in you perfect trust and perfect rest.

If not allowed to be grateful on my own account, I may be in behalf of my sister Penelope.

After thus long following out your orders, medical and mental, I begin to notice a slight change in Penelope. She no longer lies in bed late, on the plea that it shortens the day; nor is she so difficult to persuade in going out. Further than the garden she will not stir; but there I get her to creep up and down for a little while daily. Lately, she has began to notice her flowers, especially a white moss-rose, which she took great pride in, and which never flowered until this summer. Yesterday, its first bud opened,—she stopped and examined it.

“Somebody has been mindful of this—who was it?”

I said, the gardener and myself together.

“Thank you.” She called John—showed him what a good bloom it was, and consulted how they should manage to get the plant to flower again next year. She can then look forward to “next year.”

You say, that as “while there is life there is hope,” with the body; so, while one ray of hope is discernible, the soul is alive. To save souls alive, that is your special calling.

It seems as if you yourself had been led through deep waters of despair, in order that you might personally understand how those feel who are drowning, and therefore know best how to help them. And lately, you have in this way done more than you know of. Shall I tell you? You will not be displeased.

Max—hitherto, nobody but me has seen a line of your letters. I could not bear it. I am as jealous over them as any old miser; it has vexed me even to see a stray hand fingering them, before they reach mine. Yet, this week I actually read out loud two pages of one of them to Penelope! This was how it came about.

I was sitting by her sofa, supposing her asleep. I had been very miserable that morning: tried much in several ways, and I took out your letter to comfort me. It told me of so many miseries, to which my own are nothing, and among which you live continually; yet are always so patient and tender over mine. I said to myself—“how good he is!” and two large tears came with a great splash upon the paper, before I was aware. Very foolish, you know, but I could not help it. And, wiping my eyes, I saw Penelope's wide open, watching me.

“Has Doctor Urquhart been writing any thing to wound you?” said she, slowly and bitterly.

I eagerly disclaimed this.

“Is, he ill?”

“Oh, no, thank God!”

“Why, then, were you crying?”

Why, indeed? But what could I say except the truth, that they were not tears of pain, but because you were so good, and I was so proud of you. I forgot what arrows these words must have been into my sister's heart. No wonder she spoke as she did, spoke out fiercely and yet with a certain solemnity.

“Dora Johnston, you will reap what you sow, and I shall not pity you. Make to yourself an idol, and God will strike it down. '*Thou shalt have none other gods but me.*' Remember Who says that, and tremble.”

I should have trembled, Max, had I *not* remembered. I said to my sister, as gently as I could, “that I made no idols; that I knew all your faults, and you mine, and we loved one another in spite of them, but we did not worship one another—only God. That if it were His will we should part, I believed we could part. And—” here I could not say any more for tears. .

Penelope looked sorry.

“I remember you preaching that doctrine once, child, but—” she started up violently—“Can't you give me something to amuse me? Read me a bit of that—that nonsense. Of all amusing things in this world, there is nothing like a love-letter. But don't believe them, Dora,”—she grasped my hand hard—“they are every one of them lies.”

I said that I could not judge, never having received a “love-letter” in all my life, and hoped earnestly I never might.

“No love-letters? What does he write to you about, then?”

I told her in a general way. I would not see her half-satirical, half-incredulous smile. It did not last very long. Soon, though she turned away and shut her eyes, I felt sure she was both listening and thinking.

“Doctor Urquhart cannot have an easy or pleasant life,” she observed, “but he does not deserve it. No man does.”

“Or woman either,” said I, as gently as I could.

Penelope bade me hold my tongue; preaching was my father's business, not mine, that is, if reasoning were of any avail.

I asked, did she think it was not?

“I think nothing about nothing. I want to smother thought. Child, can't you talk a little? Or stay, read me some of Dr. Urquhart's letters; they are not love letters, so you can have no objection.”

It went hard, Max, indeed it did! till I considered—perhaps, to hear of people more miserable than herself, more wicked than Francis, might not do harm but good to my poor Penelope.

So I was brave enough to take out my letter and read from it, (with reservations now and then, of course), about your daily work and the people concerned therein; all that interests me so much, and makes me feel happier and prouder than any mere “love-letter” written to or about myself. Penelope was interested too, both in the gaol and the hospital matters. They touched that practical, benevolent, energetic half of her, which till lately has made her papa's right hand in the parish. I saw her large black eyes brightening up, till an unfortunate name, upon which I fell unawares, changed all.

Max, I am sure she had heard of Tom Turton. Francis knew him. When I stopped with some excuse, she bade me go on, so I was obliged to finish the miserable history. She then asked:—

“Is Turton dead?”

I said, “No,” and referred to the postscript where you say that both yourself and his poor old ruined father hope Tom Turton may yet live to amend his ways.

Penelope muttered:—

“He never will. Better he died.”

I said Doctor Urquhart did not think so. She shook her head impatiently, exclaiming she was tired, and wished to hear no more, and so fell into one of her long, sullen silences, which sometimes last for hours.

I wonder whether among the many cruel things she must be thinking about, she ever thinks, as I do often, what has become of Francis?

Sometimes, puzzling over how best to deal with her, I have tried to imagine myself in her place, and consider what would have been my own feelings towards Francis now. The sharpest and most prominent would be the ever-abiding sense of his degradation,—he who was so dear, united to the constant terror of his sinking lower and lower to any depth of crime or shame. To think of him as a bad man, a sinner against heaven, would be tenfold worse than any sin or cruelty against me.

Therefore, whether or not her love for him has died out, I cannot help thinking there must be times when Penelope would give anything for tidings of Francis Charteris. I wish you would find out whether he has left England, and then perhaps in some way or other I may let Penelope understand that he is safe away—possibly to begin a new and better life, in a new world.

A new and better life. This phrase—Penelope might call it our “cant,” yet what we solemnly believe in is surely not cant—brings me to something I have to tell you this week. For some reasons I am glad it did not occur until this week, that I might have time for consideration.

Max, if you remember, when you made to me that request about Lydia Cartwright, I merely answered “that I would endeavour to do as you wished;” as, indeed, I always would, feeling that my duty to you, even in the matter of “obedience,” has already begun. I mean to obey, you see, but would rather do it with my heart, as well as my conscience. So, hardly knowing what to say to you, I just said this, and no more.

My life has been so still, so safely shut up from the outside world, that there are many subjects I have never even thought about, and this was one. After the first great shock concerning Francis, I put it aside, hoping to forget it. When you revived it, I was at first startled; then I tried to ponder it over carefully, so as to come to a right judgment and be enabled to act in every way as became not only myself, Theodora Johnston, but—let me not be ashamed to say it—Theodora, Max Urquhart's wife.

By-and-by, all became clear to me. My dear Max, I do not hesitate; I am not afraid. I have been only waiting opportunity; which at length came.

Last Sunday I overheard my class—Penelope's that was, you know—whispering something among themselves, and trying to hide it from me; when I put the question direct, the answer was:—

“Please, Miss, Mrs. Cartwright and Lydia have come home.”

I felt myself grow hot as fire—I do now, in telling you. Only it must be borne—it must be told.

Also another thing, which one of the bigger girls let out, with many titters, and never a blush,—they had brought a child with them.

Oh, Max, the horror of shame and repulsion, and then the perfect anguish of pity that came over me! These girls of our parish, Lydia was one of them; if they had been taught better; if I had tried to teach them, instead of all these years studying or dreaming, thinking wholly of myself and caring not a straw about my fellow-creatures. Oh, Max—would that my life had been more like yours!

It shall be henceforth. Going home through the village, with the sun shining on the cottages, of whose inmates I know no more than of the New Zealand savages,—on the group of ragged girls who were growing up at our very door, no one knows how, and no one cares—I made a vow to myself. I that have been so blessed—I that am so happy—yes, Max, happy! I will work with all my strength, while it is day. You will help me. And you will never love me the less for anything I feel—or do.

I was going that very afternoon, to walk direct to Mrs. Cartwright's, when I remembered your charge, that nothing should be attempted without my father's knowledge an consent.

I took the opportunity when he and I were sitting alone together—Penelope gone to bed. He was saying she looked better. He thought she might begin visiting in the district soon, if she were properly persuaded. At least she might take a stroll round the village. He should ask her to-morrow.

“Don't papa. Oh, pray don't!”—and then I was obliged to tell him the reason why. I had to put it very plainly before he understood—he forgets things now sometimes.

“Starving, did you say?—Mrs. Cartwright, Lydia, and the child?—What child?”

“Francis's.”

Then he comprehended,—and, oh, Max, had I been the girl I was a few months ago, I should have sunk to the earth with the shame he said I ought to feel at even alluding to such things. But I would not stop to consider this, or to defend myself; the matter concerned not me, but Lydia. I asked papa if he did not remember Lydia?

She came to us, Max, when she was only fourteen, though, being well-grown and hand some, she looked older;—a pleasant, willing, affectionate creature, only she had “no head,” or it was half-turned by the admiration her beauty gained, not merely among her own class, but all our visitors. I remember Francis saying once—oh, how angry Penelope was about it—that Lydia was so naturally elegant she could be made a lady of in no time, if a man liked to take her, educate and marry her. Would he had done it! spite of all broken vows to Penelope. I think my sister herself might have for given him, if he had only honestly fallen in love with poor Lydia, and married her.

These things I tried to recall to papa's mind, but he angrily bade me be silent.

“I cannot,” I said, “because, if we had taken better care of the girl, this might never have happened. When I think of her—her pleasant ways about the house—how she used to go singing over her work of mornings—poor innocent young thing—oh, papa! papa!”

“Dora,” he said, eyeing me closely; “what change has come over you of late?”

I said, I did not know, unless it was that which must come over people who have been very unhappy—the wish to save other people as much unhappiness as they can.

“Explain yourself. I do not understand.” When he did, he said abruptly,—

“Stop. It was well you waited to consult with me. If your own delicacy does not teach you better, I must. My daughter—the daughter of the clergyman of the parish—cannot possibly be allowed to interfere with these profligates.”

My heart sunk like lead:—

“But you, papa? They are here; you, as the rector, must do something. What shall you do?”

He thought a little.

“I shall forbid them the church and the sacrament; omit them from my charities; and take every lawful means to get them out of the neighbourhood. This, for my family's sake, and the parish's—that they may carry their corruption elsewhere.”

“But they may not be wholly corrupt. And the child—that innocent, unfortunate child!”

“Silence, Dora. It is written, *The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned*. The sinless must suffer with the guilty; there is no hope for either.”

“Oh, papa,” I cried, in an agony, “Christ did not say so. He said, 'Go, and sin no more.'”

Was I wrong? If I was, I suffered for it. What followed was very hard to bear.

Max, if ever I am yours, altogether in your power, I wonder, will you ever give me those sort of bitter, cruel words? Words which people, living under the same roof, think nothing of using—mean nothing by them—yet they cut sharp, like swords. The flesh closes up after them—but oh, they bleed—they bleed! Dear Max, reprove me as you will, however much, but let it be in love, not in anger or sarcasm. Sometimes people drop carelessly, by quiet firesides, and with a good-night kiss following, as papa gave to me, words which leave a scar for years.

Next day, I was just about to write and ask you to find some other plan for helping the Cartwrights, since we neither of us would choose to persist in one duty at the expense of another—when papa called me to take a walk with him.

Is it not strange, the way in which good angels seem to take up the thread of our dropped hopes and endeavours, and wind them up for us, we see not how, till it is all done? Never was I more surprised than when papa, stopping to lean on my arm, and catch the warm, pleasant wind that came over the moors, said suddenly:—

“Dora, what could possess you to talk to me as you did last night? And why, if you had any definite scheme in your head, did you relinquish it so easily?”

“Papa, you forbade it.”

“So, even when differing from your father, you consider it right to obey him?”

“Yes,—except—”

“Say it out, child.”

“Except in the case of any duty which I felt to be not less sacred than the one I owe to my father.”

He made no reply.

Walking on, we passed Mrs. Cartwright's cottage. It was quiet and silent, the door open, but the window-shutter half closed, and there was no smoke from the chimney. I saw papa turn round and look. At last he said:—

“What did you mean by telling me they were 'starving?'”

I answered the direct, entire truth. I was bold, for it was your mind as well as my own I was speaking out, and I knew it was right. I pleaded chiefly for the child—it was easiest to think of it, the little creature I had seen laughing and crowing in the garden at Kensington. It seemed such a dreadful thing for that helpless baby to die of want, or live to turn out a reprobate.

“Think, papa,” I cried, “if that poor little soul had been our own flesh and blood—if you were Francis's father, and this had been your grandchild!”

To my sorrow, I had forgotten for the time a part of poor Harry's story—the beginning of it: you shall know it some day—it is all past now. But papa remembered it. He faltered as he walked—at last he sat down on a tree by the roadside, and said, “He must go home.”

Yet still, either by accident or design, he took the way by the lane where is Mrs. Cartwright's cottage. At the gate of it a little ragged urchin was poking a rosy face through the bars; and, seeing papa, this small fellow gave a shout of delight, tottered out, and caught hold of his coat, calling him “Daddy.” He started—I thought he would have fallen, he trembled so: my poor old father.

When I lifted the little thing out of his way, I too started. It is strange always to see a face you know revived in a child's face—in this instance it was shocking—pitiful. My first thought was, we never must let Penelope come past this way. I was carrying the boy off—I well knew where, when papa called me.

“Stop. Not alone—not without your father.”

It was but a few steps, and we stood on the door-sill of Mrs. Cartwright's cottage. The old woman snatched up the child, and I heard her whisper something about “Run—Lyddy—run away.”

But Lydia, if that white, thin creature, huddled up in the corner were she, never attempted to move.

Papa walked up to her.

“Young woman, are you Lydia Cartwright, and is this your child?”

“Have you been meddling with him? You'd better not! I say, Franky, what have they been doing to mother's Franky?”

She caught at him, and hugged him close, as mothers do. And when the boy, evidently both attracted and puzzled by papa's height and gentlemanly clothes, tried to get back to him, and again call him “Daddy,” she said angrily, “No, no, 'tis not your daddy. They're no friends o' yours. I wish they were out of the place, Franky, boy.”

“You wish us away. No wonder. Are you not ashamed to look us in the face—my daughter and me?”

But papa might have said ever so much more, without her heeding. The child having settled himself on her lap, playing with the ragged counterpane that wrapped her instead of a shawl, Lydia seemed to care for nothing. She lay back with her eyes shut, still and white. We may be sure of one thing—she has preferred to

starve.

“Dunnot be too hard upon her, sir,” begged the old woman. “Dunnot please, Miss Dora. She bean't a lady like you, and he were such a fine coaxing young gentleman. It's he that's most to blame.”

My father said sternly, “Has she left him, or been deserted by him—I mean Mr. Francis Charteris?”

“Mother,” screamed Lydia, “what's that? What have they come for? Do they know anything about him?”

She did not, then.

“Be quiet, my lass,” said the mother, soothingly, but it was of no use.

“Miss Dora,” cried the girl, creeping to me, and speaking in the same sort of childish pitiful tone in which she used to come and beg Lisabel and me to intercede for her when she had annoyed Penelope, “do, Miss Dora, tell me. I don't want to see him, I only want to hear. I've heard nothing since he sent me a letter from prison, saying I was to take my things and the baby's and go. I don't know what's become of him, no more than the dead. And, miss, he's that boy's father—miss—please—”

She tried to go down to her knees, but fell prone on the floor.

Max, who would have thought, the day before, that this day I should have been sitting with Lydia Cartwright's head on my lap, trying to bring her back to this miserable life of hers; that papa would have stood by and seen me do it, without a word of blame!

“It's the hunger,” cried the mother. “You see, she isn't used to it, now; he always kept her like a lady.”

Papa turned, and walked out of the cottage. I afterwards found out that he had bought the loaf at the baker's shop down the village, and got the bottle of wine from his private cupboard in the vestry. He returned with both—one in each pocket—then, sitting down on a chair, cut the bread and poured out the wine, and fed these three himself, with his own hands. My dear father!

Nor did he draw back when, as she recovered, the first word that came to the wretched girl's lips was “Francis.”

“Mother, beg them to tell me about him. I'll do him no harm, indeed I won't, neither him nor them. Is he married? Or,” with a sudden gasp, “is he dead? I've thought sometimes he must be, or he never would have left the child and me. He was always fond of us, wasn't he, Franky?”

I told her, to the best of my knowledge, Mr. Charteris was living, but what had become of him we could none of us guess. We never saw him now.

Here, looking wistfully at me, Lydia seemed suddenly to remember old times, to become conscious of what she used to be, and what she was now. Also, in a vague sort of way, of how guilty she had been towards her mistress and our family. How long, or how deep the feeling was, I cannot judge, but she certainly did feel. She hung her head, and tried to draw herself away from my arm.

“I'd rather not trouble you, Miss Dora, thank you.”

I said it was no trouble, she had better lie still till she felt stronger.

“You don't mean that. Not such as me.”

I told her she must know she had done very wrong, but if she was sorry for it, I was sorry for her, and we would help her if we could to an honest livelihood.

“What, and the child too?”

I looked towards papa; he answered distinctly, but sternly:—“Principally for the sake of the child.”

Lydia began to sob. She attempted no exculpation—expressed no penitence—just lay and sobbed, like a child. She is hardly more, even yet—only nineteen, I believe. So we sat—papa as silent as we, resting on his stick, with his eyes fixed on the cottage floor, till Lydia turned to me with a sort of fright. .

“What would Miss Johnston say if she knew?”

I wondered, indeed, what my sister would say.

And here, Max—you will hardly credit it, nobody would, if it were an incident in a book—something occurred which, even now, seems hardly possible—as if I must have dreamt it all.

Through the open cottage door a lady walked right in, looked at us all, including the child, who stopped in his munching of bread to stare at her with wide-open blue eyes—Francis's eyes; and that lady was my sister Penelope.

She walked in and walked out again, before we had our wits about us sufficiently to speak to her, and when I rose and ran after her, she had slipped away somehow, so that I could not find her. How she came to take this notion into her head, after being for weeks shut up indoors;—whether she discovered that the Cartwrights had returned, and came here in anger, or else, prompted by some restless instinct, to have another look at Francis's child—none of us can guess; nor have we ever dared to enquire.

When we got home, she was lying in her usual place on the sofa, as if she wanted us not to notice that she had been out at all. Still, by papa's desire, I spoke to her frankly—told her the circumstances of our visit to the two women—the destitution in which we found them; and how they should be got away from the village as soon as possible.

She made no answer whatever, but lay absorbed, as it were—hardly moving, except an occasional nervous twitch, all afternoon and evening, until I called her in to prayers, which were shorter than usual—papa being very tired. He only read the collect, and repeated the Lord's Prayer, in which, among the voices that followed his, I distinguished, with surprise, Penelope's. It had a steadiness and sweetness such as I never heard before. And when—the servants being gone—she went up to papa, and kissed him, the change in her manner was something almost startling.

“Father, when shall you want me in the district, again?” said she.

“My dear girl!”

“Because I am quite ready to go. I have been ill, and it has made me unmindful of many things; but I am better now. Papa, I will try and be a good daughter to you. I have nobody but you.”

She spoke quietly and softly, bending her head upon his grey hairs. He kissed and blessed her. She kissed me, too, as she passed, and then went away to bed, without any more explanation.

But from that time—and it is now three days ago—Penelope has resumed her usual place in the household—taken up all her old duties, and even her old pleasures; for I saw her in her green-house this morning. When she called me, in something of the former quick, imperative voice, to look at an air-plant that was just coming into flower, I could not see it for tears.

Nevertheless, there is in her a difference. Not her serious, almost elderly-looking face, nor her manner, which has lost its sharpness, and is so gentle sometimes that when she gives her orders the servants actually stare—but the marvellous composure which is evident in her whole demeanour; the bearing of a person who, having gone through that sharp agony which either kills or cures, is henceforth settled in mind and "circumstances," to feel no more any strong emotion, but go through life placidly and patiently, without much further change, to the end. The sort of woman that nuns are-made of—or-Sours de la Charité; or Protestant lay-sisters, of whom every village has some; and almost every family owns at least one. She will, to all appearance, be our one—our elder sister, to be regarded with reverence unspeakable, and be made as happy as we possibly can. Max, I am learning to think with hope and without pain, of the future of my sister Penelope.

One word more, and this long letter ends.

Yesterday, papa and I walking on the moor, met Mrs. Cartwright, and learnt full particulars of Lydia. From your direction, her mother found her out, in a sort of fever, brought on by want. Of course, everything had been taken from the Kensington cottage, for Francis's debts. She was turned out with only the clothes she wore. But you know all this already, through Mrs. Ansdell.

Mrs. Cartwright is sure it was you who sent Mrs. Ansdell to them, and that the money they received week, by week, in their worst distress, came from you. She said so to papa, while we stood talking.

"For it was just like our doctor, sir—as is kind to poor and rich—I'm sure he used to look at you, sir, as if he'd do anything in the world for you—as many's the time I've seed him a-sitting by your bedside when you was ill. If there ever was a man living as did good to every poor soul as came in his way—it be Doctor Urquhart."

Papa said nothing.

After the old woman had gone, he asked if I had any plans about Lydia Cartwright?

I had one, which we must consult about when she is better,—whether she might not, with her good education, be made one of the schoolmistresses that you say, go from cell to cell, instructing the female prisoners in these model gaols. But I hesitated to start this project to papa—so told him I must think the matter over.

"You are growing quite a thinking woman, Dora; who taught you, who put it into your mind to act as you do?—you, who were such a thoughtless girl;—speak out, I want to know?"

I told him—naming the name of my dear Max; the first time it has ever passed my lips in my father's hearing, since that day. It was received in silence.

Some time after, stopping suddenly, papa said to me, "Dora, some day, I know you will go and marry Doctor Urquhart."

What could I say? Deny it, deny Max—my love, and my husband? or tell my father what was not true? Either was impossible.

So we walked on, avoiding conversation until we came to our own churchyard, where we went in and sat in the porch, sheltering from the noon-heat, which papa feels more than he used to do. When he took my arm to walk home, his anger had vanished, he spoke even with a sort of melancholy.

"I don't know how it is, my dear, but the world is altering fast. People preach strange doctrines, and act in strange ways, such as were never thought of when I was young. It may be for good or for evil—I shall find out by-and-by. I was dreaming of your mother last night; you are growing very like her, child." Then suddenly, "Only wait till I am dead, and you will be free, Theodora."

My heart felt bursting; oh Max, you do not mind me telling you these things? What should I do if I could not thus open my heart to you?

Yet it is not altogether with grief, or without hope, that I have thought over what then passed between papa and me. He knows you—knows too that neither you nor I have ever deceived him in anything. He was fond of you once; I think sometimes he misses you still, in little things wherein you used to pay him attention, less like a friend than a son.

Now Max, do not think I am grieving—do not imagine I have cause to grieve. They are as kind to me as ever they can be. My home is as happy as any home could be made, except one, which, whether we shall ever find or not, God knows. In quiet evenings such as this, when, after a rainy day, it has just cleared up in time for the sun to go down, and he is going down peacefully in amber glory, with the trees standing up so purple and still, and the moorlands lying bright, and the hills distinct even to their very last faint rim—in such evenings as this, Max, when I want you and cannot find you, but have to learn to sit still by myself, as now, I learn to think also of the meeting which has no farewell, of the rest that comes to all in time, of the eternal home. We shall reach that—some day.

Your faithful,

Theodora.

CHAPTER VIII. HIS STORY.

Treherne Court, Sunday night.

My Dear Theodora,—

The answer to my telegram has just arrived, and I find it is your sister whom we are to expect, not you. I shall meet her myself by the night train, Treherne being quite incapable; indeed, he will hardly stir from the corridor that leads to his wife's room.

You will have heard already that the heir so ardently looked for has only lived a few hours. Lady Augusta's letters, which she gave me to address, and I took care to post myself, would have assured you of your sister's safety, though it was long doubtful. It will comfort you to know that she is in excellent care, both her medical attendants being known to me professionally, and Lady Augusta, being a real mother to her, in tenderness and anxiety.

You will wonder how I came here. It was by accident—taking a Saturday holiday, which is advisable now and then; and Treherne's mother detained me, as being the only person who had any control over her son. Poor fellow! he was almost out of his mind. He never had any trouble before, and he knows not how to bear it. He trembled in terror—thus coming face to face with that messenger of God who puts an end to all merely mortal joys—was paralyzed at the fear of losing his blessings, which, numerous as they are, are all of this world. My love, whom I thought to have seen to-night, but shall not see—for how long?—things are more equally balanced than we suppose.

You will be sorry about the little one.

Treherne seems indifferent; his whole thought being, naturally, his wife; but Sir William is grievously disappointed. A son too—and he had planned bonfires, and bell-ringings, and rejoicings all over the estate. When he stood looking at the little white lump of clay, which is the only occupant of the grand nursery, prepared for the heir of Treherne Court, I heard the old man sigh as if for a great misfortune.

You will think it none, since your sister lives. Be quite content about her—which is easy for me to say, when I know how long and anxious the days will seem at Rockmount. It might have been better, for some things, if you, rather than Miss Johnston, had come to take charge of your sister during her recovery; but, maybe, all is well as it is. To-morrow I shall leave this great house, with its many happinesses, which have run so near a chance of being overthrown, and go back to my own solitary life, in which nothing of personal interest ever visits me but Theodora's letters.

There were two things I intended to tell you in my Sunday letter; shall I say them still? for the more things you have to think about the better, and one of them was my reason for suggesting your presence here, rather than your eldest sister's.—(Do not imagine though, your coming was urged by me wholly for other people's sakes. The sight of you—-just for a few hours—one hour—People talk of water in the desert—the thought of a green field to those who have been months at sea—well, that is what a glimpse of your little face would be to me. But I cannot get it—and I must not moan.)

What was I writing about? oh, to bid you tell Mrs. Cartwright from me that her daughter is well in health and doing well. After her two months' probation here, the governor, to whom alone I communicated her history (names omitted) pronounces her quite fitted for the situation. And she will be formally appointed thereto. This is a great satisfaction to me—as she was selected solely on my recommendation, backed by Mrs. Ansdell's letter. Say also to the old woman, that I trust she receives regularly the money her daughter sends her through me; which indeed is the only time I ever see Lydia alone. But I meet her often in the wards, as she goes from cell to cell, teaching the female prisoners; and it is good to see her sweet grave looks, her decent dress and mien, and her unexpressible humility and gentleness towards everybody.—She puts me in mind of words you know—which in another sense, other hearts than poor Lydia's might often feel—that those love most to whom most has been forgiven.

Hinting this, though not in reference to her, in a conversation with the governor, he observed, rather coldly, “He had heard it said Doctor Urquhart held peculiar opinions upon crime and punishment—that, in fact, he was a little too charitable.”

I sighed—thinking that of all men, Doctor Urquhart was the one who had the most reason to be charitable: and the governor fixed his eyes upon me somewhat unpleasantly. Anyone running counter, as I do, to several popular prejudices, is sure not to be without enemies. I should be sorry, though, to have displeased so honest a man, and one whom, widely as we differ in some things, is always safe to deal with, from his possessing that rare quality—justice.

You see, I go on writing to you of my matters—just as I should talk to you if you sat by my side now, with your hand in mine, and your head, here. (So you found two grey hairs in those long locks of yours last week. Never mind, love. To me you will be always young.)

I write as I hope to talk to you one day. I never was among those who believe that a man should keep all his cares secret from his wife. If she is a true wife, she will soon read them on his face, or the effect of them; he had better tell them out and have them over. I have learnt many things, since I found my Theodora: among the rest is, that when a man marries, or loves with the hope of marrying, let him have been ever so reserved, his whole nature opens out—he becomes another creature; in degree towards everybody, but most of all to her he has chosen. How altered I am—you would smile to see, were my little lady to compare these long letters, with the brief, businesslike productions which have heretofore borne the signature “Max Urquhart.”

I prize my name a little. It has been honourable for a number of years. My father was proud of it, and Dallas. Do you like it? Will you like it when—if—-No, let me trust in heaven, and say, *when* you bear it?

Those papers of mine which you saw mentioned in the *Times*—I am glad Mr. Johnston read them; or at least you suppose he did.

I believe they are doing good, and that my name is becoming pretty well known in connection with them, especially in this town. A provincial reputation has its advantages; it is more undoubted—more complete. In London, a man may shirk and hide; his nearest acquaintance can scarcely know him thoroughly; but in the

provinces it is different. There, if he has a flaw in him, either as to his antecedents, his character, or conduct, be sure scandal will find it out; for she has every opportunity. Also, public opinion is at once stricter and more narrow-minded in a place like this than in a great metropolis. I am glad to be earning a good name here, in this honest, hard-working, commercial district, where my fortunes are apparently cast; and where, having been a “rolling stone” all my life, I mean to settle and “gather moss,” if I can. Moss to make a little nest soft and warm for—my love knows who.

Writing this, about the impossibility of keeping anything secret in a town like this, reminds me of something which I was in doubt about telling you or not: finally, I have decided that I will tell you. Your sister being absent, will make things easier for you. You will not have need to use any of those concealments which must be so painful in a home. Nevertheless, I do think Miss Johnston ought to be kept ignorant of the fact that I believe, nay, am almost certain, Mr. Francis Charteris is at this present time living in Liverpool.

No wonder that all my inquiries about him in London failed. He has just been discharged from this very gaol. It is more than likely he was arrested for liabilities long owing; or contracted after his last fruitless visit to his uncle, Sir William. I could easily find out, but hardly consider it delicate to make inquiries, as I did not, you know, after the debtor—whom a turnkey here reported to have said he knew me. Debtors are not criminals by law—their ward is justly held private. I never visit any of them unless they come into hospital.

Therefore my meeting with Mr. Charteris was purely accidental. Nor do I believe he recognised me—I had stepped aside into the warder's room. The two other discharged debtors passed through the entrance-gate, and quitted the gaol immediately; but he lingered, desiring a car to be sent for—and inquiring where one could get handsome and comfortable lodgings in this horrid Liverpool. He hated a commercial town.

You will ask, woman-like, how he looked?

Ill and worn, with something of the shabby, “poor gentleman” aspect, with which we here are only too familiar. I overheard the turnkey joking with the carman about taking him to “handsome rooms.” Also, there was about him an ominous air of what we in Scotland call the “down-draught;” a term, the full meaning of which you probably do not understand—I trust you never may.

You will see by its date how many days ago the first part of this letter was written. I kept it back till the cruel suspense of your sister's sudden relapse was ended—thinking it a pity your mind should be burthened with any additional care. You have had, in the meantime, the daily bulletin from Treherne Court—the daily line from me.

How are you, my child?—for you have forgotten to say. Any roses out on your poor cheeks? Look in the glass and tell me. I must know, or I must come and see. Remember, your life is a part of mine, now.

Mrs. Treherne is convalescent—as you know. I saw her on Monday for the first time. She is changed, certainly; it will be long before she is anything like the Lisabel Johnston of my recollection, full of health and physical enjoyment. But do not grieve. Sometimes, to have gone near the gates of death, and returned, hallows the whole future life. I thought, as I left her, lying contentedly on her sofa, with her hand in her husband's, who sits watching as if truly she were given back to him from the grave, that it may be good for those two to have been so nearly parted. It may teach them, according to a line you once repeated to me (you see, though I am not poetical, I remember all your bits of poetry), to

> “hold every mortal joy
> With a loose hand.”

since nothing finite is safe, unless overshadowed by the belief in, and the glory of, the Infinite.

My dearest—my best of every earthly thing—whom to be parted from temporarily, as now often makes me feel as if half myself were wanting—whom to lose out of this world would be a loss irremediable, and to leave behind in it would be the sharpest sting of death—better, I have sometimes thought, of late—better be you and I than Treherne and Lisabel.

In all these letters I have scarcely mentioned Penelope—you see I am learning to name your sisters as if mine. She, however, has treated me almost like a stranger in the few times we happened to meet—until last Monday.

I had left the happy group in the library—Treherne, tearing himself from his wife's sofa—honest fellow! to follow me to the door—where he wrung my hand, and said, with a sob like a school-boy, that he had never been so happy in his life before, and he hoped he was thankful for it. Your eldest sister, who sat in the window sewing—her figure put me somewhat in mind of you, little lady—bade me good-bye—she was going back to Rockmount in a few days.

I quitted them, and walked alone across the park, where the chestnut-trees—you remember them—are beginning, not only to change, but to fall; thinking how fast the years go, and how little there is in them of positive joy. Wrong—this!—and I know it; but, my love, I sin sorely at times. I nearly forgot a small patient I have at the lodge-gates, who is slipping so gradually, but surely, poor wee man! into the world where he will be a child for ever. After sitting with him half an hour, I came out better.

A lady was waiting outside the lodge-gates. When I saw who it was, I meant to bow and pass on, but Miss Johnston called me. From her face, I dreaded it was some ill news about you.

Your sister is a good woman and a kind.

She said to me, when her explanations had set my mind at ease:—

“Doctor Urquhart, I believe you are a man to be trusted. Dora trusts you. Dora once said, you would be just,

even to your enemies."

I answered, I hoped it was something more than justice, that we owed even to our enemies.

"That is not the question," she said, sharply; "I spoke only of justice. I would not do an injustice to the meanest thing—the vilest wretch that crawls."

"No."

She went on:—

"I have not liked you, Dr. Urquhart: nor do I know if my feelings are altered now—but I respect you. Therefore, you are the only person of whom I can ask a favour. It is a secret. Will you keep it so?"

"Except from Theodora."

"You are right. Have no secrets from Theodora. For her sake, and your own—for your whole life's peace—never, even in the lightest thing, deceive that poor child!" Her voice sharpened, her black eyes glittered a moment, and then she shrank back into her usual self. I see exactly the sort of woman, which, as you say, she will grow into—sister Penelope—aunt Penelope. Every one belonging to her must try, henceforth, to spare her every possible pang.

After a few moments, I begged her to say what I could do for her.

"Read this letter, and tell me if you think it is true."

It was addressed to Sir William Treherne; the last humble appeal of a broken-down man; the signature "Francis Charteris."

I tried my best to disguise the emotion which Miss Johnston herself did not show, and returned the letter, merely inquiring if Sir William had answered it?

"No. He will not. He disbelieves the facts."

"Do you, also?"

"I cannot say. The—the writer was not always accurate in his statements."

Women are, in some things, stronger and harder than men. I doubt if any man could have spoken as steadily as your sister did at this minute. While I explained to her, as I thought it right to do, though with the manner of one talking of a stranger to a stranger—the present position of Mr. Charteris, she replied not a syllable. Only passing a felled tree—she suddenly sank down upon it, and sat motionless.

"What is he to do?" she said, at last.

I replied that the Insolvent Court could free him from his debts, and grant him protection from further imprisonment; that though thus sunk in circumstances, a Government situation was hardly to be hoped for, still there were in Liverpool, clerkships and mercantile opportunities, in which any person so well educated as he, might begin the world again—health permitting.

"His health was never good—has it failed him?"

"I fear so."

Your sister turned away. She sat—we both sat—for some time, so still that a bright-eyed squirrel came and peeped at us, stole a nut a few yards off, and scuttled away with it to Mrs. Squirrel and the little ones up in a tall sycamore hard by.

I begged Miss Johnston to let me see the address once more, and I would pay a visit, friendly or medical, as the case might allow, to Mr. Charteris, on my way home to-night.

"Thank you, Doctor Urquhart."

I then rose and took leave, time being short.

"Stay, one word if you please. In that visit, you will of course say, if inquired, that you learnt the address from Treherne Court. You will, name no other names?"

"Certainly not."

"But afterwards, you will write to me?"

"I will."

We shook hands, and I left her sitting there on the dead tree. I went on, wondering if anything would result from this curious combination of accidents: also, whether a woman's love, if cut off at the root, even like this tree, could be actually killed, so that nothing could revive it again. What think you, Theodora?

But this trick of moralizing, caught from you, shall not be indulged. There is only time for the relation of bare facts.

The train brought me to the opposite shore of our river, not half a mile's walk from Mr. Charteris's lodgings. They seemed "handsome lodgings" as he said—a tall new house, one of the many which, only half-built, or half-inhabited, make this Birkenhead such a dreary place. But it is improving, year by year—I sometimes think it may be quite a busy and cheerful spot by the time I take a house here, as I intend. You will like a hill-top, and a view of the sea.

I asked for Mr. Charteris, and stumbled up the half-lighted stairs, into the wholly dark drawing-room.

"Who the devil's there?"

He was in hiding, you must remember, as indeed I ought to have done, and so taken the precaution first to send up my name—but I was afraid of non-admittance.

When the gas was lit, his pale, unshaven, sallow countenance, his state of apparent illness and weakness, made me cease to regret having gained entrance, under any circumstances. Recognizing me, he muttered some apology.

"I was asleep—I usually do sleep after dinner." Then recovering his confused faculties, he asked with some *hauteur*, "To what may I attribute the pleasure of seeing Doctor Urquhart? Are you, like myself, a mere bird of passage, or a resident in Liverpool?"

"I am surgeon of ————— gaol.

“Indeed, I was not aware. A good appointment I hope? And what gaol did you say?”

I named it again, and left the subject. If he chose to wrap himself in that thin cloak of deception, it was no business of mine to tear it off. Besides, one pities a ruined man's most petty pride.

But it was an awkward position. You know how haughty Mr. Charteris can be; you know also that unlucky peculiarity in me, call it Scotch shyness, cautiousness, or what you please, my little English girl must cure it, if she can. Whether or not it was my fault, I soon felt that this visit was turning out a complete failure. We conversed in the civillest manner, though somewhat disjointedly, on politics, the climate and trade of Liverpool, &c., but of Mr. Charteris and his real condition, I learned no more than if I were meeting him at a London dinner-party, or a supper with poor Tom Turton—who is dead, as you know. Mr. Charteris did not, it seems, and his startled exclamation at hearing the fact was the own natural expression during my whole visit. Which, after a few rather broad hints, I took the opportunity of a letter's being brought in, to terminate.

Not, however, with any intention on my side of its being a final one. The figure of this wretched-looking invalid, though he would not own to illness—men seldom will—lying in the solitary, fireless lodging-house parlor, where there was no indication of food, and a strong smell of opium—followed me all the way to the jetty, suggesting plan after plan concerning him.

You cannot think how pretty even our dull river looks of a night, with its two long lines of lighted shores, and other lights scattered between in all directions, *every* vessel's rigging bearing one. And to-night, above all things, was a large bright moon, sailing up over innumerable white clouds, into the clear dark zenith, converting the town of Liverpool into a fairy city, and the muddy Mersey into a pleasant river, crossed by a pathway of silver—such as one always looks at with a kind of hope that it would lead to “some bright isle of rest.” There was a song to that effect popular when Dallas and I were boys.

As the boat moved off, I settled myself to enjoy the brief seven minutes of crossing—thinking, if I had but the little face by me looking up into the moonlight she is so fond of, the little hand to keep warm in mine!

And now, Theodora, I come to something which you must use your own judgment about telling your sister Penelope.

Half-way across, I was attracted by the peculiar manner of a passenger, who had leaped on the boat just as we were shoved off, and now stood still as a carved figure, staring down into the foamy track of the paddle-wheels. He was so absorbed that he did not notice me, but I recognized him at once, and an ugly suspicion entered my mind.

In my time, I have had opportunities of witnessing, stage by stage, that disease—call it dyspepsia, hypochondriasis, or what you will—it has all names and all forms—which is peculiar to our present state of high civilization, where the mind and the body seem cultivated into perpetual warfare one with the other. This state—some people put poetical names upon it—but we doctors know that it is at least as much physical as mental, and that many a poor misanthrope, who loathes himself and the world, is merely an unfortunate victim of stomach and nerves, whom rest, natural living, and an easy mind, would soon make a man again. But that does not remove the pitifulness and danger of the case. While the man is what he is, he is little better than a monomaniac.

If I had not seen him before, the expression of his countenance, as he stood looking down into the river, would have been enough to convince me how necessary it was to keep a strict watch over Mr. Charteris.

When the rush of passengers to the gangway made our side of the boat nearly deserted, he sprang up the steps of the paddle-box, and there stood.

I once saw a man commit suicide. It was one of ours, returning from the Crimea. He had been drinking hard, and was put under restraint, for fear of delirium tremens; but when he was thought recovered, one day, at broad noon, in sight of all hands, he suddenly jumped overboard. I caught sight of his face as he did so—it was exactly the expression of Francis Charteris.

Perhaps, in any case, you had better never repeat the whole of this to your sister.

Not till after a considerable struggle did I pull him down to the safe deck once more. There he stood breathless.

“You were not surely going to drown yourself, Mr. Charteris?”

“I was. And I will.”

“Try,—and I shall call the police to prevent your making such an ass of yourself.”

It was no time to choose words, and in this sort of disease the best preventive one can use, next to a firm, imperative will, is ridicule. He answered nothing—but gazed at me in simple astonishment, while I took his arm and led him out of the boat and across the landing-stage.

“I beg your pardon for using such strong language, but a man must be an ass indeed, who contemplates such a thing;—here, too, of all places. To be fished up out of this dirty river like a dead rat, for the entertainment of the crowd; to make a capital case at the magistrate's court to-morrow, and a first-rate paragraph in the *Liverpool Mercury*,—'Attempted Suicide of a Gentleman.' Or, if you really succeeded, which I doubt, to be 'Found Drowned,'—a mere body, drifted ashore with cocoa-nut husks and cabbages at Waterloo, or brought in as I once saw at these very stairs, one of the many poor fools who do this here yearly. They had picked him up eight miles higher up the river, and so brought him down, lashed behind a rowing-boat, floating face upwards”—

“Ah!”

I felt Charteris shudder.

You will, too, my love, so I will repeat no more of what I said to him. But these ghastly pictures were the strongest arguments available with such a man. What was the use of talking to him of God, and life, and immortality? he had told me he believed in none of these things. But he believed in death—the epicurean's view of it—“to lie in cold obstruction and to rot.” I thought, and still think, that it was best to use any lawful means to keep him from repeating the attempt. Best to save the man first, and preach to him afterwards.

He and I walked up and down the streets of Liverpool almost in silence, except when he darted into the first

chemist's shop he saw to procure opium.

“Don't hinder me,” he said, imploringly, “it is the only thing that keeps me alive.”

Then I walked him about once more, till his pace flagged, his limbs tottered, he became thoroughly passive and exhausted. I called a car, and expressed my determination to see him safe home.

“Home! No, no, I must not go there.” And the poor fellow summoned all his faculties, in order to speak rationally. “You see, a gentleman in my unpleasant circumstances—in short, could you recommend any place—a quiet, out-of-the-way place, where—where I could hide?”

I had suspected things were thus. And now, if I lost sight of him even for twenty-four hours, he might be lost permanently. He was in that critical state, when the next step, if it were not to a prison, might be into a lunatic asylum.

It was not difficult to persuade him that the last place where creditors would search for a debtor would be inside a gaol, nor to convey him, half-stupefied as he was, into my own rooms, and leave him fast asleep on my bed.

Yet, even now, I cannot account for the influence I so soon gained, and kept; except that any person in his seven senses always has power over another nearly out of them, and to a sick man there is no autocrat like the doctor.

Now for his present condition. The day following, I removed him to a country lodging, where an old woman I know will look after him. The place is humble enough, but they are honest people. He may lie safe there till some portion of health returns; his rent, &c.—my prudent little lady will be sure to be asking after my “circumstances”—well, love, his rent for the next month at least, I can easily afford to pay. The present is provided for—as to his future, heaven only knows.

I wrote, according to promise, to your sister Penelope, explaining where Mr. Charteris was, his state of health, and the position of his affairs; also, my advice, which he neither assents to nor declines, that as soon as his health will permit, he should surrender himself in London, go through the Insolvent Court, and start anew in life. A hard life, at best, since, whatever situation he may obtain, it will take years to free him from all his liabilities.

Miss Johnston's answer I received this morning. It was merely an envelope containing a bank note of 20L. Sir William's gift, possibly; I told her he had better be made aware of his nephew's abject state,—or do you suppose it is from herself? I thought beyond your quarterly allowance, you had none of you much ready money? If there is anything I ought to know before applying this sum to the use of Mr. Charteris, you will, of course, tell me?

I have been to see him this afternoon. It is a poor room he lies in, but clean and quiet. He will not stir out of it; it was with difficulty I persuaded him to have the window opened, so that we might enjoy the still autumn sunshine, the church-bells, and the little robin's song. Turning back to the sickly drawn face, buried in the sofa-pillows, my heart smote me with a heavy doubt as to what was to be the end of Francis Charteris.

Yet I do not think he will die; but he will be months, years in recovering, even if he is ever his old self again—bodily, I mean-whether his inner self is undergoing any change, I have small means of judging. The best thing for him, both mentally and physically, would be a fond, good woman's constant care; but that he cannot have.

I need scarcely say, I have taken every precaution that he should never see nor hear anything of Lydia; nor she of him. He has never named her, nor any one; past and future seem alike swept out of his mind; he only lives in the miserable present, a helpless, hopeless, exacting invalid. Not on any account would I have Lydia Cartwright see him now. If I judge her countenance rightly, she is just the girl to do exactly what you women are so prone to—forgive everything, sacrifice everything, and go back to the old love. Ah! Theodora, what am I that I should dare to speak thus lightly of women's love, women's forgiveness!

I am glad Mr. Johnston allows you occasionally to see Mrs. Cartwright and the child, and that the little fellow is so well cared by his grandmother. If, with his father's face, he inherits his father's temperament, the nervously sensitive organization of a modern “gentleman,” as opposed to the healthy animalism of a working man, life will be an uphill road to that poor boy.

His mother's heart aches after him sorely at times, as I can plainly perceive. Yesterday, I saw her stand watching the line of female convicts—those with infants—as one after the other they filed out, each with her baby in her arms, and passed into the exercising-ground. Afterwards, I watched her slip into one of the empty cells, fold up a child's cap that had been left lying about, and look at it wistfully, as if she almost envied the forlorn occupant of that dreary nook, where, at least, the mother had her child with her continually. Poor Lydia! she may have been a girl of weak will, easily led astray, but I am convinced that the only thing which led her astray must have been, and will always be, her affections.

Perhaps, as the grandmother cannot write, it would be a comfort to Lydia, if your next letter enabled me to give to her a fuller account of the welfare of little Frank. I wonder, does his father ever think of him? or of the poor mother. He was “always kind to them,” you tell me she declared; possibly fond of them, so far as a selfish man can be. But how can such an one as he understand what it must be to be a *father!*

My love, I must cease writing now. It is midnight, and I have to take as much sleep as I can; my work is very hard just at present; but happy work, because, through it, I look forward to a future.

Your father's brief message of thanks for my telegram about Mr. Treherne, was kind. Will you acknowledge it in the way you consider would be most pleasing; that is, least unpleasing, to him, from me.

And now, farewell—farewell, my only darling.

Max Urquhart.

P.S.—After the fashion of a lady's letter, though not, I trust, with the most important fact therein. Though I re-open my letter to inform you of it, lest you might learn it in some other way, I consider it of very slight moment, and only name it because these sort of small unpleasantnesses have a habit of growing like snow-balls, every yard they roll.

Our chaplain has just shown me in this morning's paper a paragraph about myself, not complimentary, and decidedly ill-natured. It hardly took me by surprise; I have of late occasionally caught stray comments, not very flattering, on myself and my proceedings, but they troubled me little. I know that a man in my position, with aims far beyond his present circumstances, with opinions too obstinate and manners too blunt to get these aims carried out, as many do, by the aid of other and more influential people, such a man *must* have enemies.

Be not afraid, love—mine are few; and be sure I have given them no cause for animosity. True, I have contradicted some, and not many men can stand contradiction—but I have wronged no man to my knowledge. My conscience is clear. So they may spread what absurd reports or innuendoes they will—I shall live it all down.

My spirit seems to have had a douche-bath this morning, cold, but salutary. This tangible annoyance will brace me out of a little feebleheartedness that has been growing over me of late; so be content, my Theodora.

I send you the newspaper paragraph. Read it, and burn it.

Is Penelope come home? I need scarcely observe, that only herself and you are acquainted, or will be, with any of the circumstances I have related with respect to Mr. Charteris.

CHAPTER IX. HER STORY.

A fourth Monday, and my letter has not come. Oh, Max, Max!—You are not ill, I know; for Augustus saw you on Saturday. Why were you in such haste to slip away from him? He himself even noticed it.

For me, had I not then heard of your wellbeing, I should have disquieted myself sorely. Three weeks—twenty-one days—it is a long time to go about as if there were a stone lying in the corner of one's heart, or a thorn piercing it. One may not acknowledge this: one's reason, or better, one's love, may often quite argue it down; yet, it is there. This morning, when the little postman went whistling past Rockmount gate, I turned almost sick with fear.

Understand me—not with one sort of fear. Faithlessness or forgetfulness are—Well, with, you they are—simply impossible! But you are my Max; anything happening to you happens to me; nothing can hurt you without hurting me. Do you feel this as I do? if so, surely, under any circumstances, you would write.

Forgive! I meant not to blame you; we never ought to blame what we cannot understand. Besides, all this suspense may end to-morrow. Max does not intend to wound me; Max loves me.

Just now, sitting quiet, I seemed to hear you saying: “My little lady,” as distinctly as if you were close at hand, and had called me. Yet it is a year since I have heard the sound of your voice, or seen your face.

Augustus says, of late you have turned quite grey. Never, mind, Max! I like silver locks. An old man I knew used to say, “At the root of every grey hair is a eell of wisdom.”

How will you be able to bear with the foolishness of this me? Yet, all the better for you. I know you would soon be ten years younger—looks and all—if, after your hard work, you had a home to come back to, and—and *me*.

See how conceited we grow! See the demoralizing result of having been for a whole year loved and cared for; of knowing ourselves, for the first time in our lives, first object to somebody!

There now, I can laugh again; and so I may begin and write my letter. It shall not be a sad or complaining letter, if I can help it.

Spring is coming on fast. I never remember such a March. Buds of chestnuts bursting, blackbirds singing, primroses out in the lane, a cloud of snowy wind-flowers gleaming through the trees of my favourite wood, concerning which, you remember, we had our celebrated battle about blue-bells and hyacinths. These are putting out their leaves already; there will be such quantities this year. How I should like to show you my bank of—ahem! *blue-bells!*

Mischievous still, you perceive. Obstinate, likewise; almost as obstinate as—you.

Augustus hints at some “unpleasant business” you have been engaged in lately. I conclude some controversy, in which you have had to “hold your own” more firmly than usual. Or new “enemies,”—business foes only of course, about which you told me I must never grieve, as they were unavoidable. I do not grieve; you will live down any passing animosity. It will be all smooth sailing by-and-by. But in the meantime, why not tell me? I am not a child—and—I am to be your wife, Max.

Ah, now the thorn is out, the one little sting of pain. It isn't this child you were fond of, this ignorant, foolish, naughty child, it is your wife, whom you yourself chose, to whom you yourself gave her place and her rights, who comes to you with her heart full of love and says, “Max, tell me!”

Now, no more of this, for I have much to tell you—I tell *you* everything.

You know how quietly this winter has slipped away with us at. Rockmount; how, from the time Penelope returned, she and I seemed to begin our lives anew together, in one sense beginning almost as little children, living entirely in the present; content with each day's work-and each day's pleasure,—and it was wonderful how many small pleasures we found—never allowing ourselves either to dwell on the future or revert to the past. Except when by your desire. I told my sister of Francis's having passed through the Insolvent Court, and how you were hoping to obtain for him a situation as corresponding clerk. Poor Francis! all his grand German and Spanish to have sunk down to the writing of a merchant's business-letters, in a musty Liverpool office! Will he ever bear it? Well, except this time, and once afterwards, his name has never been mentioned, either

by Penelope or me.

The second time happened thus—I did not tell you then, so I will now. When our Christmas bills came in—our private ones, my sister had no money to meet them. I soon guessed that—as, from your letter, I had already guessed where her half-yearly allowance had gone. I was perplexed, for though she now confides to me nearly everything of her daily concerns, she has never told me *that*. Yet she must have known I knew—that you would be sure to tell me.

At last, one morning, as I was passing the door of her room, she called me in.

She was standing before a chest-of-drawers, which, I had noticed, she always kept locked. But to-day the top drawer was open, and out of a small jewel-case that lay on it, she had taken a string of pearls. “You remember this?”

Ah, yes! But Penelope looked steadily at it; so, of course, did I.

“Have you any idea, Dora, what it is worth, or how much Sir William gave for it?”

I knew: for Lisabel had told me herself, in the days when we were all racking our brains to find out suitable marriage presents for the governor's lady.

“Do you think it would be wrong, or that the Trehernes would be annoyed, if I sold it?”

“Sold it!”

“I have no money—and my bills must be paid. It is not dishonest to sell what is one's own, though it may be somewhat painful.”

I could say nothing. The pain was keen—even to me.

She then reminded me how Mrs. Granton had once admired these pearls, saying, when Colin married she should like to give her daughter-in-law just such another necklace.

“If she would buy it now—if you would not mind asking her—”

“No, no!”

“Thank you, Dora.”

She replaced the necklace in its case, and gave it into my hand. I was slipping out of the room, when she said:—

“One moment, child. There was something more I wished to say to you. Look here.”

She unlocked drawer after drawer. There lay, carefully arranged, all her wedding clothes, even to the white silk dress, the wreath and veil. Everything was put away in Penelope's own tidy, over-particular fashion, wrapped in silver paper, or smoothly folded, with sprigs of lavender between. She must have done it leisurely and orderly, after her peculiar habit, which made us, when she was only a girl of seventeen, teaze Penelope by calling her “old maid!”

Even now, she paused more than once, to re-fold or re-arrange something—tenderly, as one would arrange the clothes of a person who was dead—then closed and locked every drawer, putting the key, not on her household-bunch, but in a corner of her desk.

“I should not like anything touched in my lifetime, but, should I die—not that this is likely; I believe I shall live to be an old woman—still, should I die, you will know, where these things are. Do with them exactly what you think best. And if money is wanted for—” She stopped, and then, for the first time, I heard her pronounce his name, distinctly and steadily, like any other name, “for Francis Charteris, or any one belonging to him—sell them. You will promise?”

I promised.

Mrs. Granton, dear soul! asked no questions, but took the necklace, and gave me the money, which I brought to my sister. She received it without a word.

After this, all went on as heretofore; and though sometimes I have felt her eye upon me when I was opening your letters, as if she fancied there might be something to hear, still, since there never was anything, I thought it best to take no notice. But Max, I wished often, and wish now, that you would tell me if there is any special reason why, for so many weeks, you have never mentioned Francis?

I was telling you about Penelope. She has fallen into her old busy ways—busier than ever, indeed. She looks well too, “quite herself again,” as Mrs. Granton whispered to me, one morning when—wonderful event—I had persuaded my sister that we ought to drive over to lunch at the Cedars, and admire all the preparations for the reception of Mrs. Colin, next month.

“I would not have liked to ask her,” added the good old lady; “but since she did come, I am glad. The sight of my young folk's happiness will not pain her? She has really got over her trouble, you think?”

“Yes, yes,” I said hastily, for Penelope was coming up the greenhouse walk. Yet when I observed her, it seemed not herself but a new self—such as is only born of sorrow which smiled out of her poor thin face, made her move softly, speak affectionately, and listen patiently to all the countless details about “my Colin” and “my daughter Emily,” (bless the dear old lady, I hope she will find her a real daughter). And though most of the way home we were both more silent than usual, something in Penelope's countenance made me, not sad or anxious, but inly awed, marvelling at its exceeding peace. A peace such as I could have imagined in those who had brought all their earthly possessions and laid them at the apostles' feet; or holier still, and therefore happier,—who had left all, taken up their cross, and followed *Him*. Him who through His life and death taught the perfection of all sacrifice, self-sacrifice.

I may write thus, Max, may I not? It is like talking to myself, talking to you.

It was on this very drive home that something happened, which I am going to relate as literally as I can, for I think you ought to know it. It will make you love my sister as I love her, which is saying a good deal.

Watching her, I almost—forgive, dear Max!—but I almost forgot my letter to you, safely written overnight, to be posted on our way home from the Cedars; till Penelope thought of a village post-office we had just passed.

“Don't vex yourself, child,” she said, “you shall cross the moor again; you will be quite in time; and I will drive round, and meet you just beyond the ponds.”

And, in my hurry, utterly forgot that cottage you know, which she has never yet been near, nor is aware who live in it. Not till I had posted my letter, did I call to mind that she would be passing Mrs. Cartwright's very door!

However, it was too late to alter plans, so I resolved not to fret about it. And, somehow, the spring feeling came over me; the smell of furze-blossoms, and of green leaves budding; the vague sense as if some new blessing were coming with the coming year. And, though I had not Max with me, to admire my one stray violet that I found, and listen to my lark—the first, singing up in his white cloud, still I thought of you, and I loved you! With a love that, I think, those only feel who have suffered, and suffered together: a love that, though it may have known a few pains, has never, thank God, known a single doubt. And so you did not feel so very far away.

Then I walked on as fast as I could, to meet the pony-carriage, which I saw crawling along the road round the turn—past the very cottage. My heart beat so! But Penelope drove quietly on, looking straight before her. She would have driven by in a minute; when, right across the road, in front of the pony, after a dog or something, I saw run a child.

How I got to the spot I hardly know; how the child escaped I know still less; it was almost a miracle. But there stood Penelope, with the little fellow in her arms. He was unhurt—not even frightened.

I took him from her—she was still too bewildered to observe him much—besides, a child alters so in six months. “He is all right you see. Run away, little man.”

“Stop! there is his mother to be thought of,” said Penelope; “where does he live? whose child is he?”

Before I could answer, the grandmother ran out, calling “Franky—Franky.”

It was all over. No concealment was possible.

I made my sister sit down by the roadside, and there, with her head on my shoulder, she sat till her deadly paleness passed away, and two tears slowly rose and rolled down her cheeks; but she said nothing.

Again I impressed upon her what a great comfort it was that the boy had escaped without one scratch; for there he stood, having once more got away from his granny, staring at us, finger in mouth, with intense curiosity and enjoyment.

“Off with you! “—I cried more than once. But he kept his ground; and when I rose to put him away—my sister held me.

Often I have noticed, that in her harshest days Penelope never disliked nor was disliked by children. She had a sort of instinct for them. They rarely vexed her, as we, or her servants, or her big scholars always unhappily contrived to do. And she could always manage them, from the squalling baby that she stopped to pat at a cottage door, to the raggedest young scamp in the village, whom she would pick up after a pitched battle, give a good scolding to, then hear all his tribulations, dry his dirty face, and send him away with a broad grin upon it, such as was upon Franky's now.

He came nearer, and put his brown little paws upon Penelope's silk gown.

“The pony,” she muttered; “Dora, go and see after the pony.”

But when I was gone, and she thought herself unseen, I saw her coax the little lad to her side, to her arms, hold him there and kiss him;—oh! Max, I can't write of it; I could not tell it to anybody but you.

After keeping away as long as was practicable, I returned, to find Franky gone, and my sister walking slowly up and down; her veil was down, but her voice and step had their usual “old-maidish” quietness,—if I dared without a sob at the heart, even think that word concerning our Penelope!

Leaving her to get into the carriage, I just ran into the cottage to tell Mrs. Cartwright what had happened, and assure her that the child had received no possible harm; when, who should I see sitting over the fire but the last person I ever expected to see in that place!

Did you know it?—was it by your advice he came?—what could be his motive in coming? or was it done merely for a whim—-just like Francis Charteris.

Anywhere else I believe I could not have recognised him. Not from his shabbiness; even in rags Francis would be something of the gentleman; but from his utterly broken-down appearance, his look of hopeless indifference, settled discontent; the air of a man who has tried all things and found them vanity.

Seeing me, he instinctively set down the child, who clung to his knees, screaming loudly to “Daddy.”

Francis blushed violently, and then laughed. “The brat owns me, you see; he has not forgotten me—likes me also a little, which cannot be said for most people. Heyday, no getting rid of him? Come along then, young man; I must e'en make the best of you.”

Franky, nothing loth, clambered up, hugged him smotheringly round the neck, and broke into his own triumphant “Ha! ha! he! “—His father turned and kissed him.

Then, somehow, I felt as if, it were easier to speak to Francis Charteris. Only a word or two—enquiries about his health—how long he had left Liverpool—and whether he meant to return.

“Of course. Only a day's holiday. A horse in a mill—that is what I am now. Nothing for it but to grind on to the end of the chapter—eh, Franky my boy!”

“Ha! ha! he!” screamed the child, with another delighted hug.

“He seems fond of you,” I said.

“Oh yes; he always was.” Francis sighed. I am sure, nature was tugging hard at the selfish pleasure-loving heart. And pity—I know it was not wrong, Max!—was pulling sore at mine.

I said I had heard of his illness in the winter, and was glad to find him so much recovered:—how long had he been about again?

“How long? Indeed I forget. I am so apt to forget things now. Except “—he added bitterly—“the clerk's stool

and the office window with the spider-webs over it—and the thirty shillings a-week. That's my income, Dora—I beg your pardon, Miss Dora,—I forgot I was no longer a gentleman, but a clerk at thirty shillings a-week."

I said, I did not see why that should make him less of a gentleman; and, broken-down as he was,—sitting crouching over the fire with his sickly cheek passed against that rosy one,—I fancied I saw something of the man—the honest, true man—flash across the forlorn aspect of poor Francis Charteris.

I would have liked to stay and talk with him, and said so, but my sister was outside.

"Is she? will she be coming in here?"—And he shrank nervously into his corner. "I have been so ill, you know."

He need not be afraid, I told him—we should have driven off in two minutes. There was not the slightest chance of their meeting—in all human probability he would never meet her more.

"Never more!"

I had not thought to see him so much affected.

"You were right, Dora, I never did deserve Penelope—yet there is something I should like to have said to her. Stop, hold back the curtain—she cannot see me sitting here?"

"No."

So, as she drove slowly past, Francis watched her; I felt more than glad—proud that he should see the face which he had known blooming and young, and which would never be either the one or the other again in this world, and that he should see how peaceful and good it was.

"She is altered strangely."

I asked, in momentary fear, did he think her looking out of health?

"Oh no—It is not that. I hardly know what it is;" then, as with a sudden impulse, "I must go and speak to Penelope."

And before I could hinder him, he was at the carriage side.

No fear of a "scene." They met—oh Max, can any two people so meet who have been lovers for ten years!

It might have been that the emotion of the last few minutes left her in that state when no occurrence seemed unexpected or strange—but Penelope, when she saw him, only gave a slight start;—and then looked at him, straight in the face, for a minute or so.

"I am sorry to see that you have been ill."

That one sentence must have struck him, as it did me, with the full conviction of how they met—as Penelope and Francis no more—merely Miss Johnston and Mr. Charteris.

"I have been ill," he said, at last. "Almost at death's door. I should have died, but for Doctor Urquhart and—one other person, whose name I discovered by accident. I beg to thank her for her charity."

He blushed scarlet in pronouncing the word. My sister tried to speak, but he stopped her.

"Needless to deny."

"I never deny what is true," said Penelope gravely. "I only did what I considered right, and what I would have done for any person whom I had known so many years. Nor would I have done it at all, but that your uncle refused."

"I had rather owe it to you—twenty times over!" he cried. "Nay—you shall not be annoyed with gratitude—I came but to own my debt—to say, if I live, I will repay it; if I die—"

She looked keenly at him:—"You will not die."

"Why not? What have I to live for—a ruined, disappointed, disgraced man? No, no—my chance is over for this world, and I do not care how soon I get out of it."

"I would rather hear of your living worthily in it."

"Too late, too late."

"Indeed it is not too late."

Penelope's voice was very earnest, and had a slight falter that startled even me. No wonder it misled Francis,—he who never had a particularly low opinion of himself, and who for so many years had been fully aware of a fact—which, I once heard Max say, ought always to make a man humble rather than vain—how deeply a fond woman had loved him.

"How do you mean?" he asked eagerly.

"That you have no cause for all this despair. You are a young man still; your health may improve; you are free from debt, and have enough to live upon. Whatever disagreeables your position has, it is a beginning—you may rise. A long and prosperous career may lie before you yet—I hope so."

"Do you?"

Max, I trembled. For he looked at her as he used to look when they were young. And it seems so hard to believe that love ever can die out. I thought, what if this exceeding calmness of my sister's should be only the cloak which pride puts on to hide intolerable pain?—But I was mistaken. And now I marvel, not that he, but that I—who know my sister as a sister ought—could for an instant have seen in those soft sad eyes anything beyond what her words expressed the more plainly, as they were such extremely kind and gentle words.

Francis came closer, and said something in a low voice, of which I caught only the last sentence,—

"Penelope, will you trust me again?"

I would have slipped away—but my sister detained me; tightly her fingers closed on mine; but she answered Francis composedly:

"I do not quite comprehend you."

"Will you forgive and forget? will you marry me?"

"Francis!" I exclaimed, indignantly; but Penelope put her hand upon my mouth.

“That is right. Don't listen to Dora—she always hated me. Listen to me. Penelope, you shall make me anything you choose; you would be the saving of me—that is, if you could put up with such a broken, sickly, ill-tempered wretch.”

“Poor Francis!” and she just touched him with her hand.

He caught it and kept it. Then Penelope seemed to wake up as out of a dream.

“You must not,” she said hurriedly; “you must not hold my hand.”

“Why not?”

“Because I, do not love you any more.”

It was so; he could not doubt it. The vainest man alive must, I think, have discerned at once that my sister spoke out of neither caprice or revenge, but in simple sadness of truth. Francis must have felt almost by instinct that, whether broken or not, the heart so long his, was his no longer—the love was gone.

Whether the mere knowledge of this made his own revive, or whether finding himself in the old familiar places—this walk was a favourite walk of theirs—the whole feeling returned in a measure, I cannot tell; I do not like to judge. But I am certain that, for the time, Francis suffered acutely.

“Do you hate me then?” said he at length.

“No; on the contrary, I feel very kindly towards you. There is nothing in the world I would not do for you.”

“Except marry me?”

“Even so.”

“Well, well; perhaps you are right. I, a poor clerk, with neither health, nor income, nor prospects—”

He stopped, and no wonder, before the rebuke of my sister's eyes.

“Francis, you know you are not speaking as you think. You know I have given you my true reason, and my only one. If we were engaged still, in outward form, I should say exactly the same, for a broken promise is less wicked than a deceitful vow. One should not marry—one ought not—when one has ceased to love.”

Francis made her no reply. The sense of all he had lost, now that he had lost it, seemed to come upon him heavily, overwhelmingly. His first words were the saddest and humblest I ever heard from Francis Charteris.

“I deserve it all. No wonder you will never forgive me.”

Penelope smiled—a very mournful smile.

“At your old habit of jumping at conclusions! Indeed, I have forgiven you long ago. Perhaps, had I been less faulty myself, I might have had more influence over you. But all was as it was to be, I suppose and it is over now. Do not let us revive it.”

She sighed, and sat silent for a few moments, looking absently across the moorland; then with a sort of wistful tenderness—the tenderness which, one clearly saw, for ever prevents and excludes love—on Francis.

“I know not how it is, Francis, but you seem to me Francis no longer—quite another person. I cannot tell how the love has gone, but it is gone; as completely as if it had never existed. Sometimes I was afraid if I saw you it might come back again; but I have seen you, and it is not there. It never can return again any more.”

“And so, from henceforth, I am no more to you than any stranger in the street?”

“I did not say that—it would not be true. Nothing you do, will ever be indifferent to me. If you do wrong—oh, Francis, it hurts me so! it will hurt me to the day of my death. I care little for your being very prosperous, or very happy, possibly no one is happy; but I want you to be good. We were young together, and I was very proud of you:—let me be proud of you again as we grow old.”

“And yet you will not marry me?”

“No, for I do not love you; and never could again, no more than I could love another woman's husband. Francis,” speaking almost in a whisper; “you know as well as I do, that there is one person and only one, whom you ought to marry.”

He shrank back, and for the second time—the first being when I found him with his boy in his arms—Francis turned scarlet with honest shame.

“Is it you—is it Penelope Johnston who can say this?”

“It is Penelope Johnston.”

“And you say it to me?”

“To you.”

“You think it would be right?”

“I do.”

There were long pauses between each of these questions, but my sister's answers were unhesitating. The grave decision of them seemed to smite home—home to the very heart of Francis Charteris. When his confusion and surprise abated, he stood with eyes cast down, deeply pondering.

“Poor little soul!” he muttered. “So fond of me, too—fond and faithful. She would be faithful to me to the end of my days.”

“I believe she would,” answered Penelope.

Here arose a piteous outcry of “Daddy, Daddy!” and little Franky, bursting from the cottage, came and threw himself in a perfect paroxysm of joy upon his father. Then I understood clearly how a good and religious woman like our Penelope could not possibly have continued loving, or thought of marrying, Francis Charteris, any more than if, as she said, he had been another woman's husband.

“Dora, pray don't take the child away. Let him remain with his father.”

And from her tone, Francis himself must have felt—if further confirmation were needed—that now and henceforth Penelope Johnston could never view him in any other light than as Franky's father.

He submitted—it always was a relief to Francis to have things decided for him. Besides, he seemed really fond of the boy. To see how patiently he let Franky clamber up him, and finally mount on his shoulder, riding

astride, and making a bridle of his hair, gave one a kindly feeling, nay, a sort of respect, for this poor sick man whom his child comforted; and who, however erring he had been, was now, nor was ashamed to be, a father.

"You don't hate me, Franky," he said, with a sudden kiss upon the fondling face. "You owe me no grudge, though you might, poor little scamp! You are not a bit ashamed of me; and, by God! (it was more a vow than an oath) I'll never be ashamed of you."

"I trust in God you never will," said Penelope, solemnly.

And then, with that peculiar softness of voice, which I now notice whenever she speaks of or to children, she said a few words, the substance of which I remember Lisabel and myself quizzing her for, years ago, irritating her with the old joke about old bachelor's wives and old maids' children—namely, that those who are childless, and know they will die so, often see more clearly and feel more deeply, than parents themselves, the heavy responsibilities of parenthood.

Not that she said this exactly, but you could read it in her eyes, as in a few simple words she praised Franky's beauty, hinted what a solemn thing it was to own such a son, and, if properly brought up, what a comfort he might grow.

Francis listened with a reverence that was beyond all love, and a humility touching to see. I, too, silently observing them both, could not help hearkening even with a sort of awe to every word that fell from the lips of my sister Penelope. All the while hearing, in a vague fashion, the last evening song of my lark, as he went up merrily into his cloud,—just as I have watched him, or rather his progenitors, numberless times; when, along this very road, I used to lag behind Francis and Penelope, wondering what on earth they were talking about, and how queer it was that they never noticed anything or anybody except one another.

Heigho! how times change!

But no sighing: I could not sigh, I did not. My heart was full, Max, but not with pain. For I am learning to understand what you often said, what I suppose we shall see clearly in the next life if not in this—that the only permanent pain on earth is sin. And, looking in my sister's dear face, I felt how blessed above all mere happiness, is the peace of those who have suffered and overcome suffering, who have been sinned against and have forgiven.

After this, when Franky, tired out, dropped suddenly asleep, as children do, his father and Penelope talked a good while, she inquiring, in her sensible, practical way, about his circumstances and prospects; he answering, candidly and apparently truthfully without any hesitation, anger, or pride; every now and then looking down, at the least movement of the pretty, sleepy face; while a soft expression, quite new in Francis Charteris, brightened his own. There was even a degree of cheerfulness and hope in his manner, as he said, in reply to some suggestion of my sister's:—"Then you think, as Doctor Urquhart did, that my life is worth preserving—that I may turn out not such a bad man after all?"

"How could a man be anything but a good man, who really felt what it is to be the father of a child?"

Francis replied nothing, but he held his little son closer to his breast. Who knows but that the pretty boy may be heaven's messenger to save the father's soul?

You see, Max, I still like, in my old moralizing habit, to "justify the ways of God to men," to try and perceive the use of pain, the reason of punishment; and to feel, not only by faith, but experience, that, dark as are the ways of Infinite Mercy, they are all safe ways. "*All things work together for good to them that love Him.*"

And so, watching these two, talking so quietly and friendly together, I thought how glad my Max would be; I remembered all my Max had done—Penelope knows it now; I told her that night. And, sad and anxious as I am about you and many things, there came over my heart one of those sudden sunshiny refts of peace, when we feel that whether or not all is happy, all is well.

Francis walked along by the pony-carriage for a quarter of a mile, or more.

"I must turn now. This little man ought to have been in his bed an hour or more: he always used to be. His mother—" Francis stopped—"I beg your pardon." Then, hugging the boy in a sudden passion of remorse, he said, "Penelope, if you want your revenge, take this. You cannot tell what a man feels, who, when the heyday of youth is gone, longs for a home, a virtuous home, yet knows that he never can offer or receive unblemished honour with his wife—never give his lawful name to his first-born."

This was the sole allusion made openly to what both tacitly understood was to be, and which you, as well as we, will agree is the best thing that can be, under the circumstances.

And here I have to say to you, both from my sister and myself, that if Francis desires to make Lydia Cartwright his wife, and she is willing, tell them both that if she will come direct from the gaol to Rockmount, we will receive her kindly, provide everything suitable for her (since Francis must be very poor, and they will have to begin housekeeping on the humblest scale), and take care that she is married in comfort and credit. Also, say that former things shall never be remembered against her, but that she shall be treated henceforward with the respect due to Francis's wife; in some things, poor loving soul! a better wife than he deserves.

So he left us. Whether in this world he and Penelope will ever meet again, who knows? He seemed to have a foreboding that they never will, for, in parting, he asked, hesitatingly, if she would shake hands?

She did so, looking earnestly at him,—her first love, who, had he been true to himself and to her, might have been her love for ever. Then I saw her eye wander down to the little head which nestled on his shoulder.

"Will you kiss my boy, Penelope?"

My sister leaned over, and touched Franky's forehead with her lips.

"God bless him! God bless you all?"

These were her last words, and however long both may live, I have a conviction that they will be her last words—to Francis Charteris.

He went back to the cottage; and through the rosy spring twilight, with a strangely solemn feeling, as if we were entering upon a new spring in another world, Penelope and I drove home.

And now, Max, I have told you all about these. About myself—No, I'll not try to deceive you; God knows how true my heart is, and how sharp and sore is this pain.

Dear Max, write to me;—if there is any trouble, I can bear it; any wrong—supposing Max could do me wrong—I'll forgive. I fear nothing, and nothing has power to grieve me, so long as you hold me fast, as I hold you.

Your faithful

Theodora.

P.S.—A wonderful, wonderful thing—it only happened last night. It hardly feels real yet.

Max, last night, after I had done reading, papa mentioned your name of his own accord.

He said, Penelope in asking his leave, as we thought it right to do before we sent that message to Lydia, had told him the whole story about your goodness to Francis. He then enquired abruptly how long it was since I had seen Doctor Urquhart?

I told him, never since that day in the library—now a year ago.

“And when do you expect to see him?”

“I do not know.” And all the bitterness of parting—the terrors lest life's infinite chances should make this parting perpetual—the murmurs that will rise, why hundreds and thousands who care little for one another should be always together, whilst we—we—Oh Max! it all broke out in a sob, “Papa, papa, how *can* I know?”

My father looked at me as if he would read me through.

“You are a good girl, and an honourable. He is honourable too. He would never persuade a child to disobey her father.”

“No, never!”

“Tell him,”—and papa turned his head away, but he did say it, I could not mistake, “tell Doctor Urquhart if he likes to come over to Rockmount, for one day only, I shall not see him, but you may.”

Max, come. Only for one day of holiday rest. It would do you good. There are green leaves in the garden, and sunshine and larks in the moorland, and—there is me. Come!

CHAPTER X. HIS STORY.

My dear Theodora,

I did not write, because I could not. In some states of mind nothing seems possible to a man but silence. Forgive me, my love, my comfort and joy.

I have suffered much, but it is over now, at least the suspense of it; and I can tell you all, with the calmness that I myself now feel. You are right; we love one another; we need not be afraid of any tribulation.

Before entering on my affairs, let me answer your letter—all but its last word, “Come!” My other self, my better conscience, will herself answer that.

The substance of what you tell me, I already know. Francis Charteris came to me on Sunday week, and asked for Lydia. They were married two days after—I gave the bride away. Since then I have drank tea with them at his lodging, which, poor as it is, has already the cheerful comfort of a home with a woman in it, and that woman a wife.

I left them—Mr. Charteris sitting by the fire with his boy on his knee; he seems passionately fond of the little scapegrace, who is, as you said, his very picture. But more than once I caught his eyes following Lydia with a wistful, grateful tenderness.

“The most sensible practical girl imaginable,” he said, during her momentary absence from the room; “and she knows all my ways, and is so patient with them. 'A poor wench,' as Shakspere hath it. 'A poor wench, sir, but mine own!'”

For her, she busied herself about house-matters, humble and silent, except when her husband spoke to her, and then her whole face brightened. Poor Lydia! None familiar with her story are likely to see much of her again; Mr. Charteris seems to wish, and for very natural reasons, that they should begin the world entirely afresh; but we may fairly believe one thing concerning her as concerning another poor sinner,—“*Her sins, which were many, are forgiven, for she loved much*.”

After I returned from them, I found your letter. It made me cease to feel what I have often felt of late, as if hope were knocking at every door except mine.

I told you once, never to be ashamed of showing me that you love me. Do not be; such love is a woman's glory, and a man's salvation.

Let me now say what is to be said about myself, beginning at the beginning.

I mentioned to you once that I had here a good many enemies, but that I should soon live them down; which, for some time, I hoped and believed, and still believe that it would have been so, under ordinary circumstances.

I have ever held that truth is stronger than falsehood, that an honest man has but to sit still, let the storm blow over, and bide his time. It does not shake this doctrine that things have fallen out differently with me.

For some time I had seen the cloud gathering; caught evil reports flying about; noticed that in society or in public meetings, now and then an acquaintance gave me the “cold shoulder.” Also, what troubled me more,

for it was a hindrance felt daily, my influence and authority in the gaol did not seem quite what they used to be. I met no tangible affront, certainly, and all was tolerably smooth sailing, till I had to find fault, and then, as you know, a feather will show which way the wind blows!

It was a new experience, for, at the worst of times, in camp or hospital, my poor fellows always loved me—I found it hard.

More scurrilous newspaper paragraphs, the last and least obnoxious of which I sent you lest you might hear of it in some other way, followed those proceedings of mine concerning reformatories. Two articles—the titles, “Physician, heal thyself,” and “Set a thief to catch a thief,” will give you an idea of their tenor—went so far as to be actionable libels. Several persons here, our chaplain especially, urged me to take legal proceedings in defence of my character, but I declined.

One day, arguing the point, the chaplain pressed me for my reasons, which I gave him, and will give you, for I have since had only too much occasion to remember them literally.

I said I had always had an instinctive dislike and dread of the law; that a man was good for little if he could not defend himself by any better weapons than the verdict of an ignorant jury, and a specious, sometimes lying, barrister's tongue.

The old clergyman, alarmed, “hoped I was not a duellist,” at which I only smiled. It never occurred to me to take the trouble of denying any such ridiculous purpose. I knew not how, when once the ball is set rolling against a man, his lightest words are made to gather weight and meaning, his very looks are brought in judgment upon him. It is the way of the world.

You see I can moralize, a sign that I am recovering myself; I think, with the relief of telling all out to you.

“But,” reasoned the chaplain, “when a man is innocent, why should he not declare it? Why sit tamely under calumny? It is unwise,—nay, unsafe. You are almost a stranger here, and we in the provinces like to find out everything about everybody. If I might suggest,” and he apologized for what he called the friendly impertinence, “why not be a little less modest, a little more free with your personal history, which must have a remarkable one, and let some friend, in a quiet, delicate way, see that the truth is as widely disseminated as the slander? If you will trust me—”

“I could not choose a better pleader,” said I, gratefully; “but it is impossible.”

“How so? A man like you can have nothing to dread—nothing to conceal.”

I said again, all I could find words to say:—

“It is impossible.”

He urged no more, but I soon felt painfully certain that some involuntary distrust lurked in the good man's mind, and though he continued the same to me in all our business relations, a cloud came over our private intercourse, which was never removed.

About this time another incident occurred; You know I have a little friend here, the governor's motherless daughter, a bonnie wee child whom I meet in the garden sometimes, where we water her flowers, and have long chats about birds, beasts, and the wonders of foreign parts. I even have given a present or two to this, my child-sweetheart. Are you jealous? She has your eyes!

Well, one day when I called Lucy, she came to me slowly, with a shy, sad countenance; and I found out after some pains, that her nurse had desired her not to play with Doctor Urquhart again, because he was “naughty.”

Doctor Urquhart smilingly inquired what he had done?

The child hesitated.

“Nurse does not exactly know, but she says it is something very wicked—as wicked as anything done by the bad people in here. But it isn't true—tell Lucy it isn't true?”

It was hard to put aside the little loving face, but I saw the nurse coming. Not an ill-meaning body, but one whom I knew for as arrant a gossip as any about this place. Her comments on myself troubled me little; I concluded it was but the result of that newspaper tattle, against which I was gradually growing hardened; nevertheless, I thought it best just to say that I had heard with much surprise what she had been telling Miss Lucy.

“Children and fools speak truth,” said the woman saucily.

“Then you ought to be the more careful that children always hear the truth.” And I insisted upon her repeating all the ridiculous tales she had been circulating about me.

When, with difficulty, I got the facts out of her, they were not what I expected, but these: Somebody in the gaol had told somebody else how Dr. Urquhart had been in former days such an abandoned character, that still his evil conscience always drove him among criminals; made him haunt gaols, prisons, reformatories, and take an interest in every form of vice. Nay, people had heard me say—and truly they might!—*apropos* to a late hanging at Kirkdale—that I had sympathy even for a murderer.

I listened—you will imagine how—to all this.

For an instant I was overwhelmed; I felt as if God had forsaken me; as if His mercy were a delusion; His punishments never-ending; His justice never satisfied. Despite my promise to your father, I might, in some fatal way, have betrayed myself, even on the spot, had I not heard the little girl saying, with a sob, almost—poor pet!—

“For shame, nurse! Doctor Urquhart isn't a wicked man; Lucy loves him.”

And I remembered you.

“My child,” I said, in a whisper, “we are all wicked; but we may all be forgiven; I trust God has forgiven me;” and I walked away without another word.

But since then I have thought it best to avoid the governor's garden; and it has cost me more pain than you would imagine—the contriving always to pass at a distance, so as to get only a nod and smile, which cannot harm her, from little Lucy.

About this time—it might be two or three days after, for out of work-hours I little noticed how time passed—an unpleasant circumstance occurred with Lucy's father.

I must have told you of him; for he is a remarkable man—young still, and well-looking; with manners like his features, hard as iron, though delicate and polished as steel. He seems born to be the ruler of criminals. Brutality, meanness, or injustice would be impossible to him. Likewise, another thing—mercy.

It was on this point that he and I had our difference.

We met in the east ward, when he pointed out to me, in passing, the announcement on the centre slate of “a boy to be whipped.”

It seems ridiculous, but the words sickened me. For I knew the boy, knew also his offence; and that such a punishment would be the first step towards converting a mere headstrong lad, sent here for a street row, into, a hardened ruffian. I pleaded for him strongly.

The governor listened—polite, but inflexible.

I went on speaking with unusual warmth; you know my horror of these floggings; you know, too, my opinion on the system of punishment, viewed as mere punishment, with no ulterior aim at reformation. I believe it is only our blinded human interpretation of things spiritual, which transforms the immutable law that evil is its own avenger and that the wrath of God against sin must be as everlasting as His pity for sinners—into the doctrine of eternal torment, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is never quenched.

The governor heard all I had to say; then, politely always, regretted that it was impossible either to grant my request, or release me from my duty.

“There is, however, one course which I may suggest to Doctor Urquhart, considering his very peculiar opinions, and his known sympathy with criminals. Do you not think, it might be more agreeable to you to resign?”

The words were nothing; but as he fixed on me that keen eye, which, he boasts can, without need of judge or jury detect a man's guilt or innocence, I felt convinced that with him too my good name was gone. It was no longer a battle with mere side-winds of slander—the storm had begun.

I might have sunk like a coward, if there were only myself to be crushed under it. As it was, I looked the governor in the face.

“Have you any special motive for this suggestion?”

“I have stated it.”

“Then allow me to state, that whatever my opinions may be, so long as my services are useful here, I have not the slightest wish or intention of resigning.”

He bowed, and we parted.

The boy was flogged. I said to him, “Bear it; better confess,”—as he had done—“confess and be punished now. It will then be over.” And I hope, by the grateful look of the poor young wretch, that with the pain, the punishment was over; that my pity helped him to endure it, so that it did not harden him, but, with a little help, he may become an honest lad yet.

When I left him in his cell, I rather envied him.

It now became necessary to look to my own affairs, and discover if possible, all that report alleged against me—false or true—as well as the originator of these statements. Him I at last by the merest chance discovered.

My little lady, with her quick, warm feelings, must learn to forgive, as I have long ago forgiven. It was Mr. Francis Charteris.

I believe still, it was less from malice premeditated, than from a mere propensity for talking, and that looseness and inaccuracy of speech which he always had—that he, when idling away his time in the debtor's ward of this gaol, repeated, probably with extempore additions, what your sister Penelope once mentioned to him concerning me—namely, that I was once about to be married, when the lady's father discovered a crime I had committed in my youth—whether dishonesty, duelling, seduction, or what, he could not say—but it was something absolutely unpardonable by an honourable man, and the marriage was forbidden. On this, all the reports against me had been grounded.

After hearing this story, which one of the turnkeys whose children were down with fever, told me while watching by their bedside, begging my pardon for doing it, honest man! I went and took a long walk down the Waterloo shore, to calm myself, and consider my position. For I knew it was in vain to struggle any more. I was ruined.

An innocent man might have fought on; how any one, with a clear conscience, is ever conquered by slander, or afraid of it, I cannot understand. With a clean heart, and truth on his tongue, a man ought to be as bold as a lion. I should have been; but—My love, you know.

This Waterloo shore has always been a favourite haunt of mine. You once said, you should like to live by the sea; and I have never heard the ripple of the tide without thinking of you—never seen the little children playing about and digging on the sands without thinking—God help me! if one keeps silence, it is not because one does not feel the knife.

“Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him?”

Let me stop. I will not pain you, my love, more than I can help. Besides, as I told you, the worst of my suffering is ended.

I believe I must have sat till night-fall among the sand-hills by the shore. For years to come, if I live so long, I shall see as clear and also as unreal as a painting—that level sea-line, along which moved the small white silent ships, and the steamers, with their humming paddle-wheels and their trailing thread of smoke, dropping one after the other into what some one of your favourite poets, my child, calls “the under world.” There seemed a great weight on my head—a weariness all over me. I did not feel anything much, after the first half-hour; except a longing to see your little face once again, and then, if it were God's will, to lie down

and die, somewhere near you, quietly, giving no trouble to you or to any one any more. You will remember, I was not in my usual health, and had had extra hard work, for some little time.

Well, my dear one, this is enough about myself, that day. I went home and fell into harness as usual; there was nothing to be done but to wait till the storm burst, and I wished for many reasons to retain my situation at the gaol as long as possible.

But it was a difficult time; rising to each day's duty, with total uncertainty of what might happen before night: and, duty done, struggling against a depression such as I have not known for these many years. In the midst of it came your dear letters—cheerful, loving, contented—unwontedly contented they seemed to me. I could not answer them, for to have written in a false strain was impossible, and to tell you everything seemed equally so. I said to myself, “No, poor child! she will learn all soon enough. Let her be happy while she can.”

I was wrong; I was unjust to you and to myself. From the hour you gave me your love, I owed it to us both to give you my full confidence, as much as if you were my wife. I had no right to wound your dear heart by keeping back from it any sorrows of mine. Forgive me, and forgive something else, which, I now see, was crueller still.

Theodora, I wished many times that you were free; that I had never bound you to my hard lot, but kept silence and left you to forget me, to love some one else better than me—pardon, pardon!

For I was once actually on the point of writing to you, saying this, when I remembered something you had said long ago,—that whether or no we were ever married you were glad we had been betrothed—that so far we might always be a help and comfort to one another. For, you added, when I was blaming myself, and talking as men do of “honour,” and “pride”—to have left you free when you were not free, would have given you all the cares of love, with neither its rights, nor duties, nor sweetnesses; and this might—you did not say it would—but it might have broken your heart.

So in my bitter strait I trusted that pure heart, whose instinct, I felt, was truer than all my wisdom. I did not write the letter, but at the same time, as I have told you, it was impossible to write any other, even a single line.

Your last letter came. Happily, it reached me the very morning when the crisis which I had been for weeks expecting, occurred. I had it in my pocket all the time I stood in that room before those men,—but I had best relate from the beginning.

You are aware that any complaints respecting the officers of this gaol, or questions concerning its internal management, are laid before the visiting justices. Thus, after the governor's hint, on every board day, I prepared myself for a summons. At length it came; ostensibly for a very trivial matter—some relaxation of discipline which I had ordered and been counteracted in. But my conduct had never been called into question before, and I knew what it implied. The very form of it—“The governor's compliments, and he requests Doctor Urquhart's attendance in the board-room;”—instead of “Doctor, come up to my room and talk the matter over,” was sufficient indication of what was impending.

I found present, besides the governor and chaplain, an unusual number of magistrates. These, who are not always or necessarily gentlemen, stared at me as if I had been some strange beast, all the time I was giving my brief evidence about the breach of regulations complained of. It was soon settled, for I had been careful to keep within the letter of the law, and I made a motion to take leave, when one of the justices requested me to “wait a bit, they hadn't done with me yet.”

These sort of men, low-born—not that that is any disgrace, but a glory, unless accompanied with a low nature—and “dressed in a little brief authority,” one often meets with here; I was well used to deal with, them, and to their dealings with the like of me—a poor professional, whose annual income was little more than they would expend, carelessly, upon one of their splendid “feeds.” But, until lately, among my co-mates in office, I had been both friendly and popular. Now, they took their tone from the rest, and even the governor and-the chaplain preserved towards me a rigid silence. You do not know our old mess phrase of being “sent to Coventry.” If you did, you would understand how those ten minutes that, according to my orders, I sat aloof from the board, while other business was proceeding, were not the pleasantest possible.

Men amongst men grow hard, are liable to evil passions, fits of pride, hatred, and revenge, that are probably unfamiliar to you sweet women. It was well I had your letter in my pocket. Besides, there is something in coming to the crisis of a great misfortune which braces up a man's nerves to meet it. So, when the governor, turning round in his always courteous tone, said the board requested a few minutes' conversation with me, I could rise and stand steady, to meet whatever shape of hard fortune lay before me.

The governor, like most men of non-intrusive but iron will, who have both temper and feelings perfectly under control, has a very strong influence wherever he goes. It was he who opened and carried on with me, what he politely termed, a “little conversation.”

“These difficulties,” continued he, after referring to the dismissed complaint of my straining the rules of the gaol to their utmost limit, from my “sympathy with criminals,” “these unpleasantnesses, Doctor Urquhart, will, I fear, be always occurring. Have you reconsidered the hint I gave to you, some little time ago?”

I answered that it was rarely my habit to take hints; I preferred having all things spoken right out.

“Such candour is creditable, though not always possible or advisable. I should have been exceedingly glad if you had saved me from what I feel to be my duty, however painful, namely, to repeat my private suggestion publicly.”

“You mean that I should tender my resignation.”

“Excuse my saying—and the board agrees with me—that such a step seems desirable, for many reasons.”

I waited, and then asked for those reasons.

“Doctor Urquhart must surely be aware of them.”

A man is not bound to rush madly into his ruin. I determined to die fighting, at any rate. I said, addressing the board:—

“Gentlemen, I am not aware of having conducted myself in any manner that unfits me for being surgeon to

this gaol. Any slight differences between the governor and myself, are mere matters of opinion, which signify little, so long as neither trenches on the other's authority, and both are amenable to the regulations of the establishment. If you have any cause of complaint against me, state it, reprove or dismiss me, it is your right; but no one has a right without just grounds to request me to resign."

The governor, even through that handsome, impassive, masked countenance of his, looked annoyed. For an instant his hard manner dropped into the old friendliness, even as when, in the first few weeks after his wife's death, he and I used to sit playing chess together of evenings, with little Lucy between us.

"Doctor, why will you misapprehend me? It is for your own sake that I wish, before the matter is opened up further, you should resign your post."

After a moment's consideration, I requested him to explain himself more clearly.

One of the magistrates here cried out with a laugh:—"Come, come, doctor, no shamming. You are the town's talk." And another suggested that "Brown had better mind his P's and Q's; there were such things as actions for libel."

I replied if the gentlemen referred to the scurrilous allegations against me which had appeared in print, they might speak without fear; I had no intention of prosecuting for libel. This silenced them a moment, and then the first magistrate said:—

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him; but surely, doctor, you can't be aware what a very bad name you have somehow got in these parts, or you would have been more eager to draw your neck out of the halter in time. Why, bless my soul, man alive, do you know what folk make you out to be?"

"This discussion is growing foreign to the matter in hand," interrupted the governor, who I felt had never taken his sharp eyes off me. "The question is merely this: that any officer in authority among criminals must of necessity bear an unblemished character. Neither in the establishment nor out of it ought people to be able to say of him that—that—"

"Say it out, sir."—"That there were circumstances in his former life which would not bear inspection, and that merely accident drew the line between himself and the convicts he was bent on reforming."

"Hear, hear!" said a justice, who had long thwarted me in my schemes; having a conscientious objection to reforming everybody—including himself.

"Nay," said the governor. "I did not give this as a fact,—only a report. These reports have come to such a height, that they must either be proved or denied. And therefore I wished, before any public inquiry became necessary—unless, indeed, Doctor Urquhart will consent to the explanatory self-defence which he definitely refused Mr. Thorley—"

And they both looked anxiously at me—these two whom I have always found honest, honorable men, and who were once my friends, or at least friendly associates—the chaplain and the governor.

Theodora, no one need ever dread lest the doctrine of total forgiveness should make guilt no burthen, and repentance pleasant and easy. There are some consequences of sin which must haunt a sinner to the day of his death.

It might have been one minute or ten, that I stood motionless, feeling as if I could have given up life and all its blessings without a pang, to be able to face those men with a clear conscience, and say, "It is all a lie. I am innocent."

Then, for my salvation, came the thought—it seemed spoken into my ear, the voice half like Dallas's, half like yours—"If God hath forgiven thee, why be afraid of men?" And I said, humbly enough—yet, I trust, without any cringing or abjectness of fear—that I wished, before taking any further step, to hear the whole of the statements current against myself, and how far they were credited by the gentlemen before me.

The accusation, I was informed, stood thus: floating rumours having accumulated into a substantive form—terribly near the truth! that I had, in my youth, either here or abroad, committed some crime which rendered me amenable to the laws of my country; and though, by some trick of law, I had escaped justice, the ban upon me was such, that only by the wandering life which I myself had owned to having led, could I escape the fury of public opinion. The impression against me was now so strong, in the gaol and out of it, that the governor would not engage even by his own authority to preserve mine unless I furnished him with an immediate, explicit denial to this charge. Which, he was pleased to say, if it had not been so widely spread, so mysterious in its origin, and so oddly corroborated by accidental admissions on my part, he should have treated as simply ridiculous.

"And now," he added, apparently re-assured by the composure with which I had listened, "I have only to ask you to deny it, point-blank, before the board and myself."

I asked, what must I deny?

"Why, if the accusations were not too ludicrous to express, just state that you are neither forger, burglar, nor body-snatcher; that you never either killed a man (unprofessionally, of course, if we may be excused the joke)—for professional purposes, or shot him irregularly in a duel, or waylaid him with pistols behind a hedge."

"Am I supposed to have committed all these crimes?"

"Such is the gullibility of the public; you really are," said the governor, smiling.

On the indignant impulse of the moment, I denied them each and all, upon my honor as a gentleman; until, feeling the old chaplain cordially grip my hand, I was roused into a full consciousness of where and what I was, and what, either by word or implication, I had been asserting.

Somebody said, "Give him air; no wonder he feels it, poor fellow!" And so, after a little, I gathered up my faculties, and saw the board sitting waiting; and the governor with pen and ink before him.

"This painful business will soon be settled, Doctor," said he cheerfully. "Just answer a question or two, which, as a matter of form, I will put in writing, and then, if you will do me the honour to dine with me to-day, we can consult how best to make the statement public; without of course compromising your dignity. To begin. You hereby make declaration that you were never in gaol? never tried at any assizes? have never

committed any act which rendered you liable to prosecution under our criminal law?”

He ran the words off carelessly, and paused for my answer. When none came, he looked up, his own penetrative, suspicious look.

“Perhaps I did not express myself clearly?” And he slightly changed the form of the sentence. “Now, what shall I write, Doctor Urquhart?”.

If I could then and there have made full confession, and gone out of that room an arrested prisoner, it would have been, so far as regarded myself, a relief unutterable, a mercy beyond all mercies. But I had to remember your father.

The governor laid down his pen.

“This looks, to say the least, rather strange.”

“Doctor,” cried one of the board, “you must be mad to hold your tongue and let your character go to the dogs in this way.”

Alas, I was not mad; I saw all that was vanishing from me—inevitably, irredeemably—my good name, my chance of earning a livelihood, my sweet hope of a home and a wife. And I might save everything, and keep my promise to your father also, by just one little lie!

Would you have had me utter it? No, love; I know you would rather have had me die.

The sensation was like dying, for one minute, and then it passed away. I looked steadily at my accusers; for accusation, at all events strong suspicion, was in every countenance now; and told them that though I had not perpetrated a single one of the atrocious crimes laid to my charge, still the events of my life had been peculiar; and circumstances left me no option but the course I had hitherto pursued, namely, total silence. That if my good character were strong enough to sustain me through it, I would willingly retain my post at the gaol, and weather the storm as I best could. If this course were impossible—

“It is impossible,” said the governor, decisively.

“Then I have no alternative but to tender my resignation.”

It was accepted at once.

I went out from the board-room a disgraced man, with a stain upon my character which will last for life, and follow me wherever I plant my foot. The honest Urquhart name, which my father bore, and Dallas—which I ought to have given stainless to my wife, and left—if I could leave nothing else—to my children—ay, it was gone. Gone, for ever and ever.

I stole up into my own rooms, and laid myself down on my bed, as motionless as if it had been my coffin.

Fear not, my love; one sin was saved me, perhaps by your letter of that morning. The wretchedest, most hopeless, most guilty of men would never dare to pray for death so long as he knew that a good woman loved him.

When daylight failed, I bestirred myself, lit my lamp, and began to make a few preparations and arrangements about my rooms—it being clear that, wherever I went, I must quit this place as soon as possible.

My mind was almost made up as to the course I ought to pursue; and that of itself calmed me. I was soon able to sit down, and begin this letter to you; but got no further than the first three words, which, often as I have written them, look as new, strange, and precious as ever: “*My dear Theodora*.” Dear,—God knows how infinitely! and mine—altogether and everlastingly mine. I felt this, even now. In the resolution I had made, no doubts shook me with respect to you; for you would bid me to do exactly what conscience urged—ay, even if you differed from me. You said once, with your arms round my neck, and your sweet eyes looking up steadfastly in mine:—“Max, whatever happens, always do what you think to be right, without reference to me. I would love you all the better for doing it, even if you broke my heart.”

I was pondering thus, planning how best to tell you of things so sore; when there came a knock to my room-door. Expecting no one but a servant, I said “Come in,” and did not even look up—for every creature in the gaol must be familiar with my disgrace by this time.

“Doctor Urquhart, do I intrude?”

It was the chaplain.

Theodora, if I have ever in my letters implied a word against him—for the narrowness and formality of his religious belief sometimes annoyed and were a hindrance to me—remember it not. Set down his name, the Reverend James Thorley, on the list of those whom I wish to be kept always in your tender memory, as those whom I sincerely honoured, and who have been most kind to me of all my friends.

The old man spoke with great hesitation, and when I thanked him for coming, replied in the manner which I had many a time heard him use in convict cells:—

“I came, sir,' because I felt it to be my duty.”

“Mr. Thorley, whatever was your motive, I respect it, and thank you.”

And we remained silent—both standing—for he declined my offer of a chair. Noticing my preparations, he said, with some agitation, “Am I hindering your plans for departure? Are you afraid of the law?”

“No.”

He seemed relieved; then, after a long examining look at me, quite broke down.

“O Doctor, Doctor, what a terrible thing this is! who would have believed it of you!” It was very bitter, Theodora.

When he saw that I attempted neither answer nor defence, the chaplain continued sternly:—“I come here, sir, not to pry into your secrets, but to fulfil my duty as a minister of God; to urge you to make confession, not unto me, but unto Him whom you have offended, whose eye you cannot escape, and whose justice sooner or later will bring you to punishment. But perhaps,” seeing I bore with composure these and many similar arguments; alas, they were only too familiar! “perhaps I am labouring under a strange mistake? You do not

look guilty, and I could as soon have believed in my own son's being a criminal, as you. For God's sake break this reserve, and tell me all."

"It is not possible."

There was a long pause, and then the old man said, sighing:—

"Well, I will urge no more. Your sin, whatever it be, rests between you and the Judge of sinners. You say the law has no hold over you?"

"I said I was not afraid of the law."

"Therefore, it must have been a moral, rather than a legal crime, if crime it was." And again I had to bear that searching look, so dreadful because it was so eager and kind. "On my soul, Doctor Urquhart, I believe you to be entirely innocent."

"Sir," I cried out, and stopped; then asked him "if he did not believe it possible for a man to have sinned and yet repented?"

Mr. Thorley started back—so greatly shocked that I perceived at once what an implication I had made. But it was too late now; nor, perhaps, would I have had it otherwise.

"As a clergyman—I—I—" He paused. "If a man sin a sin which is not unto death,—You know the rest. And there is a sin which is unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it? But never that we shall *not* pray for it."

And falling down on his knees beside me, the old chaplain repeated in a broken voice:—"*Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy, think thou upon me, O Lord, for thy goodness.*' Not ours, which is but filthy rags; for *Thy* goodness, through Jesus Christ, O Lord."

"Amen."

Mr. Thorley rose, took the chair I gave him, and we sat silent. Presently he asked me if I had any plans? Had I considered what exceeding difficulty I should find in establishing myself anywhere professionally, after what had happened this day?

I said, I was fully aware that, so far as my future prospects were concerned, I was a ruined man.

"And yet you take it so calmly?"

"Ay."

"Doctor," said he, after again watching me, "you must either be innocent, or your error must have been caused by strong temptation, and long ago retrieved. I will never believe but that you are now as honourable and worthy a man as any living."

"Thank you."

An uncontrollable weakness came over me; Mr. Thorley, too, was much affected.

"I'll tell you what it is, my dear fellow," said he, as he wrung my hand, "you must start afresh in some other part of the world. You are no older than my son-in-law was when he married and went to Canada, in your own profession too. By the way, I have an idea."

The idea was worthy of this excellent man, and of his behaviour to me. He explained that his son-in-law, a physician in good practice, wanted a partner—some one from the old country, if possible.

"If you went out, with an introduction from me, he would be sure to like you, and all might be settled in no time. Besides, you Scotch hang together so—my son-in-law is a Fife man—and did you not say you were born or educated at St. Andrews? The very thing!"

And he urged me to start by next Saturday's American mail.

A sharp straggle went on within my mind. Mr. Thorley evidently thought it sprang from another cause, and, with much delicacy, gave me to understand that in the promised introduction, he did not consider there was the slightest necessity to state more than that I had been an army surgeon, and was his valued friend; that no reports against me were likely to reach the far Canadian settlement, whither I should carry both to his son-in-law and the world at large, a perfectly unknown and unblemished name.

If I had ever wavered, this decided me. The hope must go. So I let it go, in all probability, for ever.

Was I right? I can hear you say, "Yes, Max."

In bidding the chaplain farewell, I tried to explain to him, that in this generous offer he had given to me more than he guessed—faith not only in heaven, but in mankind, and strength to do without shrinking what I am bound to do—trusting that there are other good Christians in this world besides himself who dare believe that a man may sin and yet repent—that the stigma even of an absolute crime is not hopeless, nor eternal.

His own opinion concerning my present conduct, or the facts of my past history, I did not seek; it was of little moment; he will shortly learn all.

My love, I have resolved, as the only thing possible to my future peace, the one thing exacted by the laws of God and man—to do what I ought to have done twenty years ago—to deliver myself up to justice.

Now I have told you; but I cannot tell you the infinite calm which this resolution has brought to me. To be free; to lay down this living load of lies, which has hung about me for twenty years; to speak the whole truth before God and man—confess all, and take my punishment—my love, my love, if you knew what the thought of this is to me, you would neither tremble nor weep, but rather rejoice!

My Theodora, I take you in my arms, I hold you to my heart, and love you with a love that is dearer than life and stronger than-death, and I ask you to let me do this.

In the enclosed letter to your father, I have, after relating all the circumstances of which I here inform you, implored him to release me from a pledge which I ought never to have given. Never, for it was putting the fear of man before the fear of God: it was binding myself to an eternal hypocrisy, an inward gnawing of shame, which paralyzed my very soul. I must escape it; you must try to release me from it,—my love, who loves me better than herself, better than myself, I mean this poor worthless self, battered and old, which I have often thought was more fit to go down into the grave than live to be my dear girl's husband. Forgive me

if I wound you. By the intolerable agony of this hour, I feel that the sacrifice is just and right.

You must help me, you must urge your father to set me free. Tell him—indeed I have told him—that he need dread no disgrace to the family, or to him who is no more. I shall state nothing of Henry Johnston excepting his name, and my own confession will be sufficient and sole evidence against me.

As to the possible result of my trial, I have not overlooked it. It was just, if only for my dear love's sake, that I should gain some idea of the chances against me. Little as I understand of the law, and especially English law, it seems to me very unlikely that the verdict will be wilful murder, nor shall I plead, guilty to that. God and my own conscience are witness that I did *not* commit murder, but unpremeditated manslaughter.

The punishment for this is, I believe, sometimes transportation, sometimes imprisonment for a long term of years. If it were death—which perhaps it might as well be to a man of my age, I must face it. The remainder of my days, be they few or many, must be spent in peace.

If I do not hear within two days' post from Rockmount, I shall conclude your father makes no opposition to my determination, and go at once to surrender myself at Salisbury. *You* need not write; it might compromise you; it would be almost a relief to me to hear nothing of or from you, until all was over.

And now farewell. My personal effects here I leave in charge of the chaplain, with a sealed envelope, containing the name and address of the friend to whom they are to be sent in case of my death, or any other emergency. This is yourself. In my will, I have given you, as near as the law allows, every right that you would have had, as my wife.

My wife—my wife in the sight of God, farewell! That is, until such time as I dare write again. Take good care of yourself—be patient and have hope. In whatever he commands—he is too just a man to command an injustice—obey your father.

Forget me not—but you never will. If I could have seen you once more, have felt you close to my heart—but perhaps it is better as it is.

Only a week's suspense for you, and it will be over. Let us trust in God; and farewell! Remember how I loved you, my child!

Max Urquhart.

CHAPTER XI. HIS STORY.

My dear Theodora,—

By this time you will have known all.—Thank God, it is over. My dear, dear love—my own faithful girl—it is over!

When I was brought back to prison tonight, I found your letters; but I had heard of you the day before, from Colin Granton. Do not regret the chance which made Mr. Johnston detain my letter to you, instead of forwarding it at once to the Cedars. These sort of things never seem to me as accidental; all was for good. In any case, I could not have done otherwise than I did; but it would have been painful to have done it in direct opposition to your father. The only thing I regret is, that my poor child should have had the shock of first seeing these hard tidings of my surrender to the magistrate, and my public confession, in a newspaper.

Granton told me how you bore it. Tell him, I shall remember gratefully all my life, his goodness to you, and his leaving his young wife—(whom he dearly loves, I can see) to come to me, here. Nor was he my only friend; do not think I was either contemned or forsaken. Sir William Treherne and several others offered any amount of, bail for me; but it was better I should remain in prison, during the few days between my committal and the assizes. I needed quiet and solitude.

Therefore, my love, I dared not have seen you, even had you immediately come to me. You have acted in all things as my dear girl was sure to act, wise, thoughtful, self-controlled, and oh! how infinitely loving.

I had to stop here for want of daylight—but they have now brought me my allowance of candle—slender enough, so I must make haste.

I wish you to have this full account as soon as possible after the brief telegram which I know Mr. Granton sent you, the instant my trial was over. A trial, however, it was not—in my ignorance of law, I imagined much that never happened. What did happen, I will here set down.

You must not expect me to give many details; my head was rather confused, and my health has been a good deal shaken, though do not take heed of anything Granton may tell you about me or my looks. I shall recover now.

Fortunately, the four days of imprisonment gave me time to recover myself in a measure, and I was able to write out the statement I meant to read at my trial. I preferred reading it, lest any physical weakness might make me confused or inaccurate. You see I took all rational precautions for my own safety. I was as just to myself as I would have been to another man. This for your sake, and also for the sake of those now dead, upon whose fair name I have brought the first blot.

But I must not think of that—it is too late. What best becomes me is humility, and gratitude to God and man. Had I known in my wretched youth, when, absorbed in terror of human justice, I forgot justice divine, had I but known there were so many merciful hearts in this world!

After Colin Granton left me last night, I slept quietly, for I felt quiet and at rest. O the peace of an unburdened conscience, the freedom of a soul at ease—which, the whole truth being told, has no longer

anything to dread, and is prepared for everything!

I rose calm and refreshed, and could see through my cell-window that it was a lovely spring morning. I was glad my Theodora did not know what particular day of the assizes was fixed for my trial. It would make things a little easier for her.

It was noon before the case came on: a long time to wait.

Do not suppose me braver than I was. When I found myself standing in the prisoner's dock, the whole mass of staring faces seemed to whirl round and round before my eyes; I felt sick and cold; I had lost more strength than I thought. Everything present melted away into a sort of dream through which I fancied I heard you speaking, but could not distinguish any words; except these, the soft, still tenderness of which haunted me as freshly as if they had been only just uttered: “My dear Max! my dear Max!”

By this I perceived that my mind was wandering, and must be recalled; so I forced myself to look round at the judge, jury, witness-box—in the which was one person sitting with his white head resting on his hand. I felt who it was.

Did you know your father was subpoenaed here? If so, what a day this must have been for my poor child! Think not, though, that the sight of him added to my suffering. I had no fear of him or of anything now. Even public shame was less terrible than I thought; those scores of inquisitive eyes hardly stabbed so deep as in days past did many a kind look of your father's, many a loving glance of yours.

The formalities of the court began, but I scarcely listened to them. They seemed to me of little consequence. As I said to Granton when he urged me to employ counsel, a man who only wants to speak the truth can surely manage to do it, in spite of the incumbrances of the law.

It came to an end—the long, unintelligible indictment—and my first clear perception of my position was the judge's question:—

“How say you, prisoner at the bar, guilty, or not guilty?”

I pleaded “guilty,” as a matter of course. The judge asked several questions, and held a long discussion with the counsel for the crown, on what he termed “this very remarkable case,” the purport of it was, I believe, to ascertain my sanity; and whether any corroboration of my confession could be obtained. It could not. All possible witnesses were long since dead, except your father.

He still kept his position, neither turning towards me, nor yet from me,—neither compassionate nor revengeful, but sternly composed; as if his long sorrows had obtained their solemn satisfaction, and even though the end was thus, he felt relieved that it had come. As if he, like me, had learned to submit that our course should be shaped for us rather than by us; being taught that even in this world's events, the God of Truth will be justified before men; will prove that: those who, under any pretence, disguise or deny the truth, live not unto Him, but unto the father of lies.

Is it not strange, that then and there I should have been calm enough to think of these things. Ay, and should calmly write of them now. But as I have told you, in a great crisis my mind always recovers its balance and becomes quiet. Besides, sickness makes us both clear-sighted and far-sighted; wonderfully so, sometimes.

Do not suppose from this admission, that my health is gone or going; but, simply that I am, as I see in the looking-glass, a somewhat older and feebler man than my dear love remembers me a year ago. But I must hasten on.

The plea of guilty being recorded, no trial was necessary; the judge had only to pass sentence. I was asked whether, by counsel or otherwise, I wished to say anything in my own defence? And then I rose and told the whole truth.

Do not grieve for me, Theodora? The truth is never really terrible. What makes it so is the fear of man, and that was over with me; the torment of guilty shame, and that was gone too. I have had many a moment of far sharper anguish, more grinding humiliation than this, when I stood up and publicly confessed the sin of my youth, with the years of suffering which had followed—dare I say expiated it?

There is a sense in which no sin ever can be expiated, except in One Blessed Way;—yet, in so far as man can atone to man, I believed I had atoned for mine; I had tried to give a life for a life, morally speaking; nay, I had given it. But it was not enough; it could not he. Nothing less than the truth was required from me—and I here offered it. Thus, in one short half hour, the burthen of a lifetime was laid down for ever.

The judge—he was not unmoved,-so they told me afterwards—said he must take time to consider the sentence. Had the prisoner any witnesses as to character?

Several came forward. Among the rest, the good old chaplain, who had travelled all night from Liverpool, in order, he said, just to shake hands with me to-day—which he did, in open court—God bless him!

There was also Colonel Turton; with Colin Granton—who had never left me since daylight this morning—but they all held back when they saw rise and come forward, as if with the intention of being sworn, your father.

Have no fear my love, for his health. I watched him closely all this day. He bore it well—it will have no ill result I feel sure. From my observation of him, I should say that a great and salutary change had come over him, both body and mind, and that he is as likely to enjoy a green old age as any one I know.

When he spoke, his voice was as steady and clear as before his accident it used to be in the pulpit.

“My lords and gentlemen, I was subpoenaed to this trial. Not being called upon to give evidence, I wish to make a statement upon oath.”

There must have been a “sensation in the court,” as newspapers say, for I saw Granton look anxiously at me. But I had no fears. Your father, whatever he had to say, was sure to speak the truth, not a syllable more or less, and the truth was all I wanted.

The judge here interfered, observing that there being no trial, he could receive no legal evidence against the prisoner.

“Nor have I any such evidence to give: I wish only for justice. My lord, may I speak?”

Assent was given.

Your father's words were brief and formal; but you will imagine how they fell on one ear at least.

“My name is William Henry Johnston, clerk, of Rockmount, Surrey. Henry Johnston, who—died—on the night of November 19th, 1836, was my only son. I know the prisoner at the bar. I knew him for some time before he was aware whose father I was, or I had any suspicion that my son came to his death in any other way than by accident.”

“Was your first discovery of these painful facts by the prisoner's present confession?”

“No, my lord.” Your father hesitated, but only momentarily. “He told me the whole story, himself, a year ago, under circumstances that would have induced most men to conceal it for ever.”

The judge inquired why was not this confession made public at once?

“Because I was afraid. I did not wish to make my family history a by-word and a scandal. I exacted a promise that the secret should be kept inviolate. This promise he has broken—but I blame him not. It ought never to have been made.”

“Certainly not. It was thwarting the purposes of justice and of the law.”

“My lord, I am an old man, and a clergyman; I know nothing about the law; but I know it was a wrong act to bind any man's conscience to live a perpetual lie.”

Your father was here asked if he had any thing more to say?

“A word only. In the prisoner's confession, he has, out of delicacy to me, omitted three facts, which weigh materially in extenuation of his crime. When he committed it he was only nineteen, and my son was thirty. He was drunk, and my son, who led an irregular life, had made him so, and afterwards taunted him, more than a youth of nineteen was likely to bear. Such was his statement to me, and knowing his character and my son's, I have little doubt of its perfect accuracy.”

The judge looked up for his notes. “You seem, sir, strange to say, to be not unfavourable towards the prisoner.”

“I am just towards the prisoner. I wish to be, even though he has on his hands the blood of my only son.”

After the pause which followed, the judge said:—

“Mr. Johnston:—the Court respects your feelings, and regrets to detain you longer or put you to any additional pain. But it may materially aid the decision of this very peculiar case, if you will answer another question. You are aware that, all other evidence being wanting, the prisoner can only be judged by his own confession. Do you believe, on your oath, that this confession is true?”

“I do. I am bound to say from my intimate knowledge of the prisoner, that I believe him to be now, whatever he may have been in his youth, a man of sterling honour and unblemished life; one who would not tell a lie to save himself from the scaffold.”

“The Court is satisfied.”

But before he sat down, your father turned, and, for the first time that day, he and I were face to face.

“I am a clergyman, as I said, and I never was in a court of justice before. Is it illegal for me to address a few words to the prisoner?”

Whether it was or not, nobody interrupted him.

“Doctor Urquhart,” he said, speaking loud enough for every one to hear, “what your sentence may be I know not, or whether you and I shall ever meet again until the day of judgment. If not, I believe that if we are to be forgiven our debts according as we forgive our debtors, I shall have to forgive you then. I prefer to do it now, while we are in the flesh, and it may comfort your soul. I, Henry Johnston's father, declare publicly that I believe what you did was done in the heat of youth, and has ever since been bitterly repented of. May God pardon you, even as I do this day.”

I did not see your father afterwards. He quitted the court directly after sentence was given—three months' imprisonment—the judge making a long speech previously; but I heard not a syllable. I heard nothing but your father's words—saw no one except himself, sitting there below me, with his hands crossed on his stick, and a stream of sunshine falling across his white hairs—Theodora—Theodora—I cannot write—it is impossible.

Granton got admission to me for a minute, after I was taken back to prison. He told me that the “hard labour” was remitted, that there had been application made for commutation of the three months into one, but the judge declined. If I wished, a new application should be made to the Home Secretary.

No, my love, suffer him not to do it. Let nothing more be done. I had rather abide my full term of punishment. It is only too easy.

Do not grieve for me. Trust me, my child, many a peer puts on his robes with a heavier heart than I put on this felon's dress, which shocked Granton so much that he is sure to tell you of it. Never mind it—my clothes are not me, are they, little lady? Who was the man that wrote:—

> “Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage,
> Minds innocent—”

Am I innocent? No, but I am forgiven, as I believe, before God and man. And are not all the glories of heaven preparing, not for sinless but for pardoned souls?

Therefore, I am at peace. This first night of my imprisonment is, for some things, as happy to me as that which I have often imagined to myself, when I should bring you home for the first time to my own fireside.

Not even that thought, and the rush of thoughts that came with it, are able to shake me out of this feeling of unutterable rest: so perfect that it seems strange to imagine I shall ever go out of this cell to begin afresh the

turmoil of the world—as strange as that the dead should wish to return again to life and its cares. But this as God wills.

My love, good night. Granton will give you any further particulars. Talk to him freely—it will be his good heart's best reward. His happy, busy life, which is now begun, may have been made all the brighter for the momentary cloud which taught him that Providence oftentimes blesses us in better ways than by giving us exactly the thing we desired. He told me when we parted, which was the only allusion he made to the past—that though Mrs. Colin was “the dearest little woman in all the world,” he should always adore as “something between a saint and an angel,” Miss Dora.

Is she my saint and angel? Perhaps—if she were not likewise the woman of my love.

What is she doing now, I wonder? Probably vanishing, lamp in hand, as I have often watched her, up the stair into her own wee room—where she shuts the door and remembers me.

Yes, remember me—but not with pain. Believe that I am happy—that whatever now befalls me, I shall always be happy.

Tell your father—No, tell him nothing. He surely knows all. Or he will know it—when, this life having passed away like a vapour, he and I stand together before the One God—who is also the Redeemer of sinners.

Write to me, but do not come and see me. Hitherto, your name has been kept clear out of everything; it must be still, at any sacrifice to both of us. I count on this from you. You know, you once said, laughing, you had already taken in your heart the marriage vow of “obedience,” if I chose to exact it.

I never did, but I do now. Unless I send for you—which I solemnly promise to do if illness or any other cause makes it necessary—obey me, your husband: do not come and see me.

Three months will pass quickly. Then? But let us not look forward.

My love, good-night.

Max Urquhart.

CHAPTER XII. HER STORY.

Max says I am to write an end to my journal, tie it up with his letters and mine, fasten a stone to it, and drop it over the ship's bulwarks into this blue, blue sea.—That is, either he threatened me or I him—I forget which, with such a solemn termination; but I doubt if we shall ever have courage to do it. It would feel something like dropping a little child into this “wild and wandering grave,” as a poor mother on board had to do yesterday.

“But I shall see him again,” she sobbed, as I was helping her to sew the little white body up in its hammock. “The good God will take care of him and let me find him again, even out of the deep sea. I cannot lose him; I loved him so.”

And thus, I believe, no perfect love, or the record of it, in heart or in word, can ever be lost. So it is of small matter to Max and me, whether this, our true love's history, sinks down into the bottom of the ocean; to sleep there—as we almost expected we should do yesterday, there was such a storm; or is sealed up and preserved for the benefit of—of our great-grandchildren.

Ah! that poor mother and her dead child!

—Max here crept down into the berth to look for me—and I returned with him and left him resting comfortably on the quarter-deck, promising not to stir for a whole hour. I have to take care of him still; but, as I told him, the sea winds are bringing; some of its natural brownness back to his dear old face:—and I shall not consider him “interesting” any more.

During the three months that Max was in prison, I never saw him. Indeed, we never once met from the day we said good-bye in my father's presence, till the day that——But I will continue my story systematically.

All those three months Max was ill; not dangerously—for he said so, and I could believe him. It would have gone very hard with me if I could not have relied on him in this, as in everything. Nevertheless, it was a bitter time, and now I almost wonder how I bore it. Now, when I am ready and willing for everything, except the one thing, which, thank God, I shall never have to bear again—separation.

The day before he came out of prison, Max wrote to me a long and serious letter. Hitherto, both our letters had been filled up with trivialities, such as might amuse him and cheer me, we deferred all plans till he was better. My private thoughts, if I had any, were not clear even to myself, until Max's letter.

It was a very sad letter. Three months' confinement in one cell, with one hour's daily walk round a circle in a walled yard—prisoner's labour, for he took to making mats, saying it amused him; prisoner's rules and fare—no wonder that towards the end even his brave heart gave way.

He broke down utterly. Otherwise he never would have written to me as he did—bidding me farewell, *me!* At first I was startled and shocked; then I laid down the letter and smiled—a very sad sort of smile of course, but still it was a smile. The idea that Max and I could part, or desire to do so, under any human circumstances, seemed one of those amusingly impossible things that one would never stop to argue in the least, either with one's self or any other person. That we loved one another, and therefore some day should probably be married, but that anyhow we belonged to one another till death, were facts at once as simple, natural, and immutable, as that the sun stood in the heavens or that the grass was green.

I wrote back to Max that night.

Not that I did it in any hurry, or impulse of sudden feeling. I took many hours to consider both what I should say, and in what form I should put it. Also, I had doubts whether it would not be best for him, if he accepted the generous offer of Mr. Thorley's son-in-law, made with full knowledge of all circumstances, to go first to America alone. But, think how I would, my thoughts all returned and settled in the same track, in which was written one clear truth; that after God and the right—which means all claims of justice and conscience—the first duty of any two who love truly is towards one another.

I have thought since, that if this truth were plainer seen and more firmly held, by those whom it concerns—many false notions about honour, pride, self-respect, would slip off; many uneasy doubts and divided duties would be set at rest; there would be less fear of the world and more of God, the only righteous fear. People would believe more simply in His ordinance, instituted “from the beginning”—not the mere outward ceremony of a wedding; but the love which draws together man and woman, until it makes them complete in one another, in the mystical marriage union, which, once perfect, should never he disannulled. And if this union begins, as I think it does, from the very hour each feels certain of the other's love—surely, as I said to Max—to talk about giving one another up, whether from poverty, delay, altered circumstances, or compulsion of friends, anything in short except changed love, or lost honour—like poor Penelope and Francis—was about as foolish and wrong as attempting to annul a marriage. Indeed, I have seen many a marriage that might have been broken with far less unholiness than a real troth plight, such as was this of ours.

After a little more “preaching,” (a bad habit that I fear is growing upon me, save that Max merely laughs at it, or when he does not laugh he actually listens!) I ended my letter by the-earnest advice, that he should go and settle in Canada, and go at once; but that he must remember he had to take with him one trifling incumbrance—me.

When the words were written, the deed done, I was a little startled at myself. It looked so exceedingly like my making *him* an offer of marriage! But then—good-bye, foolish doubt! good-bye contemptible, shame! Those few tears that burnt my cheeks after the letter was gone, were the only tears of the sort that I ever shed—that Max will ever suffer me to shed. Max loves me!

His letter in reply I shall not give—not a line of it. It was only *for me*.

So that being settled, the next thing to consider was how matters could be brought about, without delay either. For, with Max's letter, I got one from his good friend Mrs. Ansdell, at whose house in London he had gone to lodge. Her son had followed his two sisters—they were a consumptive family—leaving her a poor old childless widow now. She was very fond of my dear Max, which made her quick-sighted concerning him, and so she wrote as she did, delicately, but sufficiently plainly, to me, whom she said he had told her was, in case of any sudden calamity, to be sent for as “his dearest friend.”

My dear Max! Now, we smile at these sad forebodings; we believe we shall both live to see a good old age. But if I had known that we should only be married a year, a month, a week,—if I had been certain he would die in my arms the very same day—I should still have done exactly what I did.

In one sense, his illness made my path easier. He had need of me, vital, instant need, and no one else had. Also, he was so weak that even his will had left him; he could neither reason nor resist. He just wrote, “You are my conscience; do as you will, only do right.” And then, as Mrs. Ansdell afterwards told me, he lay for days and days, calm, patient; waiting, he says, for another angel than Theodora.

Well—we smile now, at these days, as I said; thank God, we can smile; but it would not do to live them over again.

Max refused to let me come to see him at Mrs. Ansdell's, until my father had been informed of all our plans. But papa went on in his daily life, now so active and cheerful; he did not seem to remember anything concerning Doctor Urquhart and me. For two whole days did I follow him about, watching an opportunity, but it never came. The first person who learnt my secret was Penelope.

How many a time, in these strange summers to come, shall I call to mind that soft English summer night, under the honeysuckle-bush,—Penelope and I sitting at our work; she talking the while of Lisabel's new hope, and considering which of us two should best be spared to go and take care of her in her trial.

“Or, indeed, papa might almost be left alone, for a week or two. He would hardly miss us—he is so well. I should not wonder, if, like grandfather, whom you don't remember, Dora,—he lived to be ninety years old.”

“I hope he may; I hope he may!”

And I burst out sobbing; then, hanging about my sister's neck, I told her all.

“Oh!” I cried, for my tongue seemed unloosed, and I was not afraid of speaking to her, nor even of hurting her—if now she could be hurt by the personal sorrows that mine recalled to her mind. “Oh, Penelope, don't you think it would be right? Papa does not want me—nobody wants me. Or if they did—”

I stopped. Penelope said, meditatively:—“A man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife.”

“And equally, a woman ought to cleave unto her husband. I mean to ask my father's consent to my going with Max to Canada.”

“Ah! that's sudden, child.” And by her start of pain I felt how untruly I had spoken, and how keenly I must have wounded my sister in saying, “Nobody wanted me” at home.

Home, where I lived for nearly twenty-seven years, all of which now seem such happy years. “God do so unto me and more also,” as the old Hebrews used to say, if ever I forget Rockmount, my peaceful maiden-home!

It looked so pretty that night, with the sunset colouring its old walls, and its terrace-walk, where papa was walking to and fro, bareheaded, the rosy light falling like a glory upon his long white hair. To think of him thus pacing his garden, year after year, each year growing older and feebler, and I never seeing him, perhaps never hearing from him; either not coming back at all, or returning after a lapse of years to find nothing left to me but my father's grave!

The conflict was very terrible; nor would Max himself have wished it less. They who do not love their own

flesh and blood, with whom they have lived ever since they were born, how can they know what any love is?

We heard papa call us:—“Come in, you girls! The sun is down, and the dews are falling.” Penelope put her hand softly on my head. “Hush, child, hush! Steal into your own room, and quiet yourself. I will go and explain things to your father.”

I was sure she must have done it in the best and gentlest way; Penelope does everything so wisely and gently now; but when she came to look for me, I knew, before she said a word, that it had been done in vain.

“Dora, you must go yourself and reason with him. But take heed what you say and what you do. There is hardly a man on this earth for whom it is worth forsaking a happy home and a good father.”

And truly, if I had ever had the least doubt of Max, or of our love for one another; if I had not felt as it were already married to him, who had no tie in the whole wide world but me—I never could have nerved myself to say what I did say to my father. If, in the lightest word, it was unjust, unloving or undutiful—may God forgive me, for I never meant it! My heart was breaking almost—but I only wanted to hold fast to the right, as I saw it, and as, so seeing it, I could not but act.

“So, I understand you wish to leave your father?”

“Papa!—papa!”

“Do not argue the point. I thought that folly was all over now. It must be over. Be a good girl, and forget it. There!”

I suppose I must have turned very white, for I felt him take hold of me, and press me into a chair beside him. But it would not do to let my strength go.

“Papa, I want your consent to my marriage with Dr. Urquhart. He would come and ask you himself; but he is too ill. We have waited a long time, and suffered much. He is not young, and I feel old—quite old myself, sometimes. Do not part us any more.”

This was, as near as I can recollect, what I said—said very quietly and humbly, I know it was; for my father seemed neither surprised nor angry; but he sat there as hard as a stone, repeating only, “It *must* be over.”

“Why?”

He answered by one word:—“*Harry*”

“No other reason?”

“None.”

Then I dared to speak out plain, even to my father. “Papa, you said, publicly, you had forgiven him for the death of Harry.”

“But I never said I should forget.”

“Ay, there it is!” I cried out bitterly. “People say they forgive, but they cannot forget. It would go hard with some of us if the just God dealt with us in like manner.”

“You are profane.”

“No! only I am not afraid to bring God's truth into all the circumstances of life, and to judge them by it. I believe,—if Christ came into the world to forgive sinners, we ought to forgive them too.”

Thus far I said—not thinking it just towards Max that I should plead merely for pity to be shewn to him or to me who loved him; but because it was the right and the truth, and as such, both for Max's honour and mine, I strove to put it clearly before my father. And then I gave way, pleading only as a daughter with her father, that he should blot out the past, and not for the sake of one long dead and gone break the heart of his living child.

“Harry would not wish it—I am sure he would not. If Harry has gone where he, too, may find mercy for his many sins, I know that he has long ago forgiven my dear Max.” My father, muttering something about “strange theology,” sat thoughtful. It was some time before he spoke again.

“There is one point of the subject you omit entirely. What will the world say? I, a clergyman, to sanction the marriage of my daughter with the man who took the life of my son? It is not possible.”

Then I grew bold:—“So, it is not the law of God, or justice, or nature, that keeps us asunder—but the world? Father, you have no right to part Max and me for fear of the world.”

When it was said, I repented myself of this. But it was too late. All his former hardness returned as he said:—

“I am aware that I have no legal right to forbid your marriage. You are of age: you may act, as you have all along acted, in defiance of your father.”

Never in defiance, nor even in secret disobedience and I reminded him how all things had been carried on—open and plain—from first to last; how patiently we had waited, and how, if Max were well and prosperous, I might still have said, “We will wait a little longer. Now—”

“Well, and now?”

I went down on my very knees, and with tears and sobs besought my father to let me be Max's wife.

It was in vain.

“Good night: go to your bed, Dora, and weary me no more.”

I rose, certain now that the time was come when I must choose between two duties—between father and husband; the one to whom I owed existence, the other to whose influence I owed everything that had made me a girl worth living, or worth loving. Such crises do come to poor souls!—God guide them, for He only can.

“Good night, father”—my lips felt dry and stiff—it was scarcely my own voice that I heard, “I will wait—there are still a few days.”

He turned suddenly upon me. “What are you planning? Tell the truth.”

“I meant to do so.” And then, briefly,—for each word came out with pain, as if it were a last breath,—I explained that Dr. Urquhart would have to leave for Canada in a month—that, if we had gained my father's

consent, we intended to be married in three weeks, remain a week in England, and then sail.

“And what if I do not give my consent?”

I stopped a moment, and then strength came.

“I must be Max's wife still. God gave us to one another, and God only shall put us asunder.”

After that, I remember nothing till I found myself lying in my own bed with Penelope beside me.

No words can tell how good my sister Penelope was to me in the three weeks that followed. She helped me in all my marriage preparations; few and small, for I had little or no money except what I might have asked papa for, and I would not have done that—not for worlds! Max's wife would have come to him almost as poor as Griseldis, had not Penelope one day taken me to those locked-up drawers of hers.

“Are you afraid of ill-luck with these things? No? Then choose whatever you want, and may you have health and happiness to wear them, my dear.”

And so—with a little more stitching—for I had a sort of superstition that I should like to be married in one new white gown, which my sister and I made between us—we finished and packed the small wardrobe which was all the marriage portion poor Theodora Johnston could bring to her husband.

My father must have been well aware of our preparations, for we did not attempt to hide them; the household knew only that Miss Dora, was “going a journey,” but he knew better—that she was going to leave him and her old home, perhaps for evermore. Yet he said nothing. Sometimes I caught him looking earnestly at me—at the poor face which I saw in the looking-glass—growing daily more white and heavy-eyed—yet he said nothing.

Penelope told me when, hearing me fall, she had run into the library that night, he bade her “take the child away, and say she must not speak to him on this subject any more.” I obeyed. I behaved all through those three weeks as if each day had been like the innumerable other days that I had sat at my father's table, walked and talked by his side, if not the best loved, at least as well loved as any of his daughters. But it was an ordeal such as even to remember gives one a shiver of pain, wondering how one bore it.

During the day-time I was quiet enough, being so busy, and, as I said, Penelope was very good to me; but at night I used to lie awake, seeing, with open eyes, strange figures about the room—especially my mother, or some one I fancied was she. I would often talk to her, asking her if I were acting right or wrong, and whether all that I did for Max she would not have once done for my father? then rouse myself with a start, and a dread that my wits were going, or that some heavy illness was approaching me, and if so, what would become of Max?

At length arrived the last day—the day before my marriage. It was not to be here, of course; but in some London church, near Mrs. Ansdell's, who was to meet me herself at the railway-station early the same morning, and remain with me till I was Dr. Urquhart's wife. I could have no other friend; Penelope and I agreed that it was best not to risk my father's displeasure by asking for her to go to my marriage. So, without sister or father, or any of my own kin, I was to start on my sad wedding-morning—quite alone.

During the week, I had taken an opportunity to drive over to the Cedars, shake hands with Colin and his wife, and give his dear old mother one long kiss, which she did not know was a good-bye. Otherwise I bade farewell to no one. My last walk through the village was amidst a deluge of August rain, in which my moorlands vanished, all mist and gloom. A heavy, heavy night: it will be long before the weight of it is lifted off my remembrance.

And yet I knew I was doing right, and, if needed, would do it all over again. Every human love has its sacrifices and its anguishes, as well as its joys—the one great love of life has often most of all. Therefore, let those beware who enter upon it lightly, or selfishly, or without having counted its full cost.

“I do not know if we shall be happy,” said I to Penelope, when she was cheering me with a future that may never come—“I only know that Max and I have cast our lots together, and that we shall love one another to the end.”

And in that strong love armed, I lived—otherwise, many times that day, it would have seemed easier to have died.

When I went, as usual, to bid papa goodnight, I could hardly stand. He looked at me suspiciously.

“Good night, my dear. By-the-by, Dora, I shall want you to drive me to the Cedars tomorrow.”

“I—I—Penelope will do it.” And I fell on his breast with a pitiful cry. “Only bid me good-bye! Only say 'God bless you,' just once, father.”

He breathed hard. “I thought so. Is it to be to-morrow?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

I told him.

For a few minutes papa let me lie where I was; patting my shoulder softly, as one does a sobbing child—then, still gently, he put me away from him.

“We had better end this, Dora; I cannot bear it. Kiss me. Good-bye.”

“And not one blessing? Papa, papa!”

My father rose, and laid his hand solemnly on my head:—“You have been a dutiful girl to me, in all things save this, and a good daughter makes a good wife. Farewell—wherever you go,—God bless you!”

And as he closed the library-door upon me I thought I had taken my last look of my dear father.

It was only six o'clock in the morning when Penelope took me to the station. Nobody saw us—nobody knew. The man at the railway stopped us, and talked to Penelope for full two minutes about his wife's illness—two whole minutes out of our last five.

—My sister would not bid me good-bye—being determined, she said, to see me again, either in London or Liverpool, before we sailed. She had kept me up wonderfully, and her last kiss was almost cheerful, or she

made it seem so. I can still see her—very pale, for she had been up since daylight, but otherwise quiet and tearless, pacing the solitary platform—our two long shadows gliding together before us, in the early morning sun. And I see her, even to the last minute, standing with her hand on the carriage-door—smiling.

"Give Doctor Urquhart my love—tell him, I know he will take care of you. And child"—turning round once again with her "practical" look that I knew so well, "Remember, I have written 'Miss Johnston,' on your boxes. Afterwards, be sure that you alter the name. Good-bye,—nonsense, it is not really goodbye."

Ay, but it was. For how many, many years?

In that dark, gloomy, London church, which a thundery mist made darker and stiller—I first saw again my dear Max.

Mrs. Ansdell said, lest I should be startled and shocked, that it was only the sight of me which overcame him; that he was really better. And so when, after the first few minutes, he asked me, hesitatingly, "if I did not find him much altered?" I answered boldly, "No! that I should soon get accustomed to his grey hair; besides, I never remembered him either particularly handsome or particularly young." At which he smiled—and then I knew again my own Max! and all things ceased to feel so mournfully strange.

We went into one of the far pews, and Max tried on my ring. How his hands shook! so much that all my trembling passed away, and a great calm came over me. Yes—I had done right. He had nobody but me.

So we sat, side by side, neither of us speaking a word, until the pew-opener came to say the clergyman was ready.

There were several other couples waiting to be married at the same time—who had bridesmaids, and friends, and fathers. We three walked up and took our places—there was no one to pay heed to us. I saw the verger whisper something to Max—to which he answered "Yes," and the old man came and stood behind Mrs. Ansdell and me. A few other folk were dotted about in the pews, but I only noticed them as moving figures, and distinguished none.

The service began—which I—indeed we both—had last heard at Lisabel's wedding—in our pretty church, all flower-adorned, she looking so handsome and happy, with her sisters near her, and her father to give her away. For a moment I felt very desolate: and hearing a pew-door open and a footstep come slowly up the aisle, I trembled with a vague fear that something might happen, something which even at the last moment might part Max and me.

But it did not; I heard him repeat the solemn promises—how dare any one make them lightly, or break them afterwards! to "*love, comfort, honor and keep me, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all other, keep me only unto him, so long as we both should live*" And I felt that I also, out of the entire trust I had in him, and the great love I bore him, could cheerfully forsake all other, father, sisters, kindred, and friends, for him. They were very dear to me, and would be always: but he was part of myself,—my husband.

And here let me relate a strange thing—so unexpected that Max and I shall always feel it as a special blessing from heaven to crown all our pain and send us forth on our new life in peace and joy. When in the service came the question:—"Who giveth this woman, &c"—there was no answer, and the silence went like a stab to my heart. The minister, thinking there was some mistake, repeated it again:—"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

"I do."

It was not a stranger's voice, but my dear father's.

My husband had asked me where I should best like to go for our marriage journey. I said, to St. Andrews. Max grew much better there. He seemed better from the very hour, when, papa having remained with us till our train started, we were for the first time left alone by our two selves. An expression ungrammatical enough to be quite worthy, Max would say, of his little lady, but people who are married will understand what it means.—We did, I think, as we sat still, my head on his shoulder and my hand between both his, watching the fields, trees, hills, and dales, fly past like changing shadows; never talking at all, nor thinking much, except—the glad thought came in spite of all the bitterness of of these good-byes—that there was one goodbye which never need be said again. We were married.

I was delighted with St. Andrews. We shall always talk of our four days there, so dream-like at the time, yet afterwards become clear in remembrance down to the minutest particulars. The sweetness of them will last us through many a working hour, many an hour of care—such as we know must come, in ours as in all human lives. We are not afraid: we are together.

Our last day in St. Andrews was Sunday, and Max took me to his own Presbyterian church, in which he and his brother were brought up, and of which Dallas was to have been a minister. From his many wanderings it so happened that my husband had not heard the Scotch service for many years, and he was much affected by it. I too—when, reading together the psalms at the end of his Bible, he shewed me, silently, the name written in it—Dallas Urquhart..

The psalm—I shall long remember it, with the tune it was sung to—which was strange to me, but Max knew it well of old, and it had been a particular favourite with Dallas. Surely if spirit, freed from flesh, be everywhere, or, if permitted, can go anywhere that it desires,—not very far from us two, as we sat singing that Sunday, must have been our brother Dallas.

"How lovely is thy dwelling place
O Lord of hosts, to me!—
The tabernacles of thy grace

How pleasant, Lord, they be!
My thirsty soul longs vehemently
Yea, faints, thy courts to see:
My very heart and flesh cry out
O living God, for thee.. . .
Blest are they, in thy house who dwell,
Who ever give thee praise;
Blest is the man whose strength thou art
In whose heart are thy ways:
Who, passing thorough Baca's vale,
Therein do dig up wells:
Also the rain that falleth down
The pools with water fills.
Thus they from strength unwearied go
Still forward unto strength:
Until in Zion they appear
Before the Lord at length.

Amen! So, when this life is ended, may we appear, even there still together,—my husband and I!

Contrary to our plans, we did not see Rockmount again, nor Penelope, nor my dear father. It was thought best not. Especially as in a few years at latest, we hope, God willing, to visit them all again, or perhaps even to settle in England.

After a single day spent at Treherne Court, Augustus went with us one sunshiny morning on board the American steamer, which lay so peacefully in the middle of the Mersey—just as if she were to lie there for ever, instead of sailing, and we with her—in one little half hour. Sailing far away, far away to a home we knew not, leaving the old familiar faces and the old familiar land.

It seemed doubly precious now, and beautiful; even the sandy flats, that Max had so often told me about, along the Mersey shore. I saw him look thoughtfully towards them, after pointing out to me the places he knew, and where his former work had lain.

“That is all over now,” he said, half sadly. “Nothing has happened as I planned, or hoped, or—”

“Or feared.”

“No. My dear wife, no! Yet all has been for good. All is very good. I shall find new work in a new country.”

“And I too?”

Max smiled. “Yes, she too. We'll work together, my little lady!”

The half hour was soon over—the few last words soon said. But I did not at all realize that we were away, till I saw Augustus wave us good-bye, and heard the sudden boom of our farewell gun as the *Europa* slipped off her mail-tender, and went steaming seaward alone—fast, oh! so fast.

The sound of that gun, it must have nearly broken many a heart, many a time! I think it would have broken mine, had I not, standing, close-clasped, by my husband's side, looked up in his dear face, and read, as he in mine, that to us thus together, everywhere was Home.

THE END.

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