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Title: Adela Cathcart, Volume 2

Author: George MacDonald

Release date: September 1, 2005 [EBook #8929]
Most recently updated: August 8, 2012

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Jonathan Ingram, David Garcia and Distributed Proofreaders

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ADELA CATHCART, VOLUME 2 ***

ADELA CATHCART

BY GEORGE MacDONALD

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ADELA CATHCART.

CHAPTER I.

SONG.

I confess I was a little dismayed to find what a solemn turn the club-stories had taken. But this dismay lasted for a moment only; for I saw that Adela was deeply interested, again wearing the look that indicates abstracted thought and feeling. I said to myself:

"This is very different mental fare from what you have been used to, Adela."

But she seemed able to mark, learn, and inwardly digest it, for she had the appearance of one who is stilled by the strange newness of her thoughts. I was sure that she was now experiencing a consciousness of existence quite different from anything she had known before. But it had a curious outcome.

For, when the silence began to grow painful, no one daring to ask a question, and Mrs. Cathcart had resumed her knitting, Adela suddenly rose, and going to the piano, struck a few chords, and began to sing. The song was one of Heine's strange, ghost-dreams, so unreal in everything but feeling, and therefore, as dreams, so true. Why did she choose such a song after what we had been listening to? I accounted for it by the supposition that, being but poorly provided as far as variety in music went, this was the only thing suggested to her by the tone of the paper, and, therefore, the nearest she could come to it. It served, however, to make a change and a transition; which was, as I thought, very desirable, lest any of the company should be scared from attending the club; and I resolved that I would divert the current, next time, if I could.

This was what Adela sang; and the singing of it was evidently a relief to her:

I dreamt of the daughter of a king,
  With a cheek white, wet, and chill;
Under the limes we sat murmuring,
  And holding each other so still!

"Oh! not thy father's sceptre of gold,
  Nor yet his shining throne,
Nor his diamond crown that glitters cold—
  'Tis thyself I want, my own!"

"Oh! that is too good," she answered me;
  "I lie in the grave all day;
And only at night I come to thee,
  For I cannot keep away."

It was something that she had volunteered a song, whatever it was. But it is a misfortune that, in writing a book, one cannot give the music of a song. Perhaps, by the time that music has its fair part in education, this may be done. But, meantime, we mention the fact of a song, and then give the words, as if that were the song. The music is the song, and the words are no more than the saddle on which the music sits, the singer being the horse, who could do without a saddle well enough.—May Adela forgive the comparison!—At the same time, a true-word song has music of its own, and is quite independent, for its music, both of that which it may beget, and of that with which it may be associated.

As she rose, she glanced towards the doctor, and said:

"Now it is your turn, Mr. Armstrong."

Harry did not wait for a second invitation; for to sing was to him evidently a pleasure too great to be put in jeopardy. He rose at once, and sitting down at the instrument, sang—I cannot say *as follows*, you see; I can only say *the following words*:

Autumn clouds are flying, flying,
  O'er the waste of blue;
Summer flowers are dying, dying,
  Late so lovely new.
Labouring wains are slowly rolling
  Home with winter grain;
Holy bells are slowly tolling
  Over buried men.

Goldener lights set noon a-sleeping
  Like an afternoon;
Colder airs come stealing, creeping
  After sun and moon;
And the leaves, all tired of blowing
  Cloudlike o'er the sun,
Change to sunset-colours, knowing
  That their day is done.

Autumn's sun is sinking, sinking
  Into Winter's night;
And our hearts are thinking, thinking
  Of the cold and blight.
Our life's sun is slowly going
  Down the hill of might;
Will our clouds shine golden-glowing
  On the slope of night?

But the vanished corn is lying
  In rich golden glooms.
In the churchyard, all the singing
  Is above the tombs.
Spring will come, slow-lingering,
  Opening buds of faith.
Man goes forth to meet his spring,
  Through the door of death.

So we love, with no less loving,
  Hair that turns to grey;
Or a step less lightly moving
  In life's autumn day.
And if thought, still-brooding, lingers
  O'er each bygone thing,
'Tis because old Autumn's fingers
  Paint in hues of Spring.

The whole tone of this song was practical and true, and so was fitted to correct the unhealthiness of imagination which might have been suspected in the choice of the preceding. "Words and music," I said to myself, "must here have come from the same hand; for they are one utterance. There is no setting of words to music here; but the words have brought their own music with them; and the music has brought its own words."

As Harry rose from the piano-forte, he said to me gaily:

"Now, Mr. Smith, it is your turn. I know when you sing, it will be something worth listening to."

"Indeed, I hope so," I answered. "But the song-hour has not yet come to me. How good you all ought to be who can sing! I feel as if my heart would break with delight, if I could sing; and yet there is not a sparrow on the housetop that cannot sing a better song than I."

"Your hour will come," said the clergyman, solemnly. "Then you will sing, and all we shall listen. There is no inborn longing that shall not be fulfilled. I think that is as certain as the forgiveness of sins. Meantime, while your singing-robes are making, I will take your place with my song, if Miss Cathcart will allow me."

"Do, please," said Adela, very heartily; "we shall all be delighted."

The clergyman sang, and sang even better than his brother. And these were the words of his song:

The Mother Mary to the infant Jesus.

'Tis time to sleep, my little boy;
  Why gaze they bright eyes so?
At night, earth's children, for new joy,
  Home to thy Father go.
But thou art wakeful. Sleep, my child;
  The moon and stars are gone;
The wind and snow they grow more wild,
  And thou art smiling on.

My child, thou hast immortal eyes,
  That see by their own light;
They see the innocent blood—it lies
  Red-glowing through the night.
Through wind and storm unto thine ear
  Cry after cry doth run;
And yet thou seemest not to hear,
  And only smilest on.

When first thou earnest to the earth,
  All sounds of strife were still;
A silence lay around thy birth,
  And thou didst sleep thy fill.
Why sleep'st thou—nay, why weep'st thou not?
  Thy earth is woe-begone;
Babies and mothers wail their lot,
  And still thou smilest on.

I read thine eyes like holy book;
  No strife is pictured there;
Upon thy face I see the look
  Of one who answers prayer.
Ah, yes!—Thine eyes, beyond this wild,
  Behold God's will well done;
Men's songs thine ears are hearing, child;
  And so thou smilest on.

The prodigals arise and go,
  And God goes forth to meet;
Thou seest them gather, weeping low,
  About the Father's feet.
And for their brothers men must bear,
  Till all are homeward gone.
O Eyes, ye see my answered prayer!
  Smile, Son of God, smile on.

As soon as the vibrations of this song, I do not mean on the chords of the instrument, but in the echo-caves of our bosoms, had ceased, I turned to the doctor and said:

"Are you ready with your story yet, Mr. Henry?"

"Oh, dear no!" he answered—"not for days. I am not an idle man like you, Mr. Smith. I belong to the labouring class."

I knew that he could not have it ready.

"Well," I said, "if our friends have no objection, I will give you another myself next time."

"Oh! thank you, uncle," said Adela.—"Another fairy tale, please."

"I can't promise you another fairy-tale just yet, but I can promise you something equally absurd, if that will do."

"Oh yes! Anything you like, uncle. *I*, for one, am sure to like what you like."

"Thank you, my dear. Now I will go; for I see the doctor waiting to have a word with you."

The company took their leave, and the doctor was not two minutes behind them; for as I went up to my room, after asking the curate when I might call upon him, I saw him come out of the drawing-room and go down stairs.

"Monday evening, then," I had heard the colonel say, as he followed his guests to the hall.

CHAPTER II.

THE CURATE AND HIS WIFE.

As I approached the door of the little house in which the curate had so lately taken up his abode, he saw me from the window, and before I had had time to knock, he had opened the door.

"Come in," he said. "I saw you coming. Come to my den, and we will have a pipe together."

"I have brought some of my favourite cigars," I said, "and I want you to try them."

"With all my heart."

The room to which he led me was small, but disfigured with no offensive tidiness. Not a spot of wall was to be seen for books, and yet there were not many books after all. We sat for some minutes enjoying the fragrance of the western incense, without other communion than that of the clouds we were blowing, and what I gathered from the walls. For I am old enough, as I have already confessed, to be getting long-sighted, and I made use of the gift in reading the names of the curate's books, as I had read those of his brother's. They were mostly books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a large admixture from the nineteenth, and more than the usual proportion of the German classics; though, strange to say, not a single volume of German Theology could I discover. The curate was the first to break the silence.

"I find this a very painful cigar," he said, with a half laugh.

"I am sorry you don't like it. Try another."

"The cigar is magnificent."

"Isn't it thoroughfare, then?"

"Oh yes! the cigar's all right. I haven't smoked such a cigar for more than ten years; and that's the reason."

"I wish I had known you seven years, Mr. Armstrong."

"You have known me a hundred and seven."

"Then I have a right to—"

"Poke my fire as much as you please."

And as Mr. Armstrong said so, he poked his own chest, to signify the symbolism of his words.

"Then I should like to know something of your early history—something to account for the fact that a man like you, at your time of life, is only a curate."

"I can do all that, and account for the pain your cigar gives me, in one and the same story."

I sat full of expectation.

"You won't find me long-winded, I hope."

"No fear of that. Begin directly. I adjure you by our friendship of a hundred years."

"My father was a clergyman before me; one of those simple-hearted men who think that to be good and kind is the first step towards doing God's work; but who are too modest, too ignorant, and sometimes too indolent to aspire to any second step, or even to inquire what the second step may be. The poor in his parish loved him and preyed upon him. He gave and gave, even after he had no more that he had a right to give.

"He was not by any means a rich man, although he had a little property besides his benefice; but he managed to send me to Oxford. Inheriting, as I suspect, a little tendency to extravagance; having at least no love of money except for what it would bring; and seeing how easily money might be raised there for need true or false, I gradually learned to think less and less of the burdens grievous to be borne, which a subjection to Mammon will accumulate on the shoulders of the unsuspecting ass. I think the old man of the sea in *Sindbad the Sailor*, must personify debt. At least *I* have found reason to think so. At the same time I wish I had done nothing worse than run into debt. Yet by far the greater part of it was incurred for the sake of having works of art about me. Of course pictures were out of the question; but good engravings and casts were within the reach of a borrower. At least it was not for the sake of whip-handles and trowsers, that I fell into the clutches of Moses Melchizedek, for that was the name of the devil to whom I betrayed my soul for money. Emulation, however, mingled with the love of art; and I must confess too, that cigars costs me money as well as pictures; and as I have already hinted, there was worse behind. But some things we can only speak to God about.

"I shall never forget the oily face of the villain—may God save him, and then he'll be no villain!—as he first hinted that he would lend me any money I might want, upon certain insignificant conditions, such as signing for a hundred and fifty, where I should receive only a hundred. The sunrise of the future glowed so golden, that it seemed to me the easiest thing in the world to pay my debts *there*. Here, there was what I wanted, cigars and all. There, there must be gold, else whence the hue? I could pay all my debts in the future, with the utmost ease. *How* was no matter. I borrowed and borrowed. I flattered myself, besides, that in the things I bought I held money's worth; which, in the main, would have been true, if I had been a dealer in such things; but a mere owner can seldom get the worth of what he possesses, especially when he cannot choose but sell, and has no choice of his market. So when, horrified at last with the filth of the refuge into which I had run to escape the bare walls of heaven, I sold off everything but a few of my pet books"—here he glanced lovingly round his humble study, where shone no glories of print or cast—"which I ought to have sold as well, I found myself still a thousand pounds in debt.

"Now although I had never had a thousand pounds from Melchizedek, I had known perfectly well what I was about. I had been deluded, but not cheated; and in my deep I saw yet a lower depth, into which I *would* not fall—for then I felt I should be lost indeed—that of in any way repudiating my debts. But what was to be done I had no idea.

"I had studied for the church, and I now took holy orders. I had a few pounds a year from my mother's property, which all went in part-payment of the interest of my debt, I dared not trouble my father with any communication on the subject of my embarrassment, for I knew that he could not help me, and that the impossibility of doing so would make him more unhappy than the wrong I had done in involving myself. I seized the first offer of a curacy that presented itself. Its emoluments were just one hundred pounds a-year, of which I had *not* to return twenty pounds, as some curates have had to do. Out of this I had to pay one half, in interest for the thousand pounds. On the other half, and the trifle my mother allowed me, I contrived to live.

"But the debt continued undiminished. It lay upon me as a mountain might crush a little Titan. There was no cracking frost, no cutting stream, to wear away, by slowest trituration, that mountain of folly and wickedness. But what I suffered most from was the fact, that I must seem to the poor of my parish unsympathetic and unkind. For although I still managed to give away a little, it seemed to me such a small shabby sum, every time that I drew my hand from my pocket, in which perhaps I had left still less, that it was with a positive feeling of shame that I offered it. There was no high generosity in this. It was mostly selfish—the effect of the transmission of my father's blind benevolence, working as an impulse in me. But it made me wretched. Add to this a feeling of hypocrisy, in the knowledge that I, the dispenser of sacred things to the people, was myself the slave of a money-lending Jew, and you will easily see how my life could not be to me the reality which it must be, for any true and healthy action, to every man. In a word, I felt that I was humbug. As to my preaching, that could not have had much reality in it of any kind, for I had no experience yet of the relation of Christian Faith to Christian Action. In fact, I regarded them as separable—not merely as distinguishable, in the necessity which our human nature, itself an analysis of the divine, has for analysing itself. I respected everything connected with my profession, which I regarded as in itself eminently respectable; but, then, it was only the profession I respected, and I was only *doing church* at best. I have since altered my opinion about the profession, as such; and while I love my work with all my heart, I do not care to think about its worldly relations at all. The honour is to be a servant of men, whom God thought worth making, worth allowing to sin, and worth helping out of it at such a cost. But as far as regards the *profession*, is it a manly kind of work, to put on a white gown once a week, and read out of a book; and then put on a black gown, and read out of a paper you bought or wrote; all about certain old time-honoured legends which have some influence in keeping the common people on their good behaviour, by promising them happiness after they are dead, if they are respectable, and everlasting torture if they are blackguards? Is it manly?"

"You are scarcely fair to the profession even as such, Mr. Armstrong," I said.

"That's what I *feel* about it," he answered. "Look here," he went on, holding out a brawny right arm, with muscles like a prize-fighter's, "they may laugh at what, by a happy hit, they have called muscular christianity—I for one don't object to being laughed at—but I ask you, is that work fit for a man to whom God has given an arm like that? I declare to you, Smith, I would rather work in the docks, and leave the *churching* to the softs and dandies; for then I should be able to respect myself as giving work for my bread, instead of drawing so many pounds a-year for talking *goody* to old wives and sentimental young ladies;—for over men who are worth anything, such a man has no influence. God forbid that I should be disrespectful to old women, or even sentimental young ladies! They are worth *serving* with a man's whole heart, but not worth pampering. I am speaking of the profession as professed by a mere clergyman—one in whom the professional predominates."

"But you can't use those splendid muscles of yours in the church."

"But I can give up the use of them for something better and nobler. They indicate work; but if I can do real spiritual instead of corporeal work, I rise in the scale. I sacrifice my thews on the altar of my faith. But by the mere clergyman, there is no work done to correspond—I do not say to *his* capacity for work—but to the capacity for work indicated by such a frame as mine—work of some sort, if not of the higher poetic order, then of the lower porter-sort. But if there be a living God, who is doing all he can to save men, to make them pure and noble and high, humble and loving and true, to make them live the life he cares to live himself; if he has revealed and is revealing this to men, and needs for his purpose the work of their fellow-men, who have already seen and known this purpose, surely there is no nobler office than that of a parson; for to him is committed the grand work of letting men see the thoughts of God, and the work of God—in a word, of telling the story of Jesus, so that men shall see how true it is for *now*, how beautiful it is for *ever*; and recognize it as in fact *the* story of God. Then a clergyman has simply to be more of a man than other men; whereas if he be but a clergyman, he is less of a man than any other man who does honestly the work he has to do, whether he be farm-labourer, shoemaker, or shopkeeper. For such a work, a man may well pine in a dungeon, or starve in a curacy; yea, for such a work, a man will endure the burden of having to dispense the wealth of a bishopric after a divine fashion."

"But your story?" I said at last, unwilling as I was to interrupt his eloquence.

"Yes. This brings me back to it. Here was I starving for no high principle, only for the commonplace one of paying my debts; and paying my debts out of the church's money too, for which, scanty as it was, I gave wretched labour—reading prayers as neatly as I could, and preaching sermons half evangelical, half scholastic, of the most unreal and uninteresting sort; feeling all the time hypocritical, as I have already said; and without the farthest prospect of deliverance.

"Then I fell in love."

"Worse and worse!"

"So it seemed; but so it wasn't—like a great many things. At all events, she's down stairs now, busy at a baby's frock, I believe; God bless her! Lizzie is the daughter of a lieutenant in the army, who died before I knew her. She was living with her mother and elder sister, on a very scanty income, in the village where I had the good fortune to be the unhappy curate. I believe I was too unhappy to make myself agreeable to the few young ladies of my congregation, which is generally considered one of the first duties of a curate, in order, no doubt, to secure their co-operation in his charitable schemes; and certainly I do not think I received any great attention from them—certainly not from Lizzie. I thought she pitied and rather despised me. I don't know whether she did, but I still suspect it. I am thankful to say I have no ground for thinking she does now. But we have been through a kind of a moderate burning fiery furnace together, and that brings out the sense, and burns out the nonsense, in both men and women. Not that Lizzie had much nonsense to be burned out of her, as you will soon see.

"I had often been fool enough to wonder that, while she was most attentive and devout during the reading of the service, her face assumed, during the sermon, a far off look of abstraction, that indicated no reception of what I said, further than as an influence of soporific quality. I felt that there was re-proof in this. In fact, it roused my conscience yet more, and made me doubt whether there was anything genuine in me at all. Sometimes I felt as if I really could not go on, but must shut up my poor manuscript, which was 'an ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own,' and come down from the pulpit, and beg Miss Lizzie Payton's pardon for presuming to read it in her presence. At length that something, or rather want of something, in her quiet unregarding eyes, aroused a certain opposition, ambition, indignation in me. I strove to write better, and to do better generally. Every good sentence, I launched at her—I don't quite know whether I aimed at her heart or her head—I fear the latter; but I know that I looked after my arrow with a hurried glance, to see whether it had reached the mark. Seldom, however, did I find that my bow had had the strength to arouse Miss Lizzie from the somniculose condition which, in my bitterness, I attributed to her. Since then I have frequently tried to bring home to her the charge, and wring from her the confession that, occasionally, just occasionally, she was really overpowered by the weather. But she has never admitted more than one such lapse, which, happening in a hard frost, and the church being no warmer than condescension, she wickedly remarked must have been owing, not to the weight of the atmosphere, but the weight of something else. At length, in my anxiety for self-justification, I persuaded myself that her behaviour was a sign of spiritual insensibility; that she needed conversion; that she looked with contempt from the far-off table-lands of the Broad church, or the dizzy pinnacles of snow-clad Puseyism, upon the humble efforts of one who followed in the footsteps of the first fishers of men—for such I tried, in my self-protection, to consider myself.

"One day, I happened to meet her in a retired lane near the village. She was carrying a jug in her hand.

"'How do you do, Miss Lizzie? A labour of love?' I said, ass that I was!

"'Yes,' she answered; 'I've been over to Farmer Dale's, to fetch some cream for mamma's tea.'

"She knew well enough I had meant a ministration to the poor.

"'Oh! I beg your pardon,' I rejoined; 'I thought you had been round your district.'

"This was wicked; for I knew quite well that she had no district.

"'No,' she answered, 'I leave that to my sister. Mamma is my district. And do you know, her headaches are as painful as any washerwoman's.'

"This shut me up rather; but I plucked up courage presently.

"'You don't seem to like going to church, Miss Lizzie.'

"Her face flushed.

"'Who dares to say so? I am very regular in my attendance.'

"'Not a doubt of it. But you don't enjoy being there.'

"'I do.'

"'Confess, now.—You don't like my sermons.'

"'Do you like them yourself, Mr. Armstrong?'

"Here was a floorer! Did I like them myself?—I really couldn't honestly say I did. I was not greatly interested in them, further than as they were my own, and my best attempts to say something about something I knew nothing about. I was silent. She stood looking at me out of clear grey eyes.

"'Now you have begun this conversation, Mr. Armstrong, I will go on with it,' she said, at length. 'It was not of my seeking.—I do not think you believe what you say in the pulpit.'

"Not believe what I said! Did I believe what I said? Or did I only believe that it was to be believed? The tables were turned with a vengeance. Here was the lay lamb, attacked and about to be worried by the wolf clerical, turning and driving the said wolf to bay. I stood and felt like a convicted criminal before the grey eyes of my judge. And somehow or other I did not hate those clear pools of light. They were very beautiful. But not one word could I find to say for myself. I stood and looked at her, and I fear I began to twitch at my neck cloth, with a vague instinct that I had better go and hang myself. I stared and stared, and no doubt got as red as a turkey-cock—till it began to be very embarrassing indeed. What refuge could there be from one who spoke the truth so plainly? And how do you think I got out of it?" asked Mr. Armstrong of me, John Smith, who, as he told the story, felt almost in as great confusion and misery as the narrator must have been in at that time, although now he looked amazingly jolly, and breathed away at his cigar with the slow exhalations of an epicure.

"Mortal cannot tell," I answered.

"One mortal can," rejoined he, with a laugh.—"I fell on my knees, and made speechless love to her."

Here came a pause. The countenance of the broad-church-man changed as if a lovely summer cloud had passed over it. The jolly air vanished, and he looked very solemn for a little while.

"There was no coxcombry in it, Smith. I may say that for myself. It was the simplest and truest thing I ever did in my life. How was I to help it? There stood the visible truth before me, looking out of the woman's grey eyes. What was I to do? I thank God, I have never seen the truth plain before me, let it look ever so ghostly, without rushing at it. All my advances have been by a sudden act—to me like an inspiration;—an act done in terror, almost, lest I should stop and think about it, and fail to do it. And here was no ghost, but a woman-angel, whose *Thou art the man* was spoken out of profundities of sweetness and truth. Could I turn my back upon her? Could I parley with her?—with the Truth? No. I fell on my knees, weeping like a child; for all my misery, all my sense of bondage and untruth, broke from me in those tears.

"My hat had fallen off as I knelt. My head was bowed on my hands. I felt as if she could save me. I dared not look up. She tells me since that she was bewildered and frightened, but I discovered nothing of that. At length I felt a light pressure, a touch of healing, fall on my bended head. It was her hand. Still I hid my face, for I was ashamed before her.

"'Come,' she said, in a low voice, which I dare say she compelled to be firm; 'come with me into the Westland Woods. There we can talk. Some one may come this way.'

"She has told me since that a kind of revelation came to her at the moment; a sight not of the future but of the fact; and that this lifted her high above every feeling of mere propriety, substituting for it a conviction of right. She felt that God had given this man to her; and she no more hesitated to ask me to go with her into the woods, than she would hesitate to go with me now if I asked her. And indeed if she had not done so, I don't know what would have come of it—how the story would have ended. I believe I should be kneeling there now, a whitened skeleton, to the terror and warning of all false churchmen who should pass through the lonely lane.

"I rose at once, like an obedient child, and turned in the direction of the Westland Woods, feeling that she was by my side, but not yet daring to look at her.—Now there are few men to whom I would tell the trifle that followed. It was a trifle as to the outside of it; but it is amazing what *virtue*, in the old meaning of the word, may lie in a trifle. The recognition of virtue is at the root of all magical spells, and amulets, and talismans. Mind, I felt from the first that you and I would understand each other."

"You rejoice my heart," I said.

"Well, the first thing I had to do, as you may suppose, to make me fit to look at her, was to wipe my eyes. I put my hand in my pocket; then my first hand in the breast pocket; then the other hand in the other pocket; and the slow-dawning awful truth became apparent, that here was a great brute of a curate, who had been crying like a baby, and had no handkerchief. A moment of keen despair followed—chased away by a vision of hope, in the shape of a little white cloud between me and the green grass. This cloud floated over a lady's hand, and was in fact a delicate handkerchief. I took it, and brought it to my eyes, which gratefully acknowledged the comfort. And the scent of the lavender—not lavender water, but the lavender itself, that puts you in mind of country churches, and old bibles, and dusky low-ceiled parlours on Sunday afternoons—the scent of the lavender was so pure and sweet, and lovely! It gave me courage.

"'May I keep it?' I asked

"'Yes. Keep it,' she answered.

"'Will you take my arm now?'

"For answer, she took my arm, and we entered the woods. It was a summer afternoon. The sun had outflanked the thick clouds of leaves that rendered the woods impregnable from overhead, and was now shining in, a little sideways, with that slumberous light belonging to summer afternoons, in which everything, mind and all, seems half asleep and all dreaming.

"'Let me carry the jug,' I said.

"'No,' she answered, with a light laugh; 'you would be sure to spill the cream, and spoil both your coat and mamma's tea.'

"'Then put it down in this hollow till we come back.'

"'It would be full of flies and beetles in a moment. Besides we won't come back this way, shall we? I can carry it quite well. Gentlemen don't like carrying things.'

"I feared lest the tone the conversation had assumed, might lead me away from the resolution I had formed while kneeling in the lane. So, as usual with me, I rushed blindly on the performance.

"'Miss Lizzie, I am a hypocritical and unhappy wretch.'

"She looked up at me with a face full of compassionate sympathy. I could have lost myself in that gaze. But I would not be turned from my purpose, of which she had no design, though her look had almost the power; and, the floodgates of speech once opened, out it came, the whole confession I have made to you, in what form or manner, I found, the very first time I looked back upon the relation, that I had quite forgotten.

"All the time, the sun was sending ever so many sloping ladders of light down through the trees, for there was a little mist rising that afternoon; and I felt as if they were the same kind of ladder that Jacob saw, inviting a man to climb up to the light and peace of God. I felt as if upon them invisible angels were going up and down all through the summer wood, and that the angels must love our woods as we love their skies. And amidst the trees and the ladders of ether, we walked, and I talked, and Lizzie listened to all I had to say, without uttering a syllable till I had finished.

"At length, having disclosed my whole bondage and grief, I ended with the question:

"'Now, what is to be done?'

"She looked up in my face with those eyes of truth, and said:

"'That money must be paid, Mr. Armstrong.'

"'But how?' I responded, in despair.

"She did not seem to heed my question, but she really answered it.

"'And, if I were you, I would do no more duty till it was paid.'

"Here was decision with a vengeance. It was more than I had bargained for. I was dumb. A moment's reflection, however, showed me that she was perfectly right—that what I had called *decision with a vengeance*, was merely the utterance of a child's perception of the true way to walk in.

"Still I was silent; for long vistas of duty, and loss, and painful action and effort opened before me. At length I said:

"'You are quite right, Miss Lizzie.'

"'I wish I could pay it for you,' she rejoined, looking up in my face with an expression of still tenderness, while the tears clouded her eyes just as clouds of a deeper grey come over the grey depths of some summer skies.

"'But you can help me to pay it.'

"'How?'

"'Love me,' I said, and no more. I could not.

"The only answer she made, was to look up at me once more, then stop, and, turning towards me, draw herself gently against my side, as she held my arm. It was enough—was it not?

"*Love me*, I said, and she did love me; and she's down stairs, as I told you; and I think she is not unhappy."

"But you're not going to stop there," I said.

"No, I'm not.—That very evening I told the vicar that I must go. He pressed for my reasons; but I managed to avoid giving a direct answer. I begged him to set me at liberty as soon as possible, meaning, when he should have provided himself with a substitute. But he took offence at last, and told me I might go when I pleased; for he was quite able to perform the duties himself. After this, I felt it would be unpleasant for him as well as for me, if I remained, and so I took him at his word. And right glad I was not to have to preach any more to Lizzie. It was time for me to act instead of talk.

"But what was I to do?—The moment the idea of ceasing to *do church* was entertained by me, the true notion of what I was to do instead presented itself. It was this. I would apply to my cousin, the accountant. He was an older man, considerably, than myself, and had already made a fortune in his profession. We had been on very good terms indeed, considering that he was a dissenter, and all but hated the church; while, I fear, I quite despised dissenters. I had often dined with him, and he had found out that I had a great turn for figures, as he called it. Having always been fond of mathematics, I had been able to assist him in arriving at a true conclusion on what had been to him a knotty point connected with life-insurance; and consequently he had a high opinion of my capacity in his department.

"I wrote to him, telling him I had resolved to go into business for a time. I did not choose to enlighten him further; and I fear I fared the better with him from his fancying that I must have begun to entertain doubts concerning church-establishments. I had the cunning not to ask him to employ me; for I thought it very likely he would request my services, which would put me in a better position with him. And it fell out as I had anticipated. He replied at once, offering me one hundred and fifty pounds to begin, with the prospect of an annual advance of twenty pounds, if, upon further trial, we both found the arrangement to our minds. I knew him to be an honourable man, and accepted the proposal at once. And I cannot tell how light-hearted I felt as I folded up my canonicals, and put them in a box to be left, for the meantime, in the charge of my landlady.

"I was troubled with no hesitation as to the propriety of the proceeding. Of course I felt that if it had been mere money-making, a clergyman ought to have had nothing to do with it; but I felt now, on the other hand, that if any man was bound to pay his debts, a clergyman was; in fact, that he could not do his duty till he had paid his debts; and that the wrong was not in turning to business now, but in having undertaken the office with a weight of filthy lucre on my back and my conscience, which my pocket could never relieve them of. Any scruple about the matter, I felt would be only superstition; that, in fact, it was a course of action worthy of a man, and therefore of a clergyman. I thought well enough of the church, too, to believe that every man of any manliness in it, would say that I had done right. And, to tell the truth, so long as Lizzie was satisfied with me, I did not care for archdeacon, or bishop. I meant just to drop out of the ranks of the clergy without sign, and keep my very existence as secret as possible, until the moment I had achieved my end, when I would go to my bishop, and tell him all, requesting to be reinstated in my sacred office. There was only one puzzle in the affair, and that was how the act towards Mrs. Payton in regard to her daughter's engagement to me. The old lady was not gifted with much common sense, I knew; and I feared both that she would be shocked at the idea, and that she would not keep my secret. Of course I consulted Lizzie about it. She had been thinking about it already, and had concluded that the best way would be for her to tell her mother the fact of our engagement, and for me to write to her from London that I did not intend taking a second charge for some time yet; and so leave Lizzie to act for the rest as occasion might demand. All this was very easily managed, and in the course of another week, chiefly devoted to the Westland Woods, I found myself at a desk in Cannon Street.

"And now began a real experience of life. I had resolved to regard the money I earned as the ransom-money of the church, paid by her for the redemption of an erring servant from the power of Mammon: I would therefore spend upon myself not one penny more than could be helped. With this view, and perhaps with a lurking notion of penance in some corner of my stupid brain, I betook myself to a lodging house in Hatton Garden, where I paid just three shillings a week for a bedroom, if that could be called a room which was rather a box, divided from a dozen others by partitions of seven or eight feet in height. I had, besides, the use of a common room, with light and fire, and the use of a kitchen for cooking my own victuals, if I required any, presided over by an old man, who was rather dirtier than necessity could justify, or the amount of assistance he rendered could excuse. But I managed to avoid this region of the establishment, by both breakfasting and dining in eating-houses, of which I soon found out the best and cheapest. It is amazing upon how little a man with a good constitution, a good conscience, and an object, can live in London. I lived and throve. My bedroom, though as small as it could possibly have been, was clean, with all its appointments; and for a penny a week additional, I had the use of a few newspapers. The only luxuries I indulged in, besides one pipe of bird's-eye a day, were writing verses, and teaching myself German. This last led to some little extravagance, for I soon came to buy German books at the bookstalls; but I thought the church would get the advantage of it by and by; and so I justified myself in it. I translated a great many German songs. Now and then you will hear my brother sing one of them. He was the only one of my family who knew where I lived. The others addressed their letters to my cousin's place of business. My father was dreadfully cut up at my desertion of the church, as he considered it. But I told my brother the whole story, and he went home, as he declared, prouder of his big brother than if he had been made a bishop of. I believe he soon comforted the dear old man, by helping him to see the matter in its true light; and not one word of reproach did I ever receive from his lips or his pen. He did his best likewise to keep the whole affair a secret.

"But a thousand pounds with interest, was a dreadful sum. However, I paid the interest and more than fifty pounds of the principal the first year. One good thing was, I had plenty of clothes, and so could go a long time without becoming too shabby for business. I repaired them myself. I brushed my own boots. Occasionally I washed my own collars.

"But it was rather dreadful to think of the years that must pass before I could be clear, before I could marry Lizzie, before I could open my mouth again to utter truths which I now began to *see*, and which grew dearer to me than existence itself. As to Lizzie, I comforted myself by thinking that it did not matter much whether we were married or not—we loved each other; and that was all that made marriage itself a good thing, and we had the good thing as it was. We corresponded regularly, and I need not say that this took a great many hours from German and other luxuries, and made the things I did not like, much easier to bear.

"I am not stoic enough to be able to say that the baseness and meanness of things about me gave me no discomfort. In my father's house, I had been used to a little simple luxury, for he liked to be comfortable himself, and could not be so, unless he saw every one comfortable about him as well. At college, likewise, I had not thwarted the tendency to self-indulgence, as my condition now but too plainly testified. It will be clear enough to you, Mr. Smith, that there must have been things connected with such a mode of life, exceedingly distasteful to one who had the habits of a gentleman; but it was not the circumstances so much as the companions of my location, that bred me discomfort. The people who shared the same roof with me, I felt bound to acknowledge as so sharing, although at first it was difficult to know how to behave to them, and their conduct sometimes caused me excessive annoyance. They were of all births and breedings, but almost all of them, like myself, under a cloud. It was not much that I had to associate with them; but even while glancing at a paper before going up to my room, for I allowed myself no time for that at the office, I could not help occasionally hearing language which disgusted me to the back-bone, and made me say to myself, as I went slowly up the stairs, 'My sins have found me out, and I am in hell for them.' Then, as I sat on the side of my bed in my stall, the vision of the past would come before me in all its beauty—the Westland Woods, the open country, the comfortable abode, and above all, the homely gracious old church, with its atmosphere of ripe sacredness and age-long belief; for now I looked upon that reading-desk, and that pulpit, with new eyes and new thoughts, as I will presently try to show you. I had not really lost them, in the sense in which I regarded them now, as types of a region of possibly noble work; but even with their old aspect, they would have seemed more honourable than this constant labour in figures from morning to night, till I thought sometimes that the depth of punishment would be to have to reckon to all eternity. But, as I have said, I had my consolations—Lizzie's letters, my books, a walk to Hampstead Heath on a holiday, an occasional peep into Goethe or Schiller on a bright day in St. Lawrence Pountney church-yard, to which I managed to get admittance; and, will you believe it? going to a city church on Sundays. More of this anon. So that, if I was in hell for my sins, it was at least not one of Swedenborg's hells. Never before did I understand what yet I had always considered one of the most exquisite sonnets I knew:

"Mourner, that dost deserve thy mournfulness,
Call thyself punished, call the earth thy hell;
Say, 'God is angry, and I earned it well;
'I would not have him smile and not redress.'
Say this, and straightway all thy grief grows less.
'God rules at least, I find, as prophets tell,
'And proves it in this prison.' Straight thy cell
Smiles with an unsuspected loveliness.
—'A prison—and yet from door and window-bar,
'I catch a thousand breaths of his sweet air;
'Even to me, his days and nights are fair;
'He shows me many a flower, and many a star;
'And though I mourn, and he is very far,
'He does not kill the hope that reaches there.'"

"Where did you get that wonderful sonnet?" I cried, hardly interrupting him, for when he came to the end of it, he paused with a solemn pause.

"It is one of the stars of the higher heavens which I spied through my prison-bars."

"Will you give me a copy of it?"

"With all my heart. It has never been in print."

"Then your star reminds me of that quaint simile of Henry Vaughan,

'If a star were confined into a tomb,
      Her captive flames must needs burn there;
But when the hand that locked her up gives room,
      She'll shine through all the sphere.'"

"Ah yes; I know the poem. That is about the worst verse in it, though."

"Quite true."

"What a number of verses you know!"

"They stick to me somehow."

"Is the sonnet your own?"

"My dear fellow, how could I speak in praise of it as I do, if it were my own? I would say 'I wish it were!' only that would be worse selfishness than coveting a man's purse. No. It is not mine."

"Well, will you go on with your story—if you will yet oblige me."

"I will. But I fear you will think it strange that I should be so communicative to one whose friendship I have so lately gained."

"I believe there is a fate in such things," I answered.

"Well, I yield to it—if I do not weary you?"

"Go on. There is positively not the least danger of that."

"Well, it was not to hell I was really sent, but to school—and that not a fashionable boarding, or expensive public school, but a day-school like a Scotch parish school—to learn the conditions and ways and thoughts of my brothers and sisters.

"I soon got over the disgust I felt at the coarseness of the men I met. Indeed I found amongst business-gentlemen what affected me with the same kind of feeling—only perhaps more profoundly—a coarseness not of the social so much as of the spiritual nature—in a word, genuine selfishness; whereas this quality was rather less remarkable in those who had less to be selfish about. I do not say therefore that they had less of it.—I soon saw that their profanity had chiefly a negative significance; but it was long before I could get sufficiently accustomed to their vileness, their beastliness—I beg the beast's pardon!—to keep from leaving the room when a vein of that sort was opened. But I succeeded in schooling myself to bear it. 'For,' thought I, 'there must be some bond—some ascertainable and recognizable bond between these men and me; I mean some bond that might show itself as such to them and me.' I found out, before long, that there was a tolerably broad and visible one—nothing less than our human nature, recognized as such. For by degrees I came to give myself to know them. I sat and talked to them, smoked with them, gave them tobacco, lent them small moneys, made them an occasional trifling present of some article of dress, of which I had more than I wanted; in short, gained their confidence. It was strange, but without any reproof from me, nothing more direct than simple silence, they soon ceased to utter a word that could offend me; and before long, I had heard many of their histories. And what stories they were! Set any one to talk about himself, instead of about other people, and you will have a seam of the precious mental metal opened up to you at once; only ore, most likely, that needs much smelting and refining; or it may be, not gold at all, but a metal which your mental alchemy may turn into gold. The one thing I learned was, that they and I were one, that our hearts were the same. How often I exclaimed inwardly, as some new trait came to light, in the words, though without the generalizing scorn, of Shakspere's Timon—"More man!" Sometimes I was seized with a kind of horror, beholding my own visage in the mirror which some poor wretch's story held up to me—distorted perhaps by the flaws in the glass, but still mine: I saw myself in other circumstances and under other influences, and felt sometimes for a moment, as if I had been guilty of the very deeds—more often of the very neglects that had brought my companion to misery. I felt in the most solemn moods of reflection, that I might have done all that, and become all that. I saw but myself, over and over again, with wondrous variations, none sufficient to destroy the identity. And I said to myself that, if I was so like them in all that was undesirable, it must be possible for them to become like me in all, whatever it was, that rendered me in any way superior to them.

"But wherein did this superiority consist? I saw that whatever it was, I had little praise in it. I said, 'What have I done to be better than I found myself? If Lizzie had not taken me in hand, I should not have done even this. What an effort it would need for one of these really to begin to rouse and raise himself! And what have I done to rouse and raise myself, to whom it would surely be easier? And how can I hope to help them to rise till I have risen myself? It is not enough to be above them: only by the strength of my own rising can I help to raise them, for we are bound together by one cord. Then how shall I rise? Whose uprising shall lift me? On what cords shall I lay hold to be heaved out of the pit?' And then I thought of the story of the Lord of men, who arose by his own might, not alone from the body-tomb, but from all the death and despair of humanity, and lifted with him our race, placing their tomb beneath their feet, and them in the sunny hope that belongs to them, and for which they were created—the air of their own freedom. 'But,' I said to myself, 'this is ideal, and belongs to the race. Before it comes true for the race, it must be done in the individual. If it be true for the race, it can only be through its being attainable by the individual. There must be something in the story belonging to the individual. I will look at the individual Christ, and see how he arose.'

"And then I saw that the Lord himself was clasped in the love of the Father; that it was in the power of mighty communion that the daily obedience was done; that besides the outward story of his devotion to men, there was the inward story—actually revealed to us men, marvellous as that is—the inward story of his devotion to his father; of his speech to him; of his upward look; of his delight in giving up to Him. And the answer to his prayers comes out in his deeds. As Novalis says: 'In solitude the heavenly heart unfolded itself to a flower-chalice of almighty love, turned towards the high face of the Father.' I saw that it was in virtue of this, that, again to use the words of Novalis, 'the mystery was unsealed. Heavenly spirits heaved the aged stone from the gloomy grave; angels sat by the slumberer, bodied forth, in delicate forms, from his dreams. Waking in new God-glories, he clomb the height of the new-born world; buried with his own hand the old corpse in the forsaken cavern, and laid thereon, with almighty arm, the stone which no might raises again. Yet weep thy beloved, tears of joy, and of boundless thanks at thy grave; still ever, with fearful gladness, behold thee arisen, and themselves with thee.' If then he is the captain of our salvation, the head of the body of the human church, I must rise by partaking in my degree of his food, by doing in my degree his work. I fell on my knees and I prayed to the Father. I rose, and bethinking me of the words of the Son, I went and tried to do them. I need say no more to you. A new life awoke in me from that hour, feeble and dim, but yet life; and often as it has stopped growing, that has always been my own fault. Where it will end, thank God! I cannot tell. But existence is an awful grandeur and delight.

"Then I understood the state of my fellowmen, with all their ignorance, and hate, and revenge; some misled by passion, some blinded by dulness, some turned monomaniacs from a fierce sense of injustice done them; and I said, 'There is no way of helping them but by being good to them, and making them trust me. But in every one of them there lies a secret chamber, to which God has access from behind by a hidden door; while they know nothing of this chamber; and the other door towards their own consciousness, is hidden by darkness and wrong, and ruin of all kinds. Sometimes they become dimly aware that there must be such a door. Some of us search for it, find it, turn back aghast; while God is standing behind the door waiting to be found, and ready to hold forth the arms of eternal tenderness to him who will open and look. Some of us have torn the door open, and, lo! there is the Father, at the heart of us, at the heart of all things.' I saw that he was leading these men through dark ways of disappointment and misery, the cure of their own wrong-doing, to find this door and find him. But could nothing be done to help them—to lead them? They, too, must learn of Christ. Could they not be led to him? If He leads to the Father, could not man lead to Him? True, he says that it is the leading of the Father that brings to Him; for the Father is all in all; He fills and rounds the cycle. But He leads by the hand of man. Then I said, 'Is not this *the* work of the church?'

"And with this new test, I went to one church after another. And the prayers were beautiful. And my soul was comforted by them. And the troubles of the week sank back into the far distance, and God ruled in London city. But how could such as I thought of, love these prayers, or understand them? For them the voice of living man was needed. And surely the spirit that dwelt in the Church never intended to make less of the voice of a living man pleading with his fellow-men in his own voice, than the voice of many people pleading with God in the words which those who had gone to Him had left behind them. If the Spirit be in the church, does it only pray? Yet almost as often as a man stood up to preach, I knew again why Lizzie had paid no heed to me. All he said had nothing to do with me or my wants. And if not with these, how could they have any influence on the all but outcasts of the social order? I justified Lizzie to the very full now; and I took refuge from the inanity of the sermon in thinking about her faithfulness. And that faithfulness was far beyond anything I knew yet.

"And now there awoke in me an earnest longing after the office I had forsaken. Thoughts began to burn in me, and words to come unbidden, till sometimes I had almost to restrain myself from rising from the pew where I was seated, ascending the pulpit stairs, and requesting the man who had nothing to say, to walk down, and allow me, who had something to say, to take his place. Was this conceit? Considering what I was listening to, it could not have been *great* conceit at least. But I did restrain myself, for I thought an encounter with the police would be unseemly, and my motives scarcely of weight in the court to which they would lead me."

Here Mr. Armstrong relieved himself and me with a good laugh. I say relieved me, for his speech had held me in a state of tension such as to be almost painful.

"But I looked to the future in hope," he went on,—"if ever I might be counted worthy to resume the labour I had righteously abandoned; having had the rightness confirmed by the light I had received in carrying out the deed."

His voice here sank as to a natural pause, and I thought he was going to end his story.

"Tell me something more," I said.

"Oh!" returned he, "as far as story is concerned, the best of it is to come yet.—About six months after I was fairly settled in London, I was riding in an omnibus, a rare enough accommodation with me, in the dusk of an afternoon. I was going out to Fulham to dine with my cousin, as I was sometimes forced to do. He was a good-hearted man, but—in short, I did not find him interesting. I would have preferred talking to a man who had barely escaped the gallows or the hulks. My cousin never did anything plainly wicked, and consequently never repented of anything. He thought no harm of being petty and unfair. He would not have taken a farthing that was not his own, but if he could get the better of you in an argument, he did not care by what means. He would put a wrong meaning on your words, that he might triumph over you, knowing all the time it was not what you meant. He would say: 'Words are words. I have nothing to do with your meanings. You may say you mean anything you like.' I wish it had been his dissent that made him such. But I won't say more about him, for I believe it is my chief fault, as to my profession, that I find common-place people dreadfully uninteresting; and I am afraid I don't always give them quite fair play.—I had to dine with him, and so I got into an omnibus going along the Strand. And I had not been long in it, before I began thinking about Lizzie. That was not very surprising.

"Next to me, nearer the top of the omnibus, sat a young woman, with a large brown paper parcel on her lap. She dropt it, and I picked it up for her; but seeing that it incommoded her considerably, I offered to hold it for her. She gave a kind of start when I addressed her, but allowed me to take the parcel. I could not see her face, because she was close to my side. But a strange feeling came over me, as if I was sitting next to Lizzie. I indulged in the fancy not from any belief in it, only for the pleasure of it. But it grew to a great desire to see the young woman's face, and find whether or not she was at all like Lizzie. I could not, however, succeed in getting a peep within her bonnet; and so strong did the desire become, that, when the omnibus stopped at the circus, and she rose to get out, I got out first, without restoring the parcel, and stood to hand her out, and then give it back. Not yet could I see her face; but she accepted my hand, and with a thrill of amazement, I felt a pressure on mine, which surely could be nobody's but Lizzie's. And it was Lizzie sure enough! I kept the parcel; she put her arm in mine, and we crossed the street together, without a word spoken.

"'Lizzie!' I said, when we got into a quieter part.

"'Ralph!' she said, and pressed closer to my side.

"'How did you come here?'

"'Ah! I couldn't escape you.'

"'How did you come here?' I repeated.

"'You did not think,' she answered, with a low musical laugh, 'that I was going to send you away to work, and take no share in it myself!'

"And then out came the whole truth. As soon as I had left, she set about finding a situation, for she was very clever with her needle and scissors. Her mother could easily do without her, as her elder sister was at home; and her absence would relieve their scanty means. She had been more fortunate than she could have hoped, and had found a good situation with a dressmaker in Bond Street. Her salary was not large, but it was likely to increase, and she had nothing to pay for food or lodging; while, like myself, she was well provided with clothes, and had, besides, facilities for procuring more. And to make a long story as short as now may be, there she remained in her situation as long as I remained in mine; and every quarter she brought me all she could spare of her salary for the Jew to gorge upon."

"And you took it?" I said, rather inadvertently.

"Took it! Yes. I took it—thankfully as I would the blessing of heaven. To have refused it would have argued me unworthy of *her*. We understood each other too well for anything else. She shortened my purgatory by a whole year—my Lizzie! It is over now; but none of it will be over to all eternity. She made a man of me."

A pause followed, as was natural, and neither spoke for some moments. The ends of our cigars had been thrown away long ago, but I did not think of offering another. At length I said, for the sake of saying something:

"And you met pretty often, I daresay?"

"Every Sunday at church."

"Of all places, the place where you ought to have met."

"It was. We met in a quiet old city church, where there was nothing to attract us but the loneliness, the service, and the bones of Milton."

"And when you had achieved your end—"

"It was but a means to an end. I went at once to a certain bishop; told him the whole story, not in quite such a lengthy shape as I have told it to you; and begged him to reinstate me in my office."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing. The good man did not venture upon many words. He held out his hand to me; shook mine warmly; and here I am, you see, curate of St. Thomas's, Purleybridge, and husband of Lizzie Payton. Am I not a fortunate fellow?"

"You are," I said, with emphasis, rising to take my leave. "But it is too bad of me to occupy so much of your time on a Saturday."

"Don't be uneasy about that. I shall preach all the better for it."

As I passed the parlour door, it was open, and Lizzie was busy with a baby's frock. I think I should have known it for one, even if I had not been put on the scent. She nodded kindly to me as I passed out. I knew she was not one of the demonstrative sort, else I should have been troubled that she did not speak to me. I thought afterwards that she suspected, from the sustained sound of her husband's voice, that he had been telling his own story; and that therefore she preferred letting me go away without speaking to me that morning.

"What a story for our club!" thought I. "Surely that would do Adela good now."

But of course I saw at once that it would not do. I could not for a moment wish that the curate should tell it. Yet I did wish that Adela could know it. So I have written it now; and there it is, as nearly as he told it, as I could manage to record it.

The next day was Sunday. And here is a part of the curate's sermon.

"My friends, I will give you a likeness, or a parable, which I think will help you to understand what is the matter with you all. For you all have something the matter with you; and most of you know this to be the case; though you may not know what is the matter. And those of you that feel nothing amiss are far the worst off. Indeed you are; for how are things to be set right if you do not even know that there is anything to be set right? There is the greatest danger of everything growing much worse, before you find out that anything is wrong.

"But now for my parable.

"It is a cold winter forenoon, with the snow upon everything out of doors. The mother has gone out for the day, and the children are amusing themselves in the nursery—pretending to make such things as men make. But there is one among them who joins in their amusement only by fits and starts. He is pale and restless, yet inactive.—His mother is away. True, he is not well. But he is not very unwell; and if she were at home, he would take his share in everything that was going on, with as much enjoyment as any of them. But as it is, his fretfulness and pettishness make no allowance for the wilfulness of his brothers and sisters; and so the confusions they make in the room, carry confusion into his heart and brain; till at length a brighter noon entices the others out into the snow.

"Glad to be left alone, he seats himself by the fire and tries to read. But the book he was so delighted with yesterday, is dull today. He looks up at the clock and sighs, and wishes his mother would come home. Again he betakes himself to his book, and the story transports his imagination to the great icebergs on the polar sea. But the sunlight has left them, and they no longer gleam and glitter and sparkle, as if spangled with all the jewels of the hot tropics, but shine cold and threatening as they tower over the ice-bound ship. He lays down the tale, and takes up a poem. But it too is frozen. The rhythm will not flow. And the sad feeling arises in his heart, that it is not so very beautiful, after all, as he had used to think it.

"'Is there anything beautiful?' says the poor boy at length, and wanders to the window. But the sun is under a cloud; cold, white, and cheerless, like death, lies the wide world out of doors; and the prints of his mother's feet in the snow, all point towards the village, and away from home. His head aches; and he cannot eat his dinner. He creeps up stairs to his mother's room. There the fire burns bright, and through the window falls a ray of sunlight. But the fire and the very sunlight are wintry and sad. 'Oh, when will mother be home?' He lays himself in a corner amongst soft pillows, and rests his head; but it is no nest for him, for the covering wings are not there. The bright-coloured curtains look dull and grey; and the clock on the chimney-piece will not hasten its pace one second, but is very monotonous and unfeeling. Poor child! Is there any joy in the world? Oh yes; but it always clings to the mother, and follows her about like a radiance, and she has taken it with her. Oh, when will she be home? The clock strikes as if it meant something, and then straightway goes on again with the old wearisome tic-tac.

"He can hardly bear it. The fire burns up within, daylight goes down without; the near world fades into darkness; the far-off worlds brighten and come forth, and look from the cold sky into the warm room; and the boy stares at them from the couch, and watches the motion of one of them, like the flight of a great golden beetle, against the divisions of the window-frame. Of this, too, he grows weary. Everything around him has lost its interest. Even the fire, which is like the soul of the room, within whose depths he had so often watched for strange forms and images of beauty and terror, has ceased to attract his tired eyes. He turns his back to it, and sees only its flickerings on the walls. To any one else, looking in from the cold frosty night, the room would appear the very picture of afternoon comfort and warmth; and he, if he were descried thus nestling in its softest, warmest nook, would be counted a blessed child, without care, without fear, made for enjoyment, and knowing only fruition. But the mother is gone; and as that flame-lighted room would appear to the passing eye, without the fire, and with but a single candle to thaw the surrounding darkness and cold, so its that child's heart without the presence of the mother.

"Worn out at length with loneliness and mental want, he closes his eyes, and after the slow lapse of a few more empty moments, re-opens them on the dusky ceiling, and the grey twilight window; no—on two eyes near above him, and beaming upon him, the stars of a higher and holier heaven than that which still looks in through the unshaded windows. They are the eyes of the mother, looking closely and anxiously on her sick boy. 'Mother, mother!' His arms cling around her neck, and pull down her face to his.

"His head aches still, but the heart-ache is gone. When candles are brought, and the chill night is shut out of doors and windows, and the children are all gathered around the tea-table, laughing and happy, no one is happier, though he does not laugh, than the sick child, who lies on the couch and looks at his mother. Everything around is full of interest and use, glorified by the radiation of her presence. Nothing can go wrong. The splendour returns to the tale and the poem. Sickness cannot make him wretched. Now when he closes his eyes, his spirit dares to go forth wandering under the shining stars and above the sparkling snow; and nothing is any more dull and unbeautiful. When night draws on, and he is laid in his bed, her voice sings him, and her hand soothes him, to sleep; nor do her influences vanish when he forgets everything in sleep; for he wakes in the morning well and happy, made whole by his faith in his mother. A power has gone forth from her love to heal and restore him.

"Brothers, sisters! do I not know your hearts from my own?—sick hearts, which nothing can restore to health and joy but the presence of Him who is Father and Mother both in one. Sunshine is not gladness, because you see him not. The stars are far away, because He is not near; and the flowers, the smiles of old Earth, do not make you smile, because, although, thank God! you cannot get rid of the child's need, you have forgotten what it is the need of. The winter is dreary and dull, because, although you have the homeliest of homes, the warmest of shelters, the safest of nests to creep into and rest—though the most cheerful of fires is blazing for you, and a table is spread, waiting to refresh your frozen and weary hearts—you have forgot the way thither, and will not be troubled to ask the way; you shiver with the cold and the hunger, rather than arise you say, 'I will go to my Father;' you will die in the storm rather than fight the storm; you will lie down in the snow rather than tread it under foot. The heart within you cries out for something, and you let it cry. It is crying for its God—for its father and mother and home. And all the world will look dull and grey—and it if does not look so now, the day will come when it must look so—till your heart is satisfied and quieted with the known presence of Him in whom we live and move and have our being."

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOWS.

It was again my turn to read. I opened my manuscript and had just opened my mouth as well, when I was arrested for a moment. For, happening to glance to the other side of the room, I saw that Percy had thrown himself at full length on a couch, opposite to that on which Adela was seated, and was watching her face with all his eyes. But his look did not express love so much as jealousy. Indeed I had seen small sign of his being attached to her. If she had encouraged him, which certainly she did not, I daresay his love might have come out; but I presume that he had been comfortably content until now, when perhaps some remark of his mother had made him fear a rival. Mischief of some sort was evidently brewing. A human cloud, surcharging itself with electric fire, lay swelling on the horizon of our little assembly; but I did not anticipate much danger from any storm that could break from such a quarter. I believed that as far as my good friend, the colonel, was concerned, Adela might at least refuse whom she pleased. Whether she might find herself at equal liberty to choose whom she pleased, was a question that I was unprepared to answer. And I could not think about it now. I had to read. So I gave out the title—and went on:

"THE SHADOWS.

"Old Ralph Rinkelmann made his living by comic sketches, and all but lost it again by tragic poems. So he was just the man to be chosen king of the fairies, for in Fairy-land the sovereignty is elective."

"But, uncle," interrupted Adela, "you said it was not to be a fairy-tale."

"Well, I don't think you will call it one, when you have heard it," I answered. "But I am not particular as to names. The fairies have not much to do with it anyhow."

"I beg your pardon, uncle," rejoined my niece; and I went on.

"They did not mean to insist on his residence; for they needed his presence only on special occasions. But they must get hold of him somehow, first of all, in order to make him king. Once he was crowned, they could get him as often as they pleased; but before this ceremony, there was a difficulty. For it is only between life and death that the fairies have power over grown-up mortals, and can carry them off to their country. So they had to watch for an opportunity.

"Nor had they to wait long. For old Ralph was taken dreadfully ill; and while hovering between life and death, they carried him off, and crowned him king of Fairy-land. But after he was crowned, it was no wonder, considering the state of his health, that he should not be able to sit quite upright on the throne of Fairy-land; or that, in consequence, all the gnomes and goblins, and ugly, cruel things that live in the holes and corners of the kingdom, should take advantage of his condition, and run quite wild, playing him, king as he was, all sorts of tricks; crowding about his throne, climbing up the steps, and actually scrambling and quarrelling like mice about his ears and eyes, so that he could see and think of nothing else. But I am not going to tell anything more about this part of his adventures just at present. By strong and sustained efforts, he succeeded, after much trouble and suffering, in reducing his rebellious subjects to order. They all vanished to their respective holes and corners; and King Ralph, coming to himself, found himself in his bed, half propped up with pillows.

"But the room was full of dark creatures, which gambolled about in the firelight in such a strange, huge, but noiseless fashion, that he thought at first that some of his rebellious goblins had not been subdued with the rest, and had followed him beyond the bounds of Fairy-land into his own private house in London. How else could these mad, grotesque hippopotamus-calves make their ugly appearance in Ralph Rinkelmann's bedroom? But he soon found out, that although they were like the under-ground goblins, they were very different as well, and would require quite different treatment. He felt convinced that they were his subjects too, but that he must have overlooked them somehow at his late coronation—if indeed they had been present; for he could not recollect that he had seen anything just like them before. He resolved, therefore, to pay particular attention to their habits, ways, and characters; else he saw plainly that they would soon be too much for him; as indeed this intrusion into this chamber, where Mrs. Rinkelmann, who must be queen if he was king, sat taking some tea by the fire-side, plainly indicated. But she, perceiving that he was looking about him with a more composed expression than his face had worn for many days, started up, and came quickly and quietly to his side, and her face was bright with gladness. Whereupon the fire burned up more cheerily; and the figures became more composed and respectful in their behaviour, retreating towards the wall like well-trained attendants. Then the king of Fairy-land had some tea and dry toast, and leaning back on his pillows, nearly fell asleep; but not quite, for he still watched the intruders.

"Presently the queen left the room to give some of the young princes and princesses their tea; and the fire burned lower; and behold, the figures grew as black, and as mad in their gambols, as ever! Their favourite games seemed to be *Hide and Seek; Touch and Go; Grin and Vanish;* and many other such; and all in the king's bed-chamber, too; so that it was quite alarming. It was almost as bad as if the house had been haunted by certain creatures, which shall be nameless in a fairy-story, because with them fairy-land will not willingly have much to do.

"'But it is a mercy that they have their slippers on!' said the king to himself; for his head ached.

"As he lay back, with his eyes half-shut and half-open, too tired to pay longer attention to their games, but, on the whole, considerably more amused than offended with the liberties they took, for they seemed good-natured creatures, and more frolicsome than positively ill-mannered, he became suddenly aware that two of them had stepped forward from the walls, upon which, after the manner of great spiders, most of them preferred sprawling, and now stood in the middle of the floor, at the foot of his majesty's bed, becking, and bowing, and ducking in the most grotesquely obsequious manner; while every now and then they turned solemnly round upon one heel, evidently considering that motion the highest token of homage they could show.

"'What do you want?' said the king.

"'That it may please your majesty to be better acquainted with us,' answered they. 'We are your majesty's subjects.'

"'I know you are: I shall be most happy,' answered the king.

"'We are not what your majesty takes us for, though. We are not so foolish as your majesty thinks us.'

"'It is impossible to take you for anything that I know of,' rejoined the king, who wished to make them talk, and said whatever came uppermost;—'for soldiers, sailors, or anything: you will not stand still long enough. I suppose you really belong to the fire-brigade; at least, you keep putting its light out.'

"'Don't jest, please your majesty.' And as they said the words, for they both spoke at once throughout the interview, they performed a grave somerset, towards the king.

"'Not jest!' retorted he; 'and with you? Why, you do nothing but jest. What are you?'

"'The Shadows, sire. And when we do jest, sire, we always jest in earnest. But perhaps your majesty does not see us distinctly.'

"'I see you perfectly well,' replied the king.

"'Permit me, however,' rejoined one of the Shadows; and as he spoke, he approached the king, and lifting a dark fore-finger, drew it lightly, but carefully, across the ridge of his forehead, from temple to temple. The king felt the soft gliding touch go, like water, into every hollow, and over the top of every height of that mountain-chain of thought. He had involuntarily closed his eyes during the operation, and when he unclosed them again, as soon as the finger was withdrawn, he found that they were opened in more senses than one. The room appeared to have extended itself on all sides, till he could not exactly see where the walls were; and all about it stood the Shadows motionless. They were tall and solemn; rather awful, indeed, in their appearance, notwithstanding many remarkable traits of grotesqueness, looking, in fact, just like the pictures of Puritans drawn by Cavaliers, with long arms, and very long, thin legs, from which hung large loose feet, while in their countenances length of chin and nose predominated. The solemnity of their mien, however, overcame all the oddity of their form, so that they were very *eerie* indeed to look at, dressed as they all were in funereal black. But a single glance was all that the king was allowed to have; for the former operator waved his dusky palm across his vision, and once more the king saw only the fire-lighted walls, and dark shapes flickering about upon them. The two who had spoken for the rest seemed likewise to have vanished. But at last the king discovered them, standing one on each side of the fire-place. They kept close to the chimney-wall, and talked to each other across the length of the chimney-piece; thus avoiding the direct rays of the fire, which, though light is necessary to their appearing to human eyes, do not agree with them at all—much less give birth to them, as the king was soon to learn. After a few minutes, they again approached the bed, and spoke thus:

"'It is now getting dark, please your majesty. We mean—out of doors in the snow. Your majesty may see, from where he is lying, the cold light of its great winding-sheet—a famous carpet for the Shadows to dance upon, your majesty. All our brothers and sisters will be at church now, before going to their night's work.'

"'Do they always go to church before they go to work?'

"'They always go to church first.'

"'Where is it?'

"'In Iceland. Would your majesty like to see it?'

"'How can I go and see it, when, as you know very well, I am ill in bed? Besides I should be sure to take cold in a frosty night like this, even if I put on the blankets, and took the feather-bed for a muff.'

"A sort of quivering passed over their faces, which seemed to be their mode of laughing. The whole shape of the face shook and fluctuated as if it had been some dark fluid; till by slow degrees of gathering calm, it settled into its former rest. Then one of them drew aside the curtains of the bed, and, the window-curtains not having been yet drawn, the king beheld the white glimmering night outside, struggling with the heaps of darkness that tried to quench it; and the heavens full of stars, flashing and sparkling like live jewels. The other Shadow went towards the fire and vanished in it.

"Scores of Shadows immediately began an insane dance all about the room; disappearing, one after the other, through the uncovered window, and gliding darkly away over the face of the white snow; for the window looked at once on a field of snow. In a few moments, the room was quite cleared of them; but instead of being relieved by their absence, the king felt immediately as if he were in a dead house, and could hardly breathe for the sense of emptiness and desolation that fell upon him. But as he lay looking out on the snow, which stretched blank and wide before him, he spied in the distance a long dark line which drew nearer and nearer, and showed itself at last to be all the Shadows, walking in a double row, and carrying in the midst of them something like a bier. They vanished under the window, but soon reappeared, having somehow climbed up the wall of the house; for they entered in perfect order by the window, as if melting through the transparency of the glass.

"They still carried the bier or litter. It was covered with richest furs, and skins of gorgeous wild beasts, whose eyes were replaced by sapphires and emeralds, that glittered and gleamed in the fire and snow-light. The outermost skin sparkled with frost, but the inside ones were soft and warm and dry as the down under a swan's wing. The Shadows approached the bed, and set the litter upon it. Then a number of them brought a huge fur-robe, and wrapping it round the king, laid him on the litter in the midst of the furs. Nothing could be more gentle and respectful than the way in which they moved him; and he never thought of refusing to go. Then they put something on his head, and, lifting the litter, carried him once round the room, to fall into order. As he passed the mirror, he saw that he was covered with royal ermine, and that his head wore a wonderful crown—of gold set with none but red stones: rubies and carbuncles and garnets, and others whose names he could not tell, glowed gloriously around his head, like the salamandrine essence of all the Christmas fires over the world. A sceptre lay beside him—a rod of ebony, surmounted by a cone-shaped diamond, which, cut in a hundred facets, flashed all the hues of the rainbow, and threw coloured gleams on every side, that looked like shadows more etherial than those that bore him. Then the Shadows rose gently to the window, passed through it, and sinking slowing upon the field of outstretched snow, commenced an orderly gliding rather than march along the frozen surface. They took it by turns to bear the king, as they sped with the swiftness of thought, in a straight line towards the north. The polestar rose above their heads with visible rapidity; for indeed they moved quite as fast as the sad thoughts, though not with all the speed of happy desires. England and Scotland slid past the litter of the king of the Shadows. Over rivers and lakes they skimmed and glided. They climbed the high mountains, and crossed the valleys with an unfelt bound; till they came to John-o'-Groat's house and the northern sea. The sea was not frozen; for all the stars shone as clear out of the deeps below as they shone out of the deeps above; and as the bearers slid along the blue-grey surface, with never a furrow in their track, so clear was the water beneath, that the king saw neither surface, bottom, nor substance to it, and seemed to be gliding only through the blue sphere of heaven, with the stars above him, and the stars below him, and between the stars and him nothing but an emptiness, where, for the first time in his life, his soul felt that it had room enough.

"At length they reached the rocky shores of Iceland, where they landed, still pursuing their journey. All this time the king felt no cold; for the red stones in his crown kept him warm, and the emerald and sapphire eyes of the wild beasts kept the frosts from settling upon his litter.

"Oftentimes upon their way, they had to pass through forests, caverns, and rock-shadowed paths, where it was so dark that at first the king feared he would lose his Shadows altogether. But as soon as they entered such places, the diamond in his sceptre began to shine and glow and flash, sending out streams of light of all the colours that painter's soul could dream of; in which light the Shadows grew livelier and stronger than ever, speeding through the dark ways with an all but blinding swiftness. In the light of the diamond, too, some of their forms became more simple and human, while others seemed only to break out into a yet more untamable absurdity. Once, as they passed through a cave, the king actually saw some of their eyes—strange shadow-eyes: he had never seen any of their eyes before. But at the same moment when he saw their eyes, he knew their faces too, for they turned them full upon him for an instant; and the other Shadows, catching sight of these, shrank and shivered, and nearly vanished. Lovely faces they were; but the king was very thoughtful after he saw them, and continued rather troubled all the rest of the journey. He could not account for those faces being there, and the faces of Shadows too, with living eyes."

"What does that mean?" asked Adela.

And I am rather ashamed to say that I could only answer, "I am not sure," and make haste to go on again.

"At last they climbed up the bed of a little stream, and then passing through a narrow rocky defile, came out suddenly upon the side of a mountain, overlooking a blue frozen lake in the very heart of mighty hills. Overhead the *aurora borealis* was shivering and flashing like a battle of ten thousand spears. Underneath, its beams passed faintly over the blue ice and the sides of the snow clad mountains, whose tops shot up like huge icicles all about, with here and there a star sparkling on the very tip of one. But as the northern lights in the sky above, so wavered and quivered, and shot hither and thither, the Shadows on the surface of the lake below; now gathering in groups, and now shivering asunder; now covering the whole surface of the lake, and anon condensed into one dark knot in the centre. Every here and there on the white mountains, might be seen two or three shooting away towards the tops, and vanishing beyond them. Their number was gradually, though hardly visibly, diminishing.

"'Please your majesty,' said the Shadows, 'this is our church—the Church of the Shadows.'

"And so saying, the king's body-guard set down the litter upon a rock, and mingled with the multitudes below. They soon returned, however, and bore the king down into the middle of the lake. All the Shadows came crowding round him, respectfully but fearlessly; and sure never such a grotesque assembly revealed itself before to mortal eyes. The king had seen all kind of gnomes, goblins, and kobolds at his coronation; but they were quite rectilinear figures, compared with the insane lawlessness of form in which the Shadows rejoiced; and the wildest gambols of the former, were orderly dances of ceremony, beside the apparently aimless and wilful contortions of figure, and metamorphoses of shape, in which the latter indulged. They retained, however, all the time, to the surprise of the king, an identity, each of his own type, inexplicably perceptible through every change. Indeed this preservation of the primary idea of each form, was quite as wonderful as the bewildering and ridiculous alterations to which the form itself was every moment subjected.

"'What are you?' said the king, leaning on his elbow, and looking around him.

"'The Shadows, your majesty,' answered several voices at once.

"'What Shadows?'

"'The human Shadows. The Shadows of men, and women, and their children.'

"'Are you not the shadows of chairs, and tables, and poker, and tongs, just as well?'

"At this question a strange jarring commotion went through the assembly with a shock. Several of the figures shot up as high as the aurora, but instantly settled down again to human size, as if overmastering their feelings, out of respect to him who had roused them. One who had bounded to the highest visible icy peak, and as suddenly returned, now elbowed his way through the rest, and made himself spokesman for them during the remaining part of the dialogue.

"'Excuse our agitation, your majesty,' said he. 'I see your majesty has not yet thought proper to make himself acquainted with our nature and habits.'

"'I wish to do so now,' replied the king.

"'We are the Shadows,' repeated the Shadow, solemnly.

"'Well?' said the king.

"'We do not often appear to men.'

"'Ha!' said the king.

"'We do not belong to the sunshine at all. We go through it unseen, and only by a passing chill do men recognize an unknown presence.'

"'Ha!' said the king, again.

"'It is only in the twilight of the fire, or when one man or woman is alone with a single candle, or when any number of people are all feeling the same thing at once, making them one, that we show ourselves, and the truth of things.

"'Can that be true that loves the night?' said the king.

"'The darkness is the nurse of light,' answered the Shadow.

"'Can that be true which mocks at forms?' said the king.

"'Truth rides abroad in shapeless storms,' answered the Shadow.

"'Ha! ha!' thought Ralph Rinkelmann, 'it rhymes. The shadow caps my questions with his answers.—Very strange!' And he grew thoughtful again.

"The Shadow was the first to resume.

"'Please your majesty, may we present our petition?'

"'By all means,' replied the king. 'I am not well enough to receive it in proper state.'

"'Never mind, your majesty. We do not care for much ceremony; and indeed none of us are quite well at present. The subject of our petition weighs upon us.'

"'Go on,' said the king.

"'Sire,' began the Shadow, 'our very existence is in danger. The various sorts of artificial light, both in houses and in men, women and children, threaten to end our being. The use and the disposition of gaslights, especially high in the centres, blind the eyes by which alone we can be perceived. We are all but banished from towns. We are driven into villages and lonely houses, chiefly old farm-houses, out of which, even, our friends the fairies are fast disappearing. We therefore petition our king, by the power of his art, to restore us to our rights in the house itself, and in the hearts of its dwellers.'

"'But,' said the king, 'you frighten the children.'

"'Very seldom, your majesty; and then only for their good. We seldom seek to frighten anybody. We only want to make people silent and thoughtful; to awe them a little, your majesty.'

"'You are much more likely to make them laugh,' said the king.

"'Are we?' said the Shadow.

"And approaching the king one step, he stood quite still for a moment. The diamond of the king's sceptre shot out a vivid flame of violet light, and the king stared at the Shadow in silence, and his lip quivered."

"Now what does that mean?" said Adela, again.

"How can I tell?" I answered, and went on:

"'It is only,' resumed the Shadow, 'when our thoughts are not fixed upon any particular object, that our bodies are subject to all the vagaries of elemental influences. Generally amongst worldly men and frivolous women, we only attach ourselves to some article of furniture or of dress; and they never doubt that we are mere foolish and vague results of the dashing of the waves of the light against the solid forms of which their houses are full. We do not care to tell them the truth, for they would never see it. But let the worldly man——or the frivolous woman——and then——'

"At each of the pauses indicated, the mass of Shadows throbbed and heaved with emotion, but soon settled again into comparative stillness. Once more the Shadow addressed himself to speak. But suddenly they all looked up, and the king, following their gaze, saw that the aurora had begun to pale.

"'The moon is rising,' said the Shadow. As soon as she looks over the mountains into the valley, we must be gone, for we have plenty to do by the moon: we are powerful in her light. But if your majesty will come here to-morrow night, your majesty may learn a great deal more about us, and judge for himself whether it be fit to accord our petition; for then will be our grand annual assembly, in which we report to our chiefs the deeds we have attempted, and the good or bad success we have had.'

"'If you send for me,' replied the king, 'I will come.'

"Ere the Shadow could reply, the tip of the moon's crescent horn peeped up from behind an icy pinnacle, and one slender ray fell on the lake. It shone upon no Shadows. Ere the eye of the king could again seek the earth after beholding the first brightness of the moon's resurrection, they had vanished; and the surface of the lake glittered cold and blue in the pale moonlight.

"There the king lay, alone in the midst of the frozen lake, with the moon staring at him. But at length he heard from somewhere a voice that he knew.

"'Will you take another cup of tea, dear?' said Mrs. Rinkelmann; and Ralph, coming slowly to himself, found that he was lying in his own bed.

"'Yes, I will,' he answered; 'and rather a large piece of toast, if you please; for I have been a long journey since I saw you last.'

"'He has not come to himself quite,' said Mrs. Rinkelmann, between her and herself.

"'You would be rather surprised,' continued Ralph, 'if I told you where I had been, and all about it.'

"'I daresay I should,' responded his wife.

"'Then I will tell you,' rejoined Ralph.

"But at that moment, a great Shadow bounced out of the fire with a single huge leap, and covered the whole room. Then it settled in one corner, and Ralph saw it shaking its fist at him from the end of a preposterous arm. So he took the hint, and held his peace. And it was as well for him. For I happen to know something about the Shadows too; and I know that if he had told his wife all about it just then, they would not have sent for him the following evening.

"But as the king, after taking his tea and toast, lay and looked about him, the dancing shadows in his room seemed to him odder and more inexplicable than ever. The whole chamber was full of mystery. So it generally was, but now it was more mysterious than ever. After all that he had seen in the Shadow-church, his own room and its shadows were yet more wonderful and unintelligible than those.

"This made it the more likely that he had seen a true vision; for, instead of making common things look common place, as a false vision would have done, it made common things disclose the wonderful that was in them.

"'The same applied to all true art,' thought Ralph Rinkelmann.

"The next afternoon, as the twilight was growing dusky, the king lay wondering whether or not the Shadows would fetch him again. He wanted very much to go, for he had enjoyed the journey exceedingly, and he longed, besides, to hear some of the Shadows tell their stories. But the darkness grew deeper and deeper, and the Shadows did not come. The cause was, that Mrs. Rinkelmann sat by the fire in the gloaming; and they could not carry off the king while she was there. Some of them tried to frighten her away, by playing the oddest pranks on the walls, and floor, and ceiling; but altogether without effect: the queen only smiled, for she had a good conscience. Suddenly, however, a dreadful scream was heard from the nursery, and Mrs. Rinkelmann rushed up stairs to see what was the matter. No sooner had she gone, than the two warders of the chimney-corners stepped out into the middle of the room, and said, in a low voice:

"'Is your majesty ready?'

"'Have you no hearts?' said the king; 'or are they as black as your faces? Did you not hear the child scream? I must know what is the matter with her before I go.'

"'Your majesty may keep his mind easy on that point,' replied the warders. 'We had tried everything we could think of, to get rid of her majesty the queen, but without effect. So a young madcap Shadow, half against the will of the older ones of us, slipped up stairs into the nursery; and has, no doubt, succeeded in appalling the baby, for he is very lithe and long-legged.—Now, your majesty.'

"'I will have no such tricks played in my nursery,' said the king, rather angrily. 'You might put the child beside itself.'

"'Then there would be twins, your majesty. And we rather like twins.'

"'None of your miserable jesting! You might put the child out of her wits.'

"'Impossible, sire; for she has not got into them yet.'

"'Go away,' said the king.

"'Forgive us, your majesty. Really, it will do the child good; for that Shadow will, all her life, be to her a symbol of what is ugly and bad. When she feels in danger of hating or envying anyone, that Shadow will come back to her mind, and make her shudder.'

"'Very well,' said the king. 'I like that. Let us go.'

"The Shadows went through the same ceremonies and preparations as before; during which, the young Shadow before-mentioned, contrived to make such grimaces as kept the baby in terror, and the queen in the nursery, till all was ready. Then with a bound that doubled him up against the ceiling, and a kick of his legs six feet out behind him, he vanished through the nursery door, and reached the king's bed-chamber just in time to take his place with the last who were melting through the window in the rear of the litter, and settling down upon the snow beneath. Away they went, a gliding blackness over the white carpet, as before. And it was Christmas Eve.

"When they came in sight of the mountain-lake, the king saw that it was crowded over its whole surface with a changeful intermingling of Shadows. They were all talking and listening alternately, in pairs, trios, and groups of every size. Here and there, large companies were absorbed in attention to one elevated above the rest, not in a pulpit, or on a platform, but on the stilts of his own legs, elongated for the nonce. The aurora, right overhead, lighted up the lake and the sides of the mountains, by sending down from the zenith, nearly to the surface of the lake, great folded vapours, luminous with all the colours of a faint rainbow.

"Many, however, as the words were that passed on all sides, not a whisper of a sound reached the ears of the king: their shadow speech could not enter his corporeal organs. One of his guides, however, seeing that the king wanted to hear and could not, went through a strange manipulation of his head and ears; after which he could hear perfectly, though still only the voice to which, for the time, he directed his attention. This, however, was a great advantage, and one which the king longed to carry back with him to the world of men.

"The king now discovered that this was not merely the church of the Shadows, but their news-exchange at the same time. For, as the Shadows have no writing or printing, the only way in which they can make each other acquainted with their doings and thinkings, is to meet and talk at this word-mart and parliament of shades. And as, in the world, people read their favourite authors, and listen to their favourite speakers, so here the Shadows seek their favourite Shadows, listen to their adventures, and hear generally what they have to say.

"Feeling quite strong, the king rose and walked about amongst them, wrapped in his ermine robe, with his red crown on his head, and his diamond sceptre in his hand. Every group of Shadows to which he drew near, ceased talking as soon as they saw him approach; but at a nod they went on again directly, conversing and relating and commenting, as if no one was there of other kind or of higher rank than themselves. So the king heard a good many stories, at some of which he laughed, and at some of which he cried. But if the stories that the Shadows told were printed, they would make a book that no publisher could produce fast enough to satisfy the buyers. I will record some of the things that the king heard, for he told them to me soon after. In fact, I was for some time his private secretary, and that is how I come to know all about his adventures.

"'I made him confess before a week was over,' said a gloomy old Shadow.

"'But what was the good of that?' said a pert young one; 'that could not undo what was done.'

"'Yes, it might.'

"'What! bring the dead to life?'

"'No; but comfort the murderer. I could not bear to see the pitiable misery he was in. He was far happier with the rope round his neck, than he was with the purse in his pocket. I saved him from killing himself too.'

"'How did you make him confess?'

"'Only by wallowing on the wall a little.'

"'How could that make him tell?'

"'*He* knows.'

"He was silent; and the king turned to another.

"'I made a fashionable mother repent.'

"'How?' broke from several voices, in whose sound was mingled a touch of incredulity.

"'Only by making a little coffin on the wall,' was the reply.

"'Did the fashionable mother then confess?'

"'She had nothing more to confess than everybody knew.'

"'What did everybody know then?'

"'That she might have been kissing a living child, when she followed a dead one to the grave.—The next will fare better.'

"'I put a stop to a wedding,' said another.

"'Horrid shade!' remarked a poetic imp.

"'How?' said others. 'Tell us how.'

"'Only by throwing a darkness, as if from the branch of a sconce, over the forehead of a fair girl.—They are not married yet, and I do not think they will be. But I loved the youth who loved her. How he started! It was a revelation to him.'

"'But did it not deceive him?'

"'Quite the contrary.'

"'But it was only a shadow from the outside, not a shadow coming through from the soul of the girl.'

"'Yes. You may say so. But it was all that was wanted to let the meaning of her forehead come out—yes, of her whole face, which had now and then, in the pauses of his passion, perplexed the youth. All of it, curled nostrils, pouting lips, projecting chin, instantly fell into harmony with that darkness between her eyebrows. The youth understood it in a moment, and went home miserable. And they're not married *yet*.'

"'I caught a toper alone, over his magnum of port,' said a very dark Shadow; 'and didn't I give it him! I made *delirium tremens* first; and then I settled into a funeral, passing slowly along the whole of the dining-room wall. I gave him plenty of plumes and mourning coaches. And then I gave him a funeral service, but I could not manage to make the surplice white, which was all the better for such a sinner. The wretch stared till his face passed from purple to grey, and actually left his fifth glass only, unfinished, and took refuge with his wife and children in the drawing-room, much to their surprise. I believe he actually drank a cup of tea; and although I have often looked in again, I have never seen him drinking alone at least.'

"'But does he drink less? Have you done him any good?'

"'I hope so; but I am sorry to say I can't feel sure about it.'

"'Humph! Humph! Humph!' grunted various shadow throats.

"'I had such fun once!' cried another. 'I made such game of a young clergyman!'

"'You have no right to make game of any one.'

"'Oh yes, I have—when it is for his good. He used to study his sermons—where do you think?'

"'In his study, of course.'

"'Yes and no. Guess again.'

"'Out amongst the faces in the streets.'

"'Guess again.'

"'In still green places in the country?'

"'Guess again.'

"'In old books?'

"'Guess again.'

"'No, no. Tell us.'

"'In the looking glass. Ha! ha! ha!'

"'He was fair game; fair shadow-game.'

"'I thought so. And I made such fun of him one night on the wall! He had sense enough to see that it was himself, and very like an ape. So he got ashamed, turned the mirror with its face to the wall, and thought a little more about his people, and a little less about himself. I was very glad; for, please you majesty,'—and here the speaker turned towards the king—'we don't like the creatures that live in the mirrors. You call them ghosts, don't you?'

"Before the king could reply, another had commenced. But the mention of the clergyman made the king wish to hear one of the shadow-sermons. So he turned him towards a long Shadow, who was preaching to a very quiet and listening crowd. He was just concluding his sermon.

"Therefore, dear Shadows, it is the more needful that we love one another as much as we can, because that is not much. We have no excuse for not loving as mortals have, for we do not die like them. I suppose it is the thought of that death that makes them hate so much. Then again, we go to sleep all day, most of us, and not in the night, as men do. And you know that we forget every thing that happened the night before; therefore, we ought to love well, for the love is short. Ah! dear Shadow, whom I love now with all my shadowy soul, I shall not love thee to-morrow eve, I shall not know thee; I shall pass thee in the crowd and never dream that the Shadow whom I now love is near me then. Happy Shades! for we only remember our tales until we have told them here, and then they vanish in the shadow-churchyard, where we bury only our dead selves. Ah! brethren, who would be a man and remember? Who would be a man and weep? We ought indeed to love one another, for we alone inherit oblivion; we alone are renewed with eternal birth; we alone have no gathered weight of years. I will tell you the awful fate of one Shadow who rebelled against his nature, and sought to remember the past. He said, 'I *will* remember this eve.' He fought with the genial influences of kindly sleep when the sun rose on the awful dead day of light; and although he could not keep quite awake, he dreamed of the foregone eve, and he never forgot his dream. Then he tried again the next night, and the next and the next; and he tempted another Shadow to try it with him. At last their awful fate overtook them; and, instead of being Shadows any longer, they began to have shadows sticking to them; and they thickened and thickened till they vanished out of our world; and they are now condemned to walk the earth, a man and a woman, with death behind them, and memories within them. Ah, brother Shades! let us love one another, for we shall soon forget. We are not men, but Shadows.'

"The king turned away, and pitied the poor Shadows far more than they pitied men.

"'Oh! how we played with a musician one night!' exclaimed one of another group, to which the king had directed a passing thought. He stopped to listen.—'Up and down we went, like the hammers and dampers on his piano. But he took his revenge on us. For after he had watched us for half an hour in the twilight, he rose and went to his instrument, and played a shadow-dance that fixed us all in sound for ever. Each could tell the very notes meant for him; and as long as he played, we could not stop, but went on dancing and dancing after the music, just as the magician—I mean the musician—pleased. And he punished us well; for he nearly danced us all off our legs and out of shape, into tired heaps of collapsed and palpitating darkness. We wont go near him for some time again, if we can only remember it. He had been very miserable all day, he was so poor; and we could not think of any way of comforting him except making him laugh. We did not succeed, with our best efforts; but it turned out better than we had expected after all; for his shadow-dance got him into notice, and he is quite popular now, and making money fast.—If he does not take care, we shall have other work to do with him by and by, poor fellow!'

"'I and some others did the same for a poor play-wright once. He had a Christmas piece to write, and not being an original genius, he could think of nothing that had not been done already twenty times. I saw the trouble he was in, and collecting a few stray Shadows, we acted, in dumb show of course, the funniest bit of nonsense we could think of; and it was quite successful. The poor fellow watched every motion, roaring with laughter at us, and delight at the ideas we put into his head. He turned it all into words and scenes and actions; and the piece came off "with a success unprecedented in the annals of the stage;"—at least so said the reporter of the *Punny Palpitator*.'

"Now don't you try, uncle, there's a dear, to make any fun; for you know you can't. It's always a failure," said Adela, looking as mischievous as she could. "You can only make people cry: you can't make them laugh. So don't try it. It hurts my feelings dreadfully when you fail; and gives me a pain in the back of my neck besides."

I heard her with delight, but went on, saying:

"I must read what I have written, you monkey!"

"'But how long we have to look for a chance of doing anything worth doing!' said a long, thin, especially lugubrious Shadow. 'I have only done one deed worth telling, ever since we met last. But I am proud of that.'

"'What was it? What was it?' rose from twenty voices.

"'I crept into a dining-room, one twilight, soon after last Christmas-day. I had been drawn thither by the glow of a bright fire through red window-curtains. At first I thought there was no one there, and was on the point of leaving the room, and going out again into the snowy street, when I suddenly caught the sparkle of eyes, and saw that they belonged to a little boy who lay very still on a sofa. I crept into a dark corner by the sideboard, and watched him. He seemed very sad, and did nothing but stare into the fire. At last he sighed out: 'I wish mamma would come home.' 'Poor boy!' thought I, 'there is no help for that but mamma.' Yet I would try to while away the time for him. So out of my corner I stretched a long shadow arm, reaching all across the ceiling, and pretended to make a grab at him. He was rather frightened at first; but he was a brave boy, and soon saw that it was all a joke. So when I did it again, he made a clutch at me; and then we had such fun! For though he often sighed, and wished mamma would come home, he always began again with me; and on we went with the wildest game. At last his mother's knock came to the door, and, starting up in delight, he rushed into the hall to meet her, and forgot all about poor black me. But I did not mind that in the least; for when I glided out after him into the hall, I was well repaid for my trouble, by hearing his mother say to him: 'Why, Charlie, my dear, you look ever so much better since I left you!' At that moment I slipped through the closing door, and as I ran across the snow, I heard the mother say: 'What shadow can that be, passing so quickly?' And Charlie answered with a merry laugh: 'Oh! mamma, I suppose it must be the funny shadow that has been playing such games with me, all the time you were out.' As soon as the door was shut, I crept along the wall, and looked in at the dining-room window. And I heard his mamma say, as she led him into the room: 'What an imagination the boy has!' Ha! ha! ha! Then she looked at him very earnestly for a minute, and the tears came in her eyes; and as she stooped down over him, I heard the sounds of a mingling kiss and sob.'"

"Ah, I thought so!" cried Adela, who espied, peeping, that I had this last tale on a separate slip of paper—"I thought so! That is yours, Mr. Armstrong, and not uncle's at all. He stole it out of your sermon."

"You are excessively troublesome to-night, Adela," I rejoined. "But I confess the theft."

"He had quite a right to take what I had done with, Miss Cathcart," said the curate; and once more I resumed.

"'I always look for nurseries full of children,' said another; 'and this winter I have been very fortunate. I am sure we belong especially to children. One evening, looking about in a great city, I saw through the window into a large nursery, where the odious gas had not yet been lighted. Round the fire sat a company of the most delightful children I had ever seen. They were waiting patiently for their tea. It was too good an opportunity to be lost. I hurried away, and gathering together twenty of the best Shadows I could find, returned in a few moments to the nursery. There we began on the walls one of our best dances. To be sure it was mostly extemporized; but I managed to keep it in harmony by singing this song, which I made as we went on. Of course the children could not hear it; they only saw the motions that answered to it. But with them they seemed to be very much delighted indeed, as I shall presently show you. This was the song:

'Swing, swang, swingle, swuff,
Flicker, flacker, fling, fluff!
Thus we go,
To and fro;
Here and there,
Everywhere,
Born and bred;
Never dead,
Only gone.

On! Come on.
Looming, glooming,
Spreading, fuming,
Shattering, scattering,
Parting, darting,
Settling, starting,
All our life,
Is a strife,
And a wearying for rest
On the darkness' friendly breast.

Joining, splitting,
Rising, sitting,
Laughing, shaking,
Sides all aching,
Grumbling, grim and gruff.
Swingle, swangle, swuff!

Now a knot of darkness;
Now dissolved gloom;
Now a pall of blackness
Hiding all the room.
Flicker, flacker, fluff!
Black and black enough!

Dancing now like demons;
Lying like the dead;
Gladly would we stop it,
And go down to bed!
But our work we still must do,

Shadow men, as well as you.

  Rooting, rising, shooting,
  Heaving, sinking, creeping;
  Hid in corners crooning;
  Splitting, poking, leaping,
  Gathering, towering, swooning.
    When we're lurking,
    Yet we're working,
For our labour we must do,
Shadow men, as well as you.
  Flicker, flacker, fling, fluff!
  Swing, swang, swingle, swuff!'

"'How thick the Shadows are!' said one of the children—a thoughtful little girl.

"'I wonder where they come from?' said a dreamy little boy.

"'I think they grow out of the wall,' answered the little girl; 'for I have been watching them come; first one and then another, and then a whole lot of them. I am sure they grow out of the walls.'

"'Perhaps they have papas and mammas,' said an older boy, with a smile.

"'Yes, yes; the doctor brings them in his pocket,' said another consequential little maiden.

"'No; I'll tell you,' said the older boy. 'They're ghosts.'

"'But ghosts are white.'

"'Oh! these have got black coming down the chimney.'

"'No,' said a curious-looking, white-faced boy of fourteen, who had been reading by the firelight, and had stopped to hear the little ones talk; 'they're body-ghosts; they're not soul-ghosts.'

"A silence followed, broken by the first, the dreamy-eyed boy, who said:

"'I hope they didn't make me;' at which they all burst out laughing, just as the nurse brought in their tea. When she proceeded to light the gas, we vanished.

"'I stopped a murder,' cried another.

"'How? How? How?'

"'I will tell you.—I had been lurking about a sick room for some time, where a miser lay, apparently dying. I did not like the place at all, but I felt as if I was wanted there. There were plenty of lurking places about, for it was full of all sorts of old furniture,—especially cabinets, chests and presses. I believe he had in that room every bit of the property he had spent a long life in gathering. And I knew he had lots of gold in those places; for one night, when his nurse was away, he crept out of bed, mumbling and shaking, and managed to open one of his chests, though he nearly fell down with the effort. I was peeping over his shoulder, and such a gleam of gold fell upon me, that it nearly killed me. But hearing his nurse coming, he slammed the lid down, and I recovered. I tried very hard, but I could not do him any good. For although I made all sorts of shapes on the walls and ceiling, representing evil deeds that he had done, of which there were plenty to choose from, I could make no shapes on his brain or conscience. He had no eyes for anything but gold. And it so happened that his nurse had neither eyes nor heart for anything else either.

"'One day as she was seated beside his bed, but where he could not see her, stirring some gruel in a basin, to cool it from him, I saw her take a little phial from her bosom, and I knew by the expression of her face both what it was and what she was going to do with it. Fortunately the cork was a little hard to get out, and this gave me one moment to think.

"'The room was so crowded with all sorts of things, that although there were no curtains on the four-post bed to hide from the miser the sight of his precious treasures, there was yet but one spot on the ceiling suitable for casting myself upon in the shape I wished to assume. And this spot was hard to reach. But I discovered that upon this very spot there was a square gleam of firelight thrown from a strange old dusty mirror that stood away in some corner, so I got in front of the fire, spied where the mirror was, threw myself upon it, and bounded from its face upon the square pool of dim light on the ceiling, assuming, as I passed, the shape of an old stooping hag, pouring something from a phial into a basin. I made the handle of the spoon with my own nose, ha! ha!'

"And the shadow-hand caressed the shadow tip of the shadow-nose, before the shadow-tongue resumed.

"'The old miser saw me. He would not taste the gruel that night, although his nurse coaxed and scolded till they were both weary. She pretended to taste it, and to think it very good; and at last retired into a corner, and made as if she were eating it herself; but I saw that she took good care to pour it all out.'

"'But she must either succeed, or starve him, at last.'

"'I will tell you.'

"'But,' interposed another, 'he was not worth saving.'

"'He might repent,' said another more benevolent Shadow.

"'No chance of that,' returned the former. 'Misers never do. The love of money has less in it to cure itself than any other wickedness into which wretched men can fall. What a mercy it is to be born a Shadow! Wickedness does not stick to us. What do we care for gold!—Rubbish!'

"'Amen! Amen! Amen!' came from a hundred shadow-voices.

"'You should have let her murder him, and so have had done with him.'

"'And besides, how was he to escape at last? He could never get rid of her—could he?'

"'I was going to tell you,' resumed the narrator, 'only you had so many shadow-remarks to make, that you would not let me.'

"'Go on; go on.'

"'There was a little grandchild who used to come and see him sometimes—the only creature the miser cared for. Her mother was his daughter; but the old man would never see her, because she had married against his will. Her husband was now dead, but he had not forgiven her yet. After the shadow he had seen, however, he said to himself, as he lay awake that night—I saw the words on his face—'How shall I get rid of that old devil? If I don't eat I shall die. I wish little Mary would come to-morrow. Ah! her mother would never serve me so, if I lived a hundred years more.' He lay awake, thinking such things over and over again all night long, and I stood watching him from a dark corner; till the day spring came and shook me out. When I came back next night, the room was tidy and clean. His own daughter, a sad-faced, still beautiful woman, sat by his bedside; and little Mary was curled up on the floor, by the fire, imitating us, by making queer shadows on the ceiling with her twisted hands. But she could not think how ever they got there. And no wonder, for I helped her to some very unaccountable ones.'

"'I have a story about a grand-daughter, too,' said another, the moment that speaker ceased.

"'Tell it. Tell it.'

"'Last Christmas-day,' he began, 'I and a troop of us set out in the twilight, to find some house where we could all have something to do; for we had made up our minds to act together. We tried several, but found objections to them all. At last we espied a large lonely country-house, and hastening to it, we found great preparations making for the Christmas-dinner. We rushed into it, scampered all over it, and made up our minds in a moment that it would do. We amused ourselves in the nursery first, where there were several children being dressed for dinner. We generally do go to the nursery first, your majesty. This time we were especially charmed with a little girl about five years old, who clapped her hands and danced about with delight at the antics we performed; and we said we would do something for her if we had a chance. The company began to arrive; and at every arrival, we rushed to the hall, and cut wonderful capers of welcome. Between times, we scudded away to see how the dressing went on. One girl about eighteen was delightful. She dressed herself as if she did not care much about it, but could no help doing it prettily. When she took her last look of the phantom in the glass, she half smiled to it.—But we do not like those creatures that come into the mirrors at all, your majesty. We don't understand them. They are dreadful to us.—She looked rather sad and pale, but very sweet and hopeful. We wanted to know all about her, and soon found out that she was a distant relation and a great favourite of the gentleman of the house, an old man, with an expression of benevolence mingled with obstinacy and a deep shade of the tyrannical. We could not admire him much; but we would not make up our minds all at once: Shadows never do.

"'The dinner-bell rang, and down we hurried. The children all looked happy, and we were merry. There was one cross fellow among the servants waiting, and didn't we plague him! and didn't we get fun out of him! When he was bringing up dishes, we lay in wait for him at every corner, and sprung upon him from the floor, and from over the banisters, and down from the cornices. He started and stumbled and blundered about, so that his fellow-servants thought he was tipsy. Once he dropped a plate, and had to pick up the pieces, and hurry away with them. Didn't we pursue him as he went! It was lucky for him his master did not see him; but we took care not to let him get into any real scrape, though his eyes were quite dazed with the dodging of the unaccountable shadows. Sometimes he thought the walls were coming down upon him; sometimes that the floor was gaping to swallow him; sometimes that he would be knocked in pieces by the hurrying to and fro, or be smothered in the black crowd.

"'When the blazing plum-pudding was carried in, we made a perfect shadow-carnival about it, dancing and mumming in the blue flames, like mad demons. And how the children screamed with delight!

"'The old gentleman, who was very fond of children, was laughing his heartiest laugh, when a loud knock came to the hall-door. The fair maiden started, turned paler, and then red as the Christmas fire. I saw it, and flung my hands across her face. She was very glad, and I know she said in her heart, "You kind Shadow!" which paid me well. Then I followed the rest into the hall, and found there a jolly, handsome, brown-faced sailor, evidently a son of the house. The old man received him with tears in his eyes, and the children with shouts of joy. The maiden escaped in the confusion, just in time to save herself from fainting. We crowded about the lamp to hide her retreat, and nearly put it out. The butler could not get it to burn up before she had glided into her place again, delighted to find the room so dark. The sailor only had seen her go, and now he sat down beside her, and, without a word, got hold of her hand in the gloom. But now we all scattered to the walls and the corners; and the lamp blazed up again, and he let her hand go.

"'During the rest of the dinner, the old man watched them both, and saw that there was something between them, and was very angry. For he was an important man in his own estimation—and they had never consulted him. The fact was, they had never known their own minds till the sailor had gone upon his last voyage; and had learned each other's only this moment.—We found out all this by watching them, and then talking together about it afterwards.—The old gentleman saw too, that his favourite, who was under such obligation to him for loving her so much, loved his son better than him; and this made him so jealous, that he soon overshadowed the whole table with his morose looks and short answers. That kind of shadowing is very different from ours; and the Christmas dessert grew so gloomy that we Shadows could not bear it, and were delighted when the ladies rose to go to the drawing-room. The gentlemen would not stay behind the ladies, even for the sake of the well-known wine. So the moddy host, notwithstanding his hospitality, was left alone at the table, in the great silent room. We followed the company upstairs to the drawing-room, and thence to the nursery for snap-dragon. While they were busy with this most shadowy of games, nearly all the Shadows crept down stairs again to the dining-room, where the old man still sat, gnawing the bone of his own selfishness. They crowded into the room, and by using every kind of expansion—blowing themselves out like soap-bubbles, they succeeded in heaping up the whole room with shade upon shade. They clustered thickest about the fire and the lamp, till at last they almost drowned them in hills of darkness.

"'Before they had accomplished so much, the children, tired with fun and frolic, were put to bed. But the little girl of five years old, with whom we had been so pleased when first we arrived, could not go to sleep. She had a little room of her own; and I had watched her to bed, and now kept her awake by gambolling in the rays of the night-light. When her eyes were once fixed upon me, I took the shape of her grandfather, representing him on the wall, as he sat in his chair, with his head bent down, and his arms hanging listlessly by his sides. And the child remembered that that was just as she had seen him last; for she had happened to peep in at the dining-room door, after all the rest had gone up stairs. "What if he should be sitting there still," thought she, "all alone in the dark!" She scrambled out of bed and crept down.

"'Meantime the others had made the room below so dark, that only the face and white hair of the old man could be dimly discerned in the shadowy crowd. For he had filled his own mind with shadows, which we Shadows wanted to draw out of him. Those shadows are very different from us, your majesty knows. He was thinking of all the disappointments he had had in life, and of all the ingratitude he had met with. He thought far more of the good he had done, than the good others had got. "After all I have done for them," said he, with a sigh of bitterness, "not one of them cares a straw for me. My own children will be glad when I am gone!" At that instant he lifted up his eyes and saw, standing close by the door, a tiny figure in a long night-gown. The door behind her was shut. It was my little friend who had crept in noiselessly. A pang of icy fear shot to the old man's heart—but it melted away as fast, for we made a lane through us for a single ray from the fire to fall on the face of the little sprite; and he thought it was a child of his own that had died when just the age of her little niece, who now stood looking for her grandfather among the Shadows. He thought she had come out of her grave in the old darkness, to ask why her father was sitting alone on Christmas-day. And he felt he had no answer to give his little ghost, but one he would be ashamed for her to hear. But the little girl saw him now. She walked up to him with a childish stateliness—stumbling once or twice on what seemed her long shroud. Pushing through the crowded shadows, she reached him, climbed upon his knee, laid her little long-haired head on his shoulders, and said: "Ganpa! you goomy? Isn't it your Kismass-day, too, ganpa?"

"'A new fount of love seemed to burst from the clay of the old man's heart. He clasped the child to his bosom, and wept. Then, without a word, he rose with her in his arms, carried her up to her room, and laying her down in her bed, covered her up, kissed her sweet little mouth unconscious of reproof, and then went to the drawing-room.

"'As soon as he entered, he saw the culprits in a quiet corner alone. He went up to them, took a hand of each, and joining them in both his, said, "God bless you!" Then he turned to the rest of the company, and "Now," said he, "let's have a Christmas carol."—And well he might; for though I have paid many visits to the house, I have never seen him cross since; and I am sure that must cost him a good deal of trouble.'

"'We have just come from a great palace,' said another, 'where we knew there were many children, and where we thought to hear glad voices, and see royally merry looks. But as soon as we entered, we became aware that one mighty Shadow shrouded the whole; and that Shadow deepened and deepened, till it gathered in darkness about the reposing form of a wise prince. When we saw him, we could move no more, but clung heavily to the walls, and by our stillness added to the sorrow of the hour. And when we saw the mother of her people weeping with bowed head for the loss of him in whom she had trusted, we were seized with such a longing to be Shadows no longer, but winged angels, which are the white shadows cast in heaven from the Light of Light, so to gather around her, and hover over her with comforting, that we vanished from the walls and found ourselves floating high above the towers of the palace, where we met the angels on their way; and knew that our service was not needed.'

"By this time there was a glimmer of approaching moonlight, and the king began to see several of those stranger Shadows, with human faces and eyes, moving about amongst the crowd. He knew at once that they did not belong to his dominion. They looked at him, and came near him, and passed slowly, but they never made any obeisance, or gave sign of homage. And what their eyes said to him, the king only could tell. And he did not tell.

"'What are those other Shadows that move through the crowd?' said he to one of his subjects near him.

"The Shadow started, looked round, shivered slightly, and laid his finger on his lips. Then leading the king a little aside, and looking carefully about him once more,

"'I do not know,' said he, in a low tone, 'what they are. I have heard of them often, but only once did I ever see any of them before. That was when some of us one night paid a visit to a man who sat much alone, and was said to think a great deal. We saw two of those sitting in the room with him, and he was as pale as they were. We could not cross the threshold, but shivered and shook, and felt ready to melt away. Is not your majesty afraid of them too?'

"But the king made no answer; and before he could speak again, the moon had climbed above the mighty pillars of the church of the Shadows, and looked in at the great window of the sky.

"The shapes had all vanished; and the king, again lifting up his eyes, saw but the wall of his own chamber, on which flickered the Shadow of a Little Child. He looked down, and there, sitting on a stool by the fire, he saw one of his own little ones, waiting to say good night to his father, and go to bed early, that he might rise as early, and be very good and happy all Christmas-day.

"And Ralph Rinkelmann rejoiced that he was a man, and not a Shadow."

When I had finished my story, the not unusual silence followed. It was soon broken by Adela.

"But what were those other shadows, mysteries in the midst of mystery?" persisted she.

"My dear, as the little child said shadows were the ghosts of the body, so I say these were the shadows of the mind.—Will that do?"

"I must think. I don't know. I can't trust you.—-I *do* believe, uncle, you write whatever comes into your head; and then when any one asks you the meaning of this or that, you hunt round till you find a meaning just about the same size as the thing itself, and stick it on.—Don't you, now?"

"Perhaps *yes*, and perhaps *no*, and perhaps both," I answered.

"You have the most confounded imagination I ever knew, Smith, my boy!" said the colonel. "You run right away, and leave me to come hobbling after as I best can."

"Oh, never mind; I always return to my wife and children," I answered; and being an old bachelor, this passed for a good joke with the kind-hearted company. No more remarks were made upon my Shadow story, though I was glad to see the curate pondering over it. Before we parted, the usual question of who was to read the next, had to be settled.

"I proposed, for a change," said the curate, "that the club meet at my house the next time, and that the story be omitted for once. We'll have some music, and singing, and poetry, and all that sort of thing. What do you say, Lizzie?"

"With all my heart," answered Mrs. Armstrong.

"You forget," said the colonel, "that Adela is not well enough to go out yet."

Adela looked as if she thought that was a mistake, and glanced towards the doctor. I think Percy caught sight of the glance as it passed him.

"If I may be allowed to give a professional opinion," said Harry, "I think she could go without the smallest danger, if she were well wrapped up."

"You can have the carriage, of course, my love," said her father, "if you would like to go."

"I should very much like to go," said Adela.

And so it was settled to the evident contentment of all except the mother and son, who, I suppose, felt that Adela was slipping through their fingers, in this strengthening of adverse influences. I was sure myself, that nothing could be better for her, in either view of the case. Harry did not stay behind to ask her any questions this evening, but left with the rest.

The next day, the bright frosty weather still continuing, I took Adela out for a walk.

"You are much better, I think, my dear," I said.

"Very much," she answered. "I think Mr. Armstrong's prescription is doing me a great deal of good. It seems like magic. I sleep very well indeed now. And somehow life seems a much more possible thing than it looked a week or two ago. And the whole world appears more like the work of God."

"I am very glad, my dear. If all your new curate tries to teach us be true, the world need not look very dreary to any of us."

"But do you believe it all, uncle?"

"Yes I do, my dear. I believe that the grand noble way of thinking of God and his will must be the true way, though it never can be grand or noble enough; and that belief in beauty and truth, notwithstanding so many things that are neither beautiful nor true, is essential to a right understanding of the world. Whatever is not good and beautiful, is doomed by the very death that is in it; and when we find such things in ourselves or in other people, we may take comfort that these must be destroyed one day, even if it be by that form of divine love which appears as a consuming fire."

"But that is very dreadful too, is it not, uncle?"

"Yes, me dear. But there is a refuge from it; and then the fear proves a friend."

"What refuge?"

"God himself. If you go close up to him, his spirit will become your spirit, and you will need no fire then. You will find that that which is fire to them that are afar off, is a mighty graciousness to them that are nigh. They are both the same thing."

Adela made me no answer. Perhaps I tried to give her more than she was ready to receive. Perhaps she needed more leading, before she would be able to walk in that road. If so, then Providence was leading her; and I need not seek to hasten a divine process.

But at least she enjoyed her walk that bright winter day, and came home without being wearied, or the cold getting any victory over her.

As we passed some cottages on our way home, Adela said—

"There is a poor woman who lives in one of these cottages, who used to be a servant of ours. She is in bad health, and I dare say is not very well off in this frost, for her husband is only a labourer. I should like to go and see her."

"With all my heart, my dear," I answered.

"This is the house," said Adela; and she lifted the latch and went in gently, I following.

No one had heard our entrance, and when Adela knocked at the inner door, there was no reply. Whereupon she opened the door, and then we saw the woman seated on one side of the fire, and the man on the other side with his pipe in his mouth; while between them sat the curate with his hands in his pockets, and his pipe likewise in his mouth. But they were blowing but a small cloud between them, and were evidently very deep in an earnest conversation.

I overheard a part of what the cottager was saying, and could not help listening to the rest.

"And the man was telling them, sir, that God had picked out so many men, women, and children, to go right away to glory, and left the rest to be damned for ever and ever in hell. And I up and spoke to him; and 'sir,' says I, 'if I was tould as how I was to pick out so many out o' my childeren, and take 'em with me to a fine house, and leave the rest to be burnt up i' the old one, which o' them would I choose?' 'How can I tell?' says he. 'No doubt,' says I; 'they aint your sons and darters. But I can. I wouldn't move a foot, sir, but I'd take my chance wi' the poor things. And, sir,' says I, 'we're all God's childeren; and which o' us is he to choose, and which is he to leave out? I don't believe he'd know a bit better how to choose one and leave another than I should, sir—that is, his heart wouldn't let him lose e'er a one o' us, or he'd be miserable for ever, as I should be, if I left one o' mine i' the fire.'"

Here Adela had the good sense to close the door again, yet more softly than she had opened it; and we retired.

"That's the right sort of man," said I, "to get a hold of the poor. He understands them, being himself as poor in spirit as they are in pocket—or, indeed, I might have said, as he is in pocket himself. But depend upon it he comes out both ways poorer than he went in."

"It should not be required of a curate to give money," said Adela.

"Do you grudge him the blessedness of giving, Adela?"

"Oh, no. I only think it is too hard on him."

"It is as necessary for a poor man to give away, as for a rich man. Many poor men are more devoted worshippers of Mammon than some rich men."

And then I took her home.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING AT THE CURATE'S.

As I led Adela, well wrapped in furs, down the steps to put her into the carriage, I felt by the wind, and saw by the sky, that a snowstorm was at hand. This set my heart beating with delight, for after all I am only what my friends call me—an old boy; and so I am still very fond of snow and wind. Of course this pleasure is often modified by the recollection that it is to most people no pleasure, and to some a source of great suffering. But then I recover myself by thinking, that I did not send for the snow, and that my enjoyment of it will neither increase their pains nor lessen my sympathies. And so I enjoy it again with all my heart. It is partly the sense of being lapt in a mysterious fluctuating depth of exquisite shapes of evanescent matter, falling like a cataract from an unknown airy gulf, where they grow into being and form out of the invisible—well-named by the prophet Job—for a prophet he was in the truest sense, all-seated in his ashes and armed with his potsherd—the womb of the snow; partly the sense of motion and the goings of the wind through the etherial mass; partly the delight that always comes from contest with nature, a contest in which no vile passions are aroused, and no weak enemy goes helpless to the ground. I presume that in a right condition of our nervous nature, instead of our being, as some would tell us, less exposed to the influences of nature, we should in fact be altogether open to them. Our nerves would be a thorough-fare for Nature in all and each of her moods and feelings, stormy or peaceful, sunshiny or sad. The true refuge from the slavery to which this would expose us, the subjection of man to circumstance, is to be found, not in the deadening of the nervous constitution, or in a struggle with the influences themselves, but in the strengthening of the moral and refining of the spiritual nature; so that, as the storms rave through the vault of heaven without breaking its strong arches with their winds, or staining its etherial blue with their rain-clouds, the soul of man should keep clear and steady and great, holding within it its own feelings and even passions, knowing that, let them moan or rave as they will, they cannot touch the nearest verge of the empyrean dome, in whose region they have their birth and being.

For me, I felt myself now, just an expectant human snow-storm; and as I sat on the box by the coachman, I rejoiced to greet the first flake, which alighted on the tip of my nose even before we had cleared our own grounds. Before we had got *up street*, the wind had risen, and the snow thickened, till the horses seemed inclined to turn their tails to the hill and the storm together, for the storm came down the hill in their faces. It was soon impossible to see one's hand before one's eyes; and the carriage lamps served only to reveal a chaotic fury of snow-flakes, crossing each other's path at all angles, in the eddies of the wind amongst the houses. The coachman had to keep encouraging his horses to get them to face it at all. The ground was very slippery; and so fast fell the snow, that it had actually begun to ball in the horses' feet before we reached our destination. When we were all safe in Mrs. Armstrong's drawing-room, we sat for a while listening to the wind roaring in the chimney, before any of us spoke. And then I did not join in the conversation, but pleased myself with looking at the room; for next to human faces, I delight in human abodes, which will always, more or less, according to the amount of choice vouchsafed in the occupancy, be like the creatures who dwell in them. Even the soldier-crab must have some likeness to the snail of whose house he takes possession, else he could not live in it at all.

The first thing to be done by one who would read a room is, to clear it as soon as possible of the air of the marvellous, the air of the storybook, which pervades every place at the first sight of it. But I am not now going to write a treatise upon this art, for which I have not time to invent a name; but only to give as much of a description of this room as will enable my readers to feel quite at home with us in it, during our evening there. It was a large low room, with two beams across the ceiling at unequal distances. There was only a drugget on the floor, and the window curtains were scanty. But there was a glorious fire on the hearth, and the tea-board was filled with splendid china, as old as the potteries. The chairs, I believe, had been brought from old Mr. Armstrong's lumber-room, and so they all looked as if they could tell stories themselves. At all events they were just the proper chairs to tell stories in, and I could not help regretting that we were not to have any to-night. The rest of the company had arrived before us. A warm corner in an old-fashioned sofa had been prepared for Adela, and as soon as she was settled in it, our hostess proceeded to pour out the tea with a simplicity and grace which showed that she had been just as much a lady when carrying parcels for the dressmaker, and would have been a lady if she had been a housemaid. Such a women are rare in every circle, the best of every kind being rare. It is very disappointing to the imaginative youth when, coming up to London and going into society, he finds that so few of the men and women he meets, come within the charmed circle of his ideal refinement.

I said to myself: "I am sure she could write a story if she would. I must have a try for one from her."

When tea was over, she looked at her husband, and then went to the piano, and sang the following ballad:

"'Traveller, what lies over the hill?
  Traveller, tell to me:

I am only a child—from the window-sill
  Over I cannot see.'

"'Child, there's a valley over there,
  Pretty and woody and shy;
And a little brook that says—'take care,
  Or I'll drown you by and by.'

"'And what comes next?' 'A little town;
  And a towering hill again;
More hills and valleys, up and down,
  And a river now and then.'

"'And what comes next?' 'A lonely moor,
  Without a beaten way;
And grey clouds sailing slow, before
  A wind that will not stay.'

"'And then?' 'Dark rocks and yellow sand,
  And a moaning sea beside.'
'And then?' 'More sea, more sea more land,
  And rivers deep and wide.'

"'And then?' 'Oh! rock and mountain and vale,
  Rivers and fields and men;
Over and over—a weary tale—
  And round to your home again.'

"'Is that the end? It is weary at best.'
  'No, child; it is not the end.
On summer eves, away in the west,
  You will see a stair ascend;

"'Built of all colours of lovely stones—
  A stair up into the sky;
Where no one is weary, and no one moans,
  Or wants to be laid by.'

"'I will go.' 'But the steps are very steep:
  If you would climb up there,
You must lie at its foot, as still as sleep,
  And be a step of the stair,

"'For others to put their feet on you,
  To reach the stones high-piled;
Till Jesus comes and takes you too,
  And leads you up, my child!'"

"That is one of your parables, I am sure, Ralph," said the doctor, who was sitting, quite at his ease, on a footstool, with his back against the wall, by the side of the fire opposite to Adela, casting every now and then a glance across the fiery gulf, just as he had done in church when I first saw him. And Percy was there to watch them, though, from some high words I overheard, I had judged that it was with difficulty his mother had prevailed on him to come. I could not help thinking myself, that two pairs of eyes met and parted rather oftener than any other two pairs in the room; but I could find nothing to object.

"Now, Miss Cathcart, it is your turn to sing."

"Would you mind singing another of Heine's songs?" said the doctor, as he offered his hand to lead her to the piano.

"No," she answered. "I will not sing one of that sort. It was not liked last time. Perhaps what I do sing won't be much better though.

"The waters are rising and flowing
   Over the weedy stone—
 Over and over it going:
   It is never gone.

"So joy on joy may go sweeping
   Over the head of pain—
 Over and over it leaping:
   It will rise again."

"Very lovely, but not much better than what I asked for. In revenge, I will give you one of Heine's that my brother translated. It always reminds me, with a great difference, of one in In Memoriam, beginning: *Dark house*."

So spake Harry, and sang:

"The shapes of the days forgotten
  Out of their graves arise,
And show me what once my life was,
  In the presence of thine eyes.

"All day through the streets I wandered,
  As in dreams men go and come;
The people in wonder looked at me,
  I was so mournful dumb.

"It was better though, at night-fall,
  When, through the empty town,
I and my shadow together
  Went silent up and down.

"With echoing, echoing footstep,
  Over the bridge I walk;
The moon breaks out of the waters,
  And looks as if she would talk.

"I stood still before thy dwelling,
  Like a tree that prays for rain;
I stood gazing up at thy window—
  My heart was in such pain.

"And thou lookedst through thy curtains—
  I saw thy shining hand;
And thou sawest me, in the moonlight,
  Still as a statue stand."

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Cathcart, with a smile, "but I don't think such sentimental songs good for anybody. They can't be *healthy*—I believe that is the word they use now-a-days."

"I don't say they are," returned the doctor; "but many a pain is relieved by finding its expression. I wish he had never written worse."

"That is not why I like them," said the curate. "They seem to me to hold the same place in literature that our dreams do in life. If so much of our life is actually spent in dreaming, there must be some place in our literature for what corresponds to dreaming. Even in this region, we cannot step beyond the boundaries of our nature. I delight in reading Lord Bacon now; but one of Jean Paul's dreams will often give me more delight than one of Bacon's best paragraphs. It depends upon the mood. Some dreams like these, in poetry or in sleep, arouse individual states of consciousness altogether different from any of our waking moods, and not to be recalled by any mere effort of the will. All our being, for the moment, has a new and strange colouring. We have another kind of life. I think myself, our life would be much poorer without our dreams; a thousand rainbow tints and combinations would be gone; music and poetry would lose many an indescribable exquisiteness and tenderness. You see I like to take our dreams seriously, as I would even our fun. For I believe that those new mysterious feelings that come to us in sleep, if they be only from dreams of a richer grass and a softer wind than we have known awake, are indications of wells of feeling and delight which have not yet broken out of their hiding-places in our souls, and are only to be suspected from these rings of fairy green that spring up in the high places of our sleep."

"I say, Ralph," interrupted Harry, "just repeat that strangest of Heine's ballads, that—"

"Oh, no, no; not that one. Mrs. Cathcart would not like it at all."

"Yes, please do," said Adela.

"Pray don't think of me, gentlemen," said the aunt.

"No, I won't," said the curate.

"Then I will," said the doctor, with a glance at Adela, which seemed to say—"If you want it, you shall have it, whether they like it or not."

He repeated, with just a touch of the recitative in his tone, the following verses:

"Night lay upon mine eyelids;
  Upon my mouth lay lead;
With withered heart and sinews,
  I lay among the dead.

"How long I lay and slumbered,
  I knew not in the gloom.
I wakened up, and listened
  To a knocking at my tomb.

"'Wilt thou not rise, my Henry?
  Immortal day draws on;
The dead are all arisen;
  The endless joy begun.'

"'My love, I cannot raise me;
  Nor could I find the door;
My eyes with bitter weeping
  Are blind for evermore.'

"'But from thine eyes, dear Henry,
  I'll kiss away the night;
Thou shall behold the angels,
  And Heaven's own blessed light.'

"'My love, I cannot raise me;
  The blood is flowing still,
Where thou, heart-deep, didst stab me,
  With a dagger-speech, to kill.'

"'Oh! I will lay my hand, Henry,
  So soft upon thy heart;
And that will stop the bleeding—
  Stop all the bitter smart.'

"'My love, I cannot raise me;
  My head is bleeding too.
When thou wast stolen from me,
  I shot it through and through.'

"'With my thick hair, my Henry,
  I will stop the fountain red;
Press back again the blood-stream,
  And heal thy wounded head.'

"She begged so soft, so dearly,
  I could no more say no;
Writhing, I strove to raise me,
  And to the maiden go.

"Then the wounds again burst open;
  And afresh the torrents break
From head and heart—life's torrents—
  And lo! I am awake."

"There now, that is enough!" said the curate. "That is not nice—is it, Mrs. Cathcart?"

Mrs. Cathcart smiled, and said:

"I should hardly have thought your time well-spent in translating it, Mr. Armstrong."

"It took me a few idle minutes only," said the curate. "But my foolish brother, who has a child's fancy for horrid things, took a fancy to that; and so he won't let my sins be forgotten. But I will take away the taste of it with another of Heine's, seeing we have fallen upon him. I should never have dreamed of introducing him here. It was Miss Cathcart's first song that opened the vein, I believe."

"I am the guilty person," said Adela; "and I fear I am not sorry for my sins—the consequences have been too pleasant. Do go on, Mr. Armstrong."

He repeated:

"*Peace*.

"High in the heavens the sun was glowing;
Around him the white clouds, like waves, were flowing;
The sea was very still and grey.
Dreamily thinking as I lay,
Close by the gliding vessel's wheel,
A sleepless slumber did o'er me steal;
And I saw the Christ, the healer of woe,
In white and waving garments go;
Walking in giant form went he
Over the land and sea.
High in the heaven he towered his head,
And his hands in blessing forth he spread
Over the land and sea.
And for a heart, O wonder meet!
In his breast the sun did throb and beat;
In his breast, for a heart to the only One,
Shone the red, the flaming sun.

The flaming red sunheart of the Lord
Forth its gracious life-beams poured;
Its fair and love-benignant light
Softly shone, with warming might,
Over the land and sea.

"Sounds of solemn bells that go
Through the still air to and fro,
Draw, like swans, in a rosy band,
The gliding ship to the grassy land,
Where a mighty city, towered and high,
Breaks and jags the line of the sky.

"Oh, wonder of peach, how still was the town!
The hollow tumult had all gone down
Of the bustling and babbling trades.
Men and women, and youths and maids,
White clothes wearing,
Palm branches bearing,
Walked through the clean and echoing streets;
And when one with another meets,
They look at each other with eyes that tell
That they understand each other well;
And, trembling with love and sweet restraint,
Each kisses the other upon the brow,
And looks above, like a hoping saint,
To the holy, healing sunheart's glow;
Which atoning all, its red blood streams
Downward in still outwelling beams;
Till, threefold blessed, they call aloud,
The single hearts of a happy crowd.
Praised be Jesus Christ!"

"You will like that better," concluded the curate, again addressing Mrs. Cathcart.

"Fanciful," she answered. "I don't like fancies about sacred things."

"I fear, however," replied he, "that most of our serious thoughts about sacred things are little better than fancies."

"Sing that other of his about the flowers, and I promise you never to mention his name in this company again," said Harry.

"Very well, I will, on that condition," answered Ralph.

"In the sunny summer morning
Into the garden I come;
The flowers are whispering and speaking,
But I, I wander dumb.

"The flowers are whispering and speaking,
And they gaze at my visage wan:
'You must not be cross with our sister,
You melancholy man!'"

"Is that all?" said Adela.

"Yes, that's all," answered the singer.

"But we cannot let you off with that only," she said.

"What an awful night it is!" interrupted the colonel, rising and going to the window to peep out. "Between me and the lamp, the air looks solid with driving snow."

"Sing one of your winter songs, Ralph," said the curate's wife. "This is surely stormy enough for one of your Scotch winters that you are so proud of."

Thus adjured, Mr. Armstrong sang:

"A morning clear, with frosty light
From sunbeams late and low;
They shine upon the snow so white,
And shine back from the snow.

"From icy spears a drop will run—
Not fall: at afternoon,
It shines a diamond for the sun,
An opal for the moon.

"And when the bright sad sun is low

Behind the mountain-dome,
A twilight wind will come, and blow
All round the children's home;

"And waft about the powdery snow,
As night's dim footsteps pass;
But waiting, in its grave below,
Green lies the summer-grass."

"Now it seems to me," said the colonel, "though I am no authority in such matters, that it is just in such weather as this, that we don't need songs of that sort. They are not very exhilarating."

"There is truth in that," replied Mr. Armstrong. "I think it is in winter chiefly that we want songs of summer, as the Jews sang—if not the songs of Zion, yet of Zion, in a strange land. Indeed most of our songs are of this sort."

"Then sing one of your own summer songs."

"No, my dear; I would rather not. I don't altogether like them. Besides, if Harry could sing that *Tryst* of Schiller's, it would bring back the feeling of the summer better than any brooding over the remembrances of it could do."

"Did you translate that too?" I asked.

"Yes. As I told you, at one time of my life translating was a constant recreation to me. I have had many half-successes, some of which you have heard. I think this one better."

"What is the name of it?"

"It is 'Die Erwartung'—*The Waiting*, literally, or *Expectation.* But the Scotch word *Tryst* (Rendezvous) is a better name for a poem, though English. It is often curious how a literal rendering, even when it gives quite the meaning, will not do, because of the different ranks of the two words in their respective languages."

"I have heard you say," said Harry, "that the principles of the translation of lyrics have yet to be explored."

"Yes. But what I have just said, applies nearly as much to prose as to the verse.—Sing, Harry. You know it well enough."

"Part is in recitative,"

"So it is. Go on."

"To enter into the poem, you must suppose a lover waiting in an arbour for his lady-love. First come two recited lines of expectation; then two more, in quite a different measure, of disappointment; and then a long-lined song of meditation; until expectation is again aroused, to be again disappointed—and so on through the poem.

"THE TRYST.

"That was the wicket a-shaking!
That was its clang as it fell!
No, 'twas but the night-wind waking,
And the poplars' answering swell.

Put on thy beauty, foliage-vaulted roof,
To greet her entrance, radiant all with grace;
Ye branches weave a holy tent, star-proof;
With lovely darkness, silent, her embrace;
Sweet, wandering airs, creep through the leafy woof,
And toy and gambol round her rosy face,
When with its load of beauty, lightly borne,
Glides in the fairy foot, and brings my morn.

Hush! I hear timid, yet daring
Steps that are almost a race!
No, a bird—some terror scaring—
Started from its roosting place.

Quench thy sunk torch, Hyperion. Night, appear!
Dim, ghostly Night, lone loveliness entrancing!
Spread, purple blossoms, round us, in a sphere;
Twin, lattice-boughs, the mystery enhancing;
Love's joy would die, if more than two were here—
She shuns the daybeam indiscreetly glancing.

Eve's star alone—no envious tell-tale she—
Gazes unblamed, from far across the sea.

Hark! distant voices, that lightly
Ripple the silence deep!
No; the swans that, circling nightly,
Through the silver waters sweep.

Around me wavers an harmonious flow;
The fountain's fall swells in delicious rushes;
The flower beneath the west wind's kiss bends low;
A trembling joy from each to all outgushes.
Grape-clusters beckon; peaches luring glow,
Behind dark leaves hiding their crimson blushes;
The winds, cooled with the sighs of flowers asleep,
Light waves of odour o'er my forehead sweep.

Hear I not echoing footfalls,
Hither along the pleached walk?
No; the over-ripened fruit falls
Heavy-swollen, from off its stalk.

Dull is the eye of day that flamed so bright;
In gentle death, its colours all are dim;
Unfolding fearless in the fair half light,
The flower-cups ope, that all day closed their brim;
Calm lifts the moon her clear face on the night;
Dissolved in masses faint, Earth's features swim;
Each grace withdraws the soft relaxing zone—
Beauty unrobed shines full on me alone.

See I not, there, a white shimmer?—
Something with pale silken shine?
No; it is the column's glimmer,
'Gainst the gloomy hedge of pine.

O longing heart! no more thyself delight
With shadow-forms—a sweet deceiving pleasure;
Filling thy arms but as the vault of night
Infoldeth darkness without hope or measure.
O lead the living beauty to my sight,
That living love her loveliness may treasure!
Let but her shadow fall across my eyes,
And straight my dreams exulting truths will rise!

And soft as, when, purple and golden,
The clouds of the evening descend,
So had she drawn nigh unbeholden,
And wakened with kisses her friend."

Never had song a stranger accompaniment than this song; for the air was full of fierce noises near and afar. Again the colonel went to the window. When he drew back the curtains, at Adela's request, and pulled up the blind, you might have fancied the dark wind full of snowy Banshees, fleeting and flickering by, and uttering strange ghostly cries of warning. The friends crowded into the bay-window, and stared out into the night with a kind of happy awe. They pressed their brows against the panes, in the vain hope of seeing where there was no light. Every now and then the wind would rush up against the window in fierce attack, as if the creatures that rode by upon the blast had seen the row of white faces, and it angered them to be thus stared at, and they rode their airy steeds full tilt against the thin rampart of glass that protected the human weaklings from becoming the spoil of their terrors.

While every one was silent with the intensity of this outlook, and with the awe of such an uproar of wild things without souls, there came a loud knock at the door, which was close to the window where they stood. Even the old colonel, whose nerves were as hard as piano-wires, started back and cried "God bless me!" The doctor, too, started, and began mechanically to button his coat, but said nothing. Adela gave a little suppressed scream, and ashamed of the weakness, crept away to her sofa-corner.

The servant entered, saying that Dr. Armstrong's man wanted to see him. Harry went into the passage, which was just outside the drawing-room, and the company overheard the following conversation, every word.

"Well, William?"

"There's a man come after you from Cropstone Farm, sir. His missus is took sudden."

"What?—It's not the old lady then? It's the young mistress?"

"Yes; she's in labour, sir; leastways she was—he's been three hours on the road. I reckon it's all over by this time.—You won't go, sir! It's morally unpossible."

"Won't go! It's morally impossible not. You knew I would go.—That's the mare outside."

"No, sir. It's Tilter."

"Then you did think I wouldn't go! You knew well enough Tilter's no use for a job like this. The mare's my only chance."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did not think you would go."

"Home with you, as hard as Tilter can drive—confound him!—And bring the mare instantly. She's had her supper?"

"I left her munching, sir."

"Don't let her drink. I'll give her a quart of ale at Job Timpson's."

"You won't go that way, surely, sir?"

"It's the nearest; and the snow can't be very deep yet."

"I've brought your boots and breeches, sir."

"All right."

The man hurried out, and Harry was heard to run up stairs to his brother's room. The friends stared at each other in some perturbation. Presently Harry re-entered, in the articles last mentioned, saying—

"Ralph, have you an old shooting-coat you could lend me?"

"I should think so, Harry. I'll fetch you one."

Now at length the looks of the circle found some expression in the words of the colonel:

"Mr. Armstrong, I am an old soldier, and I trust I know what duty is. The only question is, *Can* this be done?"

"Colonel, no man can tell what can or cannot be done till he tries. I think it can."

The colonel held out his hand—his sole reply.

The schoolmaster and his wife ventured to expostulate. To them Harry made fun of the danger. Adela had come from the corner to which she had retreated, and joined the group. She laid her hand on Harry's arm, and he saw that she was pale as death.

"Don't go," she said.

As if to enforce her words, the street-door, which, I suppose, William had not shut properly, burst open with a bang against the wall, and the wind went shrieking through the house, as if in triumph at having forced an entrance.

"The woman is in labour," said Harry in reply to Adela, forgetting, in the stern reality both for the poor woman and himself, that girls of Adela's age and social position are not accustomed to hear such facts so plainly expressed, from a man's lips. Adela, however, simply accepted the fact, and replied:

"But you will be too late anyhow."

"Perhaps just in time," he answered, as his brother entered with a coat over his arm.

"Ralph," he went on, with a laugh, "they are trying to persuade me not to go."

"It is a tempting of Providence," said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"Harry, my boy," said the curate solemnly, "I would rather have you brought home dead to-morrow, than see you sitting by that fire five minutes after your mare comes. But you'll put on a great-coat?"

"No, thank you. I shall do much better without one. How comical I shall look in Farmer Prisphig's Sunday clothes! I'm not going to be lost this storm, Mrs. Bloomfield; for I second-see myself at this moment, sitting by the farmer's kitchen fire, in certain habiliments a world too wide for my unshrunk shanks, but doing my best to be worthy of them by the attention I am paying to my supper."

Here he stooped to Lizzie and whispered in her ear:

"Don't let them make a fuss about my going. There is really no particular danger. And I don't want my patient there frightened and thrown back, you know."

Mrs. Armstrong nodded a promise. In a moment more, Harry had changed his coat; for the storm had swept away ceremony at least. Lizzie ran and brought him a glass of wine; but he begged for a glass of milk instead, and was soon supplied; after which he buttoned up his coat, tightened the straps of his spurs, which had been brought slack on his boots, put on one of a thick pair of gloves which he found in his brother's coat, bade them all good night, drew on the other glove, and stood prepared to go.

Did he or did he not see Adela's eyes gazing out of her pale face with an expression of admiring apprehension, as she stood bending forward, and looking up at the strong man about to fight the storm, and all ready to meet it? I don't know. I only put it to his conscience.

In a moment more, the knock came again—the only sign, for no one could hear the mare's hoofs in the wind and snow. With one glance and one good night, he hurried out. The wind once more, for a brief moment, held an infernal carnival in the house. They crowded to the window—saw a dim form heave up on horseback, and presently vanish. All space lay beyond; but, for them, he was swallowed up by the jaws of the darkness. They knew no more. A flash of pride in his brother shot from Ralph's eyes, as, with restrained excitement, for which he sought some outlet, he walked towards the piano. His wife looked at Ralph with the same light of pride, tempered by thankfulness; for she knew, if he had been sent for, he would have gone all the same as Harry; but then he was not such a horseman as his brother. The fact was, he had neither seat nor hands, though no end of pluck.

"He will have to turn back," said the colonel. "He can't reach Cropstone Farm to-night. It lies right across the moor. It is impossible."

"Impossible things are always being done," said the curate, "else the world would have been all moor by this time."

"The wind is dead against him," said the schoolmaster.

"Better in front than in flank," said the colonel. "It won't blow him out of the saddle."

Adela had crept back to her corner, where she sat shading her eyes, and listening. I saw that her face was very pale. Lizzie joined her, and began talking to her.

I had not much fear for Harry, for I could not believe that his hour was come yet. I had great confidence in him and his mare. And I believed in the God that made Harry and the mare, and the storm too, through which he had sent them to the aid of one who was doing her part to keep his world going.

But now Mr. Armstrong had found a vent for his excitement in another of his winter songs, which might be very well for his mood, though it was not altogether suited to that of some of the rest of us. He sang—

"Oh wildly wild the winter-blast
  Is whirling round the snow;
The wintry storms are up at last,
  And care not how they go.

In wreaths and mists, the frozen white
  Is torn into the air;
It pictures, in the dreary light,
  An ocean in despair.

Come, darkness! rouse the fancy more;
  Storm! wake the silent sea;
Till, roaring in the tempest-roar,
  It rave to ecstasy;

And death-like figures, long and white,
  Sweep through the driving spray;
And, fading in the ghastly night,
  Cry faintly far away."

I saw Adela shudder. Presently she asked her papa whether it was not time to go home. Mrs.

Armstrong proposed that she should stay all night; but she evidently wished to go. It would be rather perilous work to drive down the hill with the wind behind, in such a night, but a servant was sent to hasten the carriage notwithstanding. The colonel and Percy and I ran along side of it, ready to render any assistance that might be necessary; and, although we all said we had never been out in such an uproar of the elements, we reached home in safety.

As Adela bade us good night in the hall, I certainly felt very uneasy as to the effects of the night's adventures upon her—she looked so pale and wretched.

She did not come down to breakfast.

But she appeared at lunch, nothing the worse, and in very good spirits.

If I did not think that this had something to do with another fact I have come to the knowledge of since, I don't know that the particulars of the evening need have been related so minutely. The other fact was this: that in the grey dawn of the morning, by which time the snow had ceased, though the wind still blew, Adela saw from her window a weary rider and wearier horse pass the house, going up the street. The heads of both were sunk low. You might have thought the poor mare was looking for something she had lost last night in the snow; and perhaps it was not all fatigue with Harry Armstrong. Perhaps he was giving thanks that he had saved two lives instead of losing his own. He was not so absorbed, however, but that he looked up at the house as he passed, and I believe he saw the blind of her window drop back into its place.

But how did she come to be looking out just at the moment?

If a lady has not slept all night, and has looked out of window ninety-nine times before, it is not very wonderful that at the hundredth time she should see what she was looking for; that is, if the object desired has not been lost in the snow, or drowned in a moorland pit; neither of which had happened to Harry Armstrong. Nor is it unlikely that, after seeing what she has watched for, she will fall too fast asleep to be roused by the breakfast bell.

CHAPTER V.

PERCY AND HIS MOTHER.

At luncheon, the colonel said—

"Well, Adela, you will be glad to know that our hero of last night returned quite safe this morning."

"I am glad to know it, papa."

"He is one of the right sort, that young fellow. Duty is the first thing with him."

"Perhaps duty may not have been his only motive," said Mrs. Cathcart, coldly. "It was too good an opportunity to be lost."

Adela seemed to understand her, for she blushed—but not with embarrassment alone, for the fire that made her cheek glow red, flashed in flames from her eyes.

"Some people, aunt," she said, trying to follow the cold tone in which Mrs. Cathcart had spoken, "have not the faculty for the perception of the noble and self-denying. Their own lives are so habitually elevated, that they see nothing remarkable in the devotion of others."

"Well, I do see nothing remarkable in it," returned the aunt, in a tone that indicated she hardly knew what to make of Adela's sarcasm. "Mr. Armstrong would have been liable to an action at law if he had refused to go. And then to come into the drawing-room in his boots and spurs, and change his coat before ladies!—It was all just of a piece with the coarse speech he made to you when you were simple enough to ask him not to go. I can't think what you admire about the man, I am sure."

Adela rose and left the room.

"You are too hard on Mr. Armstrong," said the colonel

"Perhaps I am, Colonel; but I have my reasons. If you will be blind to your daughter's interests, that is only the more reason why I should keep my eyes open to them."

So saying, Mrs. Cathcart rose, and followed her niece—out of the room, but no farther, I will venture to say. Fierce as the aunt was, there had been that in the niece's eyes, as she went, which I do not believe the vulgar courage of the aunt could have faced.

I concluded that Mrs. Cathcart had discovered Adela's restlessness the night before; had very possibly peeped into her room; and, as her windows looked in the same direction, might have seen Harry riding home from his selfish task in the cold grey morning; for scheming can destroy the rest of some women as perfectly as loving can destroy the rest of others. She might have made the observation, too, that Adela had lain as still as a bird unhatched, after that apparition of weariness had passed.

The colonel again sank into an uncomfortable mood. He had loved his dead brother very dearly, and had set his heart on marrying Adela to Percy. Besides there was quite enough of worldliness left in the heart of the honourable old soldier, to make him feel that a country practitioner, of very moderate means, was not to be justified in aspiring to the hand of his daughter. Moreover, he could hardly endure the thought of his daughter's marriage at all, for he had not a little of the old man's jealousy in him; and the notion of Percy being her husband was the only form in which the thought could present itself, that was in the least degree endurable to him. Yet he could not help admiring Harry; and until his thoughts had been turned into their present channel by Mrs. Cathcart's remarks, he had felt that that lady was unjust to the doctor. But to think that his line, for he had no son, should merge into that of the Armstrongs, who were of somewhat dubious descent in his eyes, and Scotch, too—though, by the way, his own line was Scotch, a few hundred years back—was sufficient to cause him very considerable uneasiness—*pain* would be the more correct word.

I have, for many pages, said very little about Percy; simply because there has been very little to say about him. He was always present at our readings, but did not appear to take any interest in them. He would generally lie on a couch, and stare either at Adela or the fire till he fell asleep. If he did not succeed in getting to sleep, he would show manifest signs of being bored. No doubt he considered the whole affair a piece of sentimental humbug. And during the day I saw very little of him. He had hunted once or twice, on one of his uncle's horses: they had scarcely seen the hounds this season. But that was a bore, no doubt. He went skating occasionally, and had once tried to get Adela to accompany him; but she would not. These amusements, with a few scattered hours of snipe-shooting, composed his Christmas enjoyments; the intervals being filled up with yawning, teasing the dogs, growling at his mother and the cold, and sleeping "the innocent sleep."

Whether he had any real regard for Adela, I could not quite satisfy myself—I mean *real* by the standard and on the scale of his own being; for of course, as compared with the love of men like the Armstrongs, the attachment of a lad like Percy could hardly be considered *real* at all. But even that, as I say, I could not clearly find out. His jealousy seemed rather the jealousy of what was his, or ought to be his, than any more profound or tragical feeling. But he evidently disliked the doctor—and the curate, too, whether for his own sake or for the doctor's, is of little consequence.

In the course of this forenoon, I came upon Master Percy in the kitchen garden. He had set an old shutter against one of the walls for a target, and was peppering away at it with a revolver; apparently quite satisfied if he succeeded in hitting the same panel twice running, at twelve paces. Guessing at the nonsense that was in his head, I sauntered up to him and watched his practice for a while. He pulled the trigger with a jerk that threw the muzzle up half an inch every time he fired, else I don't believe he would have hit the board at all. But he held his breath before-hand, till he was red in the face, because he had heard that, in firing at a mark, pistol-shooters did not even breathe, to avoid the influence of the motion of the chest upon the aim.

"Ah!" I said, "pretty well. But you should see Mr. Henry Armstrong shoot."

Whereupon Mr. Percy Cathcart deliberately damned Mr. Henry Armstrong, expressly and by name. I pretended not to have heard him, and, continuing to regard the said condemned as still alive and comfortable, went on:

"Just ask him, the next time you find him at home, to let you see him drive a nail with three pistol-bullets."

He threw the pistol from him, exploded himself, like a shell, in twenty different fragments of oaths, and left me the kitchen garden and the pistol, which latter I took a little practice with myself, for the sake of emptying two of the chambers still charged. Whether Henry Armstrong even knew how to fire a pistol, I did not know; but I dare say he was a first-rate shot, if I only had known it. I sent the pistol up to Mr. Percy's room by the hand of Mr. Beeves; but I never heard him practising any more.

The next night the curate was to read us another story. The time arrived, and with it all our company, except Harry. Indeed it was a marvel that he had been able to attend so often as he had attended. I presume the severe weather had by this time added to his sick-list.

Although I fear the chief end of our readings was not so fully attained as hitherto, or, in other words, that Adela did not enjoy the evening so much as usual, I will yet record all with my usual faithfulness.

The curate and his wife were a little late, and when they arrived, they found us waiting for them in music. As soon as they entered, Adela rose from the piano.

"Do go on, Miss Cathcart," said the curate.

"I had just finished," she replied.

"Then, if you will allow me, I will sing a song first, which I think will act as an antidote to those sentimental ones which we had at my house, and of which Mrs. Cathcart did not approve."

"Thank you," said everybody, Mrs. Cathcart included.

Whereupon the curate sang:

"I am content. In trumpet-tones,
  My song, let people know.
And many a mighty man, with throne
  And sceptre, is not so.
And if he is, I joyful cry,
Why then, he's just the same as I.

The Mogul's gold, the Sultan's show—
  His bliss, supreme too soon,
Who, lord of all the world below,
  Looked up unto the moon—
I would not pick it up—all that
Is only fit for laughing at.

My motto is—*Content with this*.
  Gold-place—I prize not such.
That which I have, my measure is;
  Wise men desire not much.
Men wish and wish, and have their will,
And wish again, as hungry still.

And gold and honour are besides
  A very brittle glass;
And Time, in his unresting tides,
  Makes all things change and pass;
Turns riches to a beggar's dole;
Sets glory's race an infant's goal.

Be noble—that is more than wealth;
  Do right—that's more than place;
Then in the spirit there is health,
  And gladness in the face;
Then thou art with thyself at one,
And, no man hating, fearest none.

I am content. In trumpet-tones,
  My song, let people know.
And many a mighty man, with throne
  And sceptre, is not so.
And if he is, I joyful cry,
Why then, he's just the same as I."

"Is that one of your own, Mr. Armstrong?" asked the colonel.

"It is, like most of those you have heard from me and my brother, only a translation."

"I am no judge of poetry, but it seems to me that if he was content, he need not say so much about it."

"There is something in what you say. But there was no show-off in Claudius, I think. He was a most simple-hearted, amiable man, to all appearance. A man of business, too—manager of a bank at Altona, in the beginning of the present century. But as I have not given a favourable impression of him, allow me to repeat a little bit of innocent humour of his—a cradle song—which I like fully better than the other."

"Most certainly; it is only fair," answered the colonel.

"Sleep, baby boy, sleep sweet, secure;
Thou art thy father's miniature;
That art thou, though thy father goes
And swears that thou hast not his nose.

A moment gone, he looked at thee,
  My little budding rose,
And said—No doubt there's much of me,
  But he has not my nose.

I think myself, it is too small,
But it is *his* nose after all;
For if thy nose his nose be not,
Whence came the nose that thou hast got?

Sleep, baby, sleep; don't half-way doze:
  To tease me—that's his part.
No matter if you've not his nose,
  So be you've got his heart!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BROKEN SWORDS.

Every one liked this, except Mrs. Cathcart, who opined, with her usual smile, that it was rather silly.

"Well, I hope a father may be silly sometimes," said the curate, with a glance at his wife, which she did not acknowledge. "At least I fear I should be silly enough, if I were a father."

No more remarks were made, and as it was now quite time to begin the story, Mr. Armstrong took his place, and the rest took their places. He began at once.

"THE BROKEN SWORDS.

"The eyes of three, two sisters and a brother, gazed for the last time on a great pale-golden star, that followed the sun down the steep west. It went down to arise again; and the brother about to depart might return, but more than the usual doubt hung upon his future. For between the white dresses of the sisters, shone his scarlet coat and golden sword-knot, which he had put on for the first time, more to gratify their pride than his own vanity. The brightening moon, as if prophetic of a future memory, had already begun to dim the scarlet and the gold, and to give them a pale, ghostly hue. In her thoughtful light the whole group seemed more like a meeting in the land of shadows, than a parting in the substantial earth.—But which should be called the land of realities?—the region where appearance, and space, and time drive between, and stop the flowing currents of the soul's speech? or that region where heart meets heart, and appearance has become the slave to utterance, and space and time are forgotten?

"Through the quiet air came the far-off rush of water, and the near cry of the land-rail. Now and then a chilly wind blew unheeded through the startled and jostling leaves that shaded the ivy-seat.

Else, there was calm everywhere, rendered yet deeper and more intense by the dusky sorrow that filled their hearts. For, far away, hundreds of miles beyond the hearing of their ears, roared the great war-guns; next week their brother must sail with his regiment to join the army; and to-morrow he must leave his home.

"The sisters looked on him tenderly, with vague fears about his fate. Yet little they divined it. That the face they loved might lie pale and bloody, in a heap of slain, was the worst image of it that arose before them; but this, had they seen the future, they would, in ignorance of the further future, have infinitely preferred to that which awaited him. And even while they looked on him, a dim feeling of the unsuitableness of his lot filled their minds. For, indeed, to all judgments it must have seemed unsuitable that the home-boy, the loved of his mother, the pet of his sisters, who was happy womanlike (as Coleridge says), if he possessed the signs of love, having never yet sought for its proofs—that he should be sent amongst soldiers, to command and be commanded; to kill, or perhaps to be himself crushed out of the fair earth in the uproar that brings back for the moment the reign of Night and Chaos. No wonder that to his sisters it seemed strange and sad. Yet such was their own position in the battle of life, in which their father had died with doubtful conquest, that when their old military uncle sent the boy an ensign's commission, they did not dream of refusing the only path open, as they thought, to an honourable profession, even though it might lead to the trench-grave. They heard it as the voice of destiny, wept, and yielded.

"If they had possessed a deeper insight into his character, they would have discovered yet further reason to doubt the fitness of the profession chosen for him; and if they had ever seen him at school, it is possible the doubt of fitness might have strengthened into a certainty of incongruity. His comparative inactivity amongst his schoolfellows, though occasioned by no dulness of intellect, might have suggested the necessity of a quiet life, if inclination and liking had been the arbiters in the choice. Nor was this inactivity the result of defective animal spirits either, for sometimes his mirth and boyish frolic were unbounded; but it seemed to proceed from an over-activity of the inward life, absorbing, and in some measure checking, the outward manifestation. He had so much to do in his own hidden kingdom, that he had not time to take his place in the polity and strife of the commonwealth around him. Hence, while other boys were acting, he was thinking. In this point of difference, he felt keenly the superiority of many of his companions; for another boy would have the obstacle overcome, or the adversary subdued, while he was meditating on the propriety, or on the means, of effecting the desired end. He envied their promptitude, while they never saw reason to envy his wisdom; for his conscience, tender and not strong, frequently transformed slowness of determination into irresolution: while a delicacy of the sympathetic nerves tended to distract him from any predetermined course, by the diversity of their vibrations, responsive to influences from all quarters, and destructive to unity of purpose.

"Of such a one, the *a priori* judgment would be, that he ought to be left to meditate and grow for some time, before being called upon to produce the fruits of action. But add to these mental conditions a vivid imagination, and a high sense of honour, nourished in childhood by the reading of the old knightly romances, and then put the youth in a position in which action is imperative, and you have elements of strife sufficient to reduce that fair kingdom of his to utter anarchy and madness. Yet so little, do we know ourselves, and so different are the symbols with which the imagination works its algebra, from the realities which those symbols represent, that as yet the youth felt no uneasiness, but contemplated his new calling with a glad enthusiasm and some vanity; for all his prospect lay in the glow of the scarlet and the gold. Nor did this excitement receive any check till the day before his departure, on which day I have introduced him to my readers, when, accidently taking up a newspaper of a week old, his eye fell on these words—"*Already crying women are to be met in the streets*." With this cloud afar on his horizon, which, though no bigger than a man's hand, yet cast a perceptible shadow over his mind, he departed next morning. The coach carried him beyond the consecrated circle of home laws and impulses, out into the great tumult, above which rises ever and anon the cry of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

"Every tragedy of higher order, constructed in Christian times, will correspond more or less to the grand drama of the Bible; wherein the first act opens with a brilliant sunset vision of Paradise, in which childish sense and need are served with all the profusion of the indulgent nurse. But the glory fades off into grey and black, and night settles down upon the heart which, rightly uncontent with the childish, and not having yet learned the childlike, seeks knowledge and manhood as a thing denied by the Maker, and yet to be gained by the creature; so sets forth alone to climb the heavens, and instead of climbing, falls into the abyss. Then follows the long dismal night of feverish efforts and delirious visions, or, it may be, helpless despair; till at length a deeper stratum of the soul is heaved to the surface; and amid the first dawn of morning, the youth says within him, "I have sinned against my *Maker*—I will arise and go to my *Father*." More or less, I say, will Christian tragedy correspond to this—a fall and a rising again; not a rising only, but a victory; not a victory merely, but a triumph. Such, in its way and degree, is my story. I have shown, in one passing scene, the home paradise; now I have to show a scene of a far differing nature.

"The young ensign was lying in his tent, weary, but wakeful. All day long the cannon had been bellowing against the walls of the city, which now lay with wide, gaping breach, ready for the morrow's storm, but covered yet with the friendly darkness. His regiment was ordered to be ready with the earliest dawn to march up to the breach. That day, for the first time, there had been blood on his sword—there the sword lay, a spot on the chased hilt still. He had cut down one of the enemy in a skirmish with a sally party of the besieged and the look of the man as he fell, haunted him. He felt, for the time, that he dared not pray to the Father, for the blood of a brother had rushed forth at the stroke of his arm, and there was one fewer of living souls on the earth because he lived thereon. And to-morrow he must lead a troop of men up to that poor disabled town, and turn them loose upon it, not knowing what might follow in the triumph of enraged and victorious foes, who for weeks had been subjected, by the constancy of the place, to the greatest privations. It was true the general had issued his commands against all disorder and pillage; but if the soldiers once yielded to temptation, what might not be done before the officers could reclaim them! All the wretched tales he had read of the sack of cities rushed back on his memory. He shuddered as he lay. Then his conscience began to speak, and to ask what right he had to be there.—Was the war a just one?—He could not tell; for this was a bad time for settling nice questions. But there he was, right or wrong, fighting and shedding blood on God's earth, beneath God's heaven.

"Over and over he turned the question in his mind; again and again the spouting blood of his foe, and the death-look in his eye, rose before him; and the youth who at school could never fight with a companion because he was not sure that he was in the right, was alone in the midst of undoubting men of war, amongst whom he was driven helplessly along, upon the waves of a terrible necessity. What wonder that in the midst of these perplexities his courage should fail him! What wonder that the consciousness of fainting should increase the faintness! or that the dread of fear and its consequences should hasten and invigorate its attacks! To crown all, when he dropped into a troubled slumber at length, he found himself hurried, as on a storm of fire, through the streets of the captured town, from all the windows of which looked forth familiar faces, old and young, but distorted from the memory of his boyhood by fear and wild despair. On one spot lay the body of his father, with his face to the earth; and he woke at the cry of horror and rage that burst from his own lips, as he saw the rough, bloody hand of a soldier twisted in the loose hair of his elder sister, and the younger fainting in the arms of a scoundrel belonging to his own regiment.

"He slept no more. As the grey morning broke, the troops appointed for the attack assembled without sound of trumpet or drum, and were silently formed in fitting order. The young ensign was in his place, weary and wretched after his miserable night. Before him he saw a great, broad-shouldered lieutenant, whose brawny hand seemed almost too large for his sword-hilt, and in any one of whose limbs played more animal life than in the whole body of the pale youth. The firm-set lips of this officer, and the fire of his eye, showed a concentrated resolution, which, by the contrast, increased the misery of the ensign, and seemed, as if the stronger absorbed the weaker, to draw out from him the last fibres of self-possession: the sight of unattainable determination, while it increased the feeling of the arduousness of that which required such determination, threw him into the great gulf which lay between him and it. In this disorder of his nervous and mental condition, with a doubting conscience and a shrinking heart, is it any wonder that the terrors which lay before him at the gap in those bristling walls, should draw near, and, making sudden inroad upon his soul, overwhelm the government of a will worn out by the tortures of an unassured spirit? What share fear contributed to unman him, it was impossible for him, in the dark, confused conflict of differing emotions, to determine; but doubtless a natural shrinking from danger, there being no excitement to deaden its influence, and no hope of victory to encourage to the struggle, seeing victory was dreadful to him as defeat, had its part in the sad result. Many men who have courage, are dependent on ignorance and a low state of the moral feeling for that courage; and a further progress towards the development of the higher nature would, for a time at least, entirely overthrow it. Nor could such loss of courage be rightly designated by the name of cowardice.

"But, alas! the colonel happened to fix his eyes upon him as he passed along the file; and this completed his confusion. He betrayed such evident symptoms of perturbation, that that officer ordered him under arrest; and the result was, that, chiefly for the sake of example to the army, he was, upon trial by court-martial, expelled from the service, and had his sword broken over his head. Alas for the delicate minded youth! Alas for the home-darling!

"Long after, he found at the bottom of his chest the pieces of the broken sword, and remembered that, at the time, he had lifted them from the ground and carried them away. But he could not recall under what impulse he had done so. Perhaps the agony he suffered, passing the bounds of mortal endurance, had opened for him a vista into the eternal, and had shown him, if not the injustice of the sentence passed upon him, yet his freedom from blame, or, endowing him with dim prophetic vision, had given him the assurance that some day the stain would be wiped from his soul, and leave him standing clear before the tribunal of his own honour. Some feeling like this, I say, may have caused him, with a passing gleam of indignant protest, to lift the fragments from the earth, and carry them away; even as the friends of a so-called traitor may bear away his mutilated body from the wheel. But if such was the case, the vision was soon overwhelmed and forgotten in the succeeding anguish. He could not see that, in mercy to his doubting spirit, the question which had agitated his mind almost to madness, and which no results of the impending conflict could have settled for him, was thus quietly set aside for the time; nor that, painful as was the dark, dreadful existence that he was now to pass in self-torment and moaning, it would go by, and leave his spirit clearer far, than if, in his apprehension, it had been stained with further blood-guiltiness, instead of the loss of honour. Years after, when he accidentally learned that on that very morning the whole of his company, with parts of several more, had, or ever they began to mount the breach, been blown to pieces by the explosion of a mine, he cried aloud in bitterness, "Would God that my fear had not been discovered before I reached that spot!" But surely it is better to pass into the next region of life having reaped some assurance, some firmness of character, determination of effort, and consciousness of the worth of life, in the present world; so approaching the future steadily and faithfully, and if in much darkness and ignorance, yet not in the oscillations of moral uncertainty.

"Close upon the catastrophe followed a torpor, which lasted he did not know how long, and which wrapped in a thick fog all the succeeding events. For some time he can hardly be said to have had any conscious history. He awoke to life and torture when half-way across the sea towards his native country, where was no home any longer for him. To this point, and no farther, could his thoughts return in after years. But the misery which he then endured is hardly to be understood, save by those of like delicate temperament with himself. All day long he sat silent in his cabin; nor could any effort of the captain, or others on board, induce him to go on deck till night came on, when, under the starlight, he ventured into the open air. The sky soothed him then, he knew not how. For the face of nature is the face of God, and must bear expressions that can influence, though unconsciously to them, the most ignorant and hopeless of His children. Often did he watch the clouds in hope of a storm, his spirit rising and falling as the sky darkened or cleared; he longed, in the necessary selfishness of such suffering, for a tumult of waters to swallow the vessel; and only the recollection of how many lives were involved in its safety besides his own, prevented him from praying to God for lightning and tempest, borne on which he might dash into the haven of the other world. One night, following a sultry calm day, he thought that Mercy had heard his unuttered prayer. The air and sea were intense darkness, till a light as intense for one moment annihilated it, and the succeeding darkness seemed shattered with the sharp reports of the thunder that cracked without reverberation. He who had shrunk from battle with his fellowmen, rushed to the mainmast, threw himself on his knees, and stretched forth his arms in speechless energy of supplication; but the storm passed away overhead, and left him kneeling still by the uninjured mast. At length the vessel reached her port. He hurried on shore to bury himself in the most secret place he could find. *Out of sight* was his first, his only thought. Return to his mother he would not, he could not; and, indeed, his friends never learned his fate, until it had carried him far beyond their reach.

"For several weeks he lurked about like a malefactor, in low lodging-houses in narrow streets of the seaport to which the vessel had borne him, heeding no one, and but little shocked at the strange society and conversation with which, though only in bodily presence, he had to mingle. These formed the subjects of reflection in after times; and he came to the conclusion that, though much evil and much misery exist, sufficient to move prayers and tears in those who love their kind, yet there is less of both than those looking down from a more elevated social position upon the weltering heap of humanity, are ready to imagine; especially if they regard it likewise from the pedestal of self-congratulation on which a meagre type of religion has elevated them. But at length his little stock of money was nearly expended, and there was nothing that he could do, or learn to do, in this seaport. He felt impelled to seek manual labour, partly because he thought it more likely he could obtain that sort of employment, without a request for reference as to his character, which would lead to inquiry about his previous history; and partly, perhaps, from an instinctive feeling that hard bodily labour would tend to lessen his inward suffering.

"He left the town, therefore, at nightfall of a July day, carrying a little bundle of linen, and the remains of his money, somewhat augmented by the sale of various articles of clothing and convenience, which his change of life rendered superfluous and unsuitable. He directed his course northwards, travelling principally by night—so painfully did he shrink from the gaze even of foot-farers like himself; and sleeping during the day in some hidden nook of wood or thicket, or under the shadow of a great tree in a solitary field. So fine was the season, that for three successive weeks he was able to travel thus without inconvenience, lying down when the sun grew hot in the forenoon, and generally waking when the first faint stars were hesitating in the great darkening heavens that covered and shielded him. For above every cloud, above every storm, rise up, calm, clear, divine, the deep infinite skies; they embrace the tempest even as the sunshine; by their permission it exists within their boundless peace: therefore it cannot hurt, and must pass away, while there they stand as ever, domed up eternally, lasting, strong, and pure.

"Several times he attempted to get agricultural employment; but the whiteness of his hands and the tone of his voice not merely suggested unfitness for labour, but generated suspicion as to the character of one who had evidently dropped from a rank so much higher, and was seeking admittance within the natural masonic boundaries and secrets and privileges of another. Disheartened somewhat, but hopeful, he journeyed on. I say hopeful; for the blessed power of life in the universe in fresh air and sunshine absorbed by active exercise, in winds, yea in rain, though it fell but seldom, had begun to work its natural healing, soothing effect, upon his perturbed spirit. And there was room for hope in his new endeavour. As his bodily strength increased, and his health, considerably impaired by inward suffering, improved, the trouble of his soul became more endurable—and in some measure to endure is to conquer and destroy. In proportion as the mind grows in the strength of patience, the disturber of its peace sickens and fades away. At length, one day, a widow lady in a village through which his road led him, gave him a day's work in her garden. He laboured hard and well, notwithstanding his soon-blistered hands, received his wages thankfully, and found a resting-place for the night on the low part of a hay-stack from which the upper portion had been cut away. Here he ate his supper of bread and cheese, pleased to have found such comfortable quarters, and soon fell fast asleep.

"When he awoke, the whole heavens and earth seemed to give a full denial to sin and sorrow. The sun was just mounting over the horizon, looking up the clear cloud-mottled sky. From millions of water-drops hanging on the bending stalks of grass, sparkled his rays in varied refraction, transformed here to a gorgeous burning ruby, there to an emerald, green as the grass, and yonder to a flashing, sunny topaz. The chanting priest-lark had gone up from the low earth, as soon as the heavenly light had begun to enwrap and illumine the folds of its tabernacle; and had entered the high heavens with his offering, whence, unseen, he now dropped on the earth the sprinkled sounds of his overflowing blessedness. The poor youth rose but to kneel, and cry, from a bursting heart, "Hast Thou not, O Father, some care for me? Canst Thou not restore my lost honour? Can anything befall Thy children for which Thou hast no help? Surely, if the face of Thy world lie not, joy and not grief is at the heart of the universe. Is there none for me?"

"The highest poetic feeling of which we are now conscious, springs not from the beholding of perfected beauty, but from the mute sympathy which the creation with all its children manifests with us in the groaning and travailing which look for the sonship. Because of our need and aspiration, the snowdrop gives birth in our hearts to a loftier spiritual and poetic feeling, than the rose most complete in form, colour, and odour. The rose is of Paradise—the snowdrop is of the striving, hoping, longing Earth. Perhaps our highest poetry is the expression of our aspirations in the sympathetic forms of visible nature. Nor is this merely a longing for a restored Paradise; for even in the ordinary history of men, no man or woman that has fallen, can be restored to the position formerly held. Such must rise to a yet higher place, whence they can behold their former standing far beneath their feet. They must be restored by the attainment of something better than they ever possessed before, or not at all. If the law be a weariness, we must escape it by taking refuge with the spirit, for not otherwise can we fulfil the law than by being above the law. To escape the overhanging rocks of Sinai, we must climb to its secret top.

"'Is thy strait horizon dreary?
  Is thy foolish fancy chill?
Change the feet that have grown weary
  For the wings that never will.'

"Thus, like one of the wandering knights searching the wide earth for the Sangreal, did he wander on, searching for his lost honour, or rather (for that he counted gone for ever) seeking unconsciously for the peace of mind which had departed from him, and taken with it, not the joy merely, but almost the possibility, of existence.

"At last, when his little store was all but exhausted, he was employed by a market gardener, in the neighbourhood of a large country town, to work in his garden, and sometimes take his vegetables to market. With him he continued for a few weeks, and wished for no change; until, one day driving his cart through the town, he saw approaching him an elderly gentleman, whom he knew at once, by his gait and carriage, to be a military man. Now he had never seen his uncle the retired officer, but it struck him that this might be he; and under the tyranny of his passion for concealment, he fancied that, if it were he, he might recognise him by some family likeness—not considering the improbability of his looking at him. This fancy, with the painful effect which the sight of an officer, even in plain clothes, had upon him, recalling the torture of that frightful day, so overcame him, that he found himself at the other end of an alley before he recollected that he had the horse and cart in charge. This increased his difficulty; for now he dared not return, lest his inquiries after the vehicle, if the horse had strayed from the direct line, should attract attention, and cause interrogations which he would be unable to answer. The fatal want of self-possession seemed again to ruin him. He forsook the town by the nearest way, struck across the country to another line of road, and before he was missed, was miles away, still in a northerly direction.

"But although he thus shunned the face of man, especially of any one who reminded him of the past, the loss of his reputation in their eyes was not the cause of his inward grief. That would have been comparatively powerless to disturb him, had he not lost his own respect. He quailed before his own thoughts; he was dishonoured in his own eyes. His perplexity had not yet sufficiently cleared away to allow him to see the extenuating circumstances of the case; not to say the fact that the peculiar mental condition in which he was at the time, removed the case quite out of the class of ordinary instances of cowardice. He condemned himself more severely than any of his judges would have dared; remembering that portion of his mental sensations which had savoured of fear, and forgetting the causes which had produced it. He judged himself a man stained with the foulest blot that could cleave to a soldier's name, a blot which nothing but death, not even death, could efface. But, inwardly condemned and outwardly degraded, his dread of recognition was intense; and feeling that he was in more danger of being discovered where the population was sparser, he resolved to hide himself once more in the midst of poverty; and, with this view, found his way to one of the largest of the manufacturing towns.

"He reached it during the strike of a great part of the workmen; so that, though he found some difficulty in procuring employment, as might be expected from his ignorance of machine-labour, he yet was sooner successful than he would otherwise have been. Possessed of a natural aptitude for mechanical operations, he soon became a tolerable workman; and he found that his previous education assisted to the fitting execution of those operations even which were most purely mechanical.

"He found also, at first, that the unrelaxing attention requisite for the mastering of the many niceties of his work, of necessity drew his mind somewhat from its brooding over his misfortune, hitherto almost ceaseless. Every now and then, however, a pang would shoot suddenly to his heart, and turn his face pale, even before his consciousness had time to inquire what was the matter. So by degrees, as attention became less necessary, and the nervo-mechanical action of his system increased with use, his thoughts again returned to their old misery. He would wake at night in his poor room, with the feeling that a ghostly nightmare sat on his soul; that a want—a loss—miserable, fearful—was present; that something of his heart was gone from him; and through the darkness he would hear the snap of the breaking sword, and lie for a moment overwhelmed beneath the assurance of the incredible fact. Could it be true that he was a coward? that *his* honour was gone, and in its place a stain? that *he* was a thing for men—and worse, for women—to point the finger at, laughing bitter laughter? Never lover or husband could have mourned with the same desolation over the departure of the loved; the girl alone, weeping scorching tears over *her* degradation, could resemble him in his agony, as he lay on his bed, and wept and moaned.

"His sufferings had returned with the greater weight, that he was no longer upheld by the "divine air" and the open heavens, whose sunlight now only reached him late in an afternoon, as he stood at his loom, through windows so coated with dust that they looked like frosted glass; showing, as it passed through the air to fall on the dirty floor, how the breath of life was thick with dust of iron and wood, and films of cotton; amidst which his senses were now too much dulled by custom to detect the exhalations from greasy wheels and overtasked human-kind. Nor could he find comfort in the society of his fellow-labourers. True, it was a kind of comfort to have those near him who could not know of his grief; but there was so little in common between them, that any interchange of thought was impossible. At least, so it seemed to him. Yet sometimes his longing for human companionship would drive him out of his dreary room at night, and send him wandering through the lower part of the town, where he would gaze wistfully on the miserable faces that passed him, as if looking for some one—some angel, even there—to speak goodwill to his hungry heart.

"Once he entered one of those gin-palaces, which, like the golden gates of hell, entice the miserable to worse misery, and seated himself close to a half-tipsy, good-natured wretch, who made room for him on a bench by the wall. He was comforted even by this proximity to one who would not repel him. But soon the paintings of warlike action—of knights, and horses, and mighty deeds done with battle-axe, and broad-sword, which adorned the—panels all round, drove him forth even from this heaven of the damned; yet not before the impious thought had arisen in his heart, that the brilliantly painted and sculptural roof, with the gilded vine-leaves and bunches of grapes trained up the windows, all lighted with the great shining chandeliers, was only a microcosmic repetition of the bright heavens and the glowing earth, that overhung and surrounded the misery of man. But the memory of how kindly they had comforted and elevated him, at one period of his painful history, not only banished the wicked thought, but brought him more quiet, in the resurrection of a past blessing, than he had known for some time. The period, however, was now at hand when a new grief, followed by a new and more elevated activity, was to do its part towards the closing up of the fountain of bitterness.

"Amongst his fellow-labourers, he had for a short time taken some interest in observing a young woman, who had lately joined them. There was nothing remarkable about her, except what at first sight seemed a remarkable plainness. A slight scar over one of her rather prominent eyebrows, increased this impression of plainness. But the first day had not passed, before he began to see that there was something not altogether common in those deep eyes; and the plain look vanished before a closer observation, which also discovered, in the forehead and the lines of the mouth, traces of sorrow or other suffering. There was an expression, too, in the whole face, of fixedness of purpose, without any hardness of determination. Her countenance altogether seemed the index to an interesting mental history. Signs of mental trouble were always an attraction to him; in this case so great, that he overcame his shyness, and spoke to her one evening as they left the works. He often walked home with her after that; as, indeed, was natural, seeing that she occupied an attic in the same poor lodging-house in which he lived himself. The street did not bear the best character; nor, indeed, would the occupations of all the inmates of the house have stood investigation; but so retiring and quiet was this girl, and so seldom did she go abroad after work hours, that he had not discovered till then that she lived in the same street, not to say the same house with himself.

"He soon learned her history—a very common one as outward events, but not surely insignificant because common. Her father and mother were both dead, and hence she had to find her livelihood alone, and amidst associations which were always disagreeable, and sometimes painful. Her quick womanly instinct must have discovered that he too had a history; for though, his mental prostration favouring the operation of outward influences, he had greatly approximated in appearance to those amongst whom he laboured, there were yet signs, besides the educated accent of his speech, which would have distinguished him to an observer; but she put no questions to him, nor made any approach towards seeking a return of the confidence she reposed in him. It was a sensible alleviation to his sufferings to hear her kind voice, and look in her gentle face, as they walked home together; and at length the expectation of this pleasure began to present itself, in the midst of the busy, dreary work-hours, as the shadow of a heaven to close up the dismal, uninteresting day.

"But one morning he missed her from her place, and a keener pain passed through him than he had felt of late; for he knew that the Plague was abroad, feeding in the low stagnant places of human abode; and he had but too much reason to dread that she might be now struggling in its grasp. He seized the first opportunity of slipping out and hurrying home. He sprang upstairs to her room. He found the door locked, but heard a faint moaning within. To avoid disturbing her, while determined to gain an entrance, he went down for the key of his own door, with which he succeeded in unlocking hers, and so crossed her threshold for the first time. There she lay on her bed, tossing in pain, and beginning to be delirious. Careless of his own life, and feeling that he could not die better than in helping the only friend he had; certain, likewise, of the difficulty of finding a nurse for one in this disease and of her station in life; and sure, likewise, that there could be no question of propriety, either in the circumstances with which they were surrounded, nor in this case of terrible fever almost as hopeless for her as dangerous to him, he instantly began the duties of a nurse, and returned no more to his employment. He had a little money in his possession, for he could not, in the way in which he lived, spend all his wages; so he proceeded to make her as comfortable as he could, with all the pent-up tenderness of a loving heart finding an outlet at length. When a boy at home, he had often taken the place of nurse, and he felt quite capable of performing its duties. Nor was his boyhood far behind yet, although the trials he had come through made it appear an age since he had lost his light heart. So he never left her bedside, except to procure what was necessary for her. She was too ill to oppose any of his measures, or to seek to prohibit his presence. Indeed, by the time he had returned with the first medicine, she was insensible; and she continued so through the whole of the following week, during which time he was constantly with her.

"That action produces feeling is as often true as its converse; and it is not surprising that, while he smoothed the pillow for her head, he should have made a nest in his heart for the helpless girl. Slowly and unconsciously he learned to love her. The chasm between his early associations and the circumstances in which he found her, vanished as he drew near to the simple, essential womanhood. His heart saw hers and loved it; and he knew that, the centre once gained, he could, as from the fountain of life, as from the innermost secret of the holy place, the hidden germ of power and possibility, transform the outer intellect and outermost manners as he pleased. With what a thrill of joy, a feeling for a long time unknown to him, and till now never known in this form or with this intensity, the thought arose in his heart that here lay one who some day would love him; that he should have a place of refuge and rest; one to lie in his bosom and not despise him! "For," said he to himself, "I will call forth her soul from where it sleeps, like an unawakened echo, in an unknown cave; and like a child, of whom I once dreamed, that was mine, and to my delight turned in fear from all besides, and clung to me, this soul of hers will run with bewildered, half-sleeping eyes, and tottering steps, but with a cry of joy on its lips, to me as the life-giver. She will cling to me and worship me. Then will I tell her, for she must know all, that I am low and contemptible; that I am an outcast from the world, and that if she receive me, she will be to me as God. And I will fall down at her feet and pray her for comfort, for life, for restoration to myself; and she will throw herself beside me, and weep and love me, I know. And we will go through life together, working hard, but for each other; and when we die, she shall lead me into paradise as the prize her angel-hand found cast on a desert shore, from the storm of winds and waves which I was too weak to resist—and raised, and tended, and saved." Often did such thoughts as these pass through his mind while watching by her bed; alternated, checked, and sometimes destroyed, by the fears which attended her precarious condition, but returning with every apparent betterment or hopeful symptom.

"I will not stop to decide the nice question, how far the intention was right, of causing her to love him before she knew his story. If in the whole matter there was too much thought of self, my only apology is the sequel. One day, the ninth from the commencement of her illness, a letter arrived, addressed to her; which he, thinking he might prevent some inconvenience thereby, opened and read, in the confidence of that love which already made her and all belonging to her appear his own. It was from a soldier—*her lover*. It was plain that they had been betrothed before he left for the continent a year ago; but this was the first letter which he had written to her. It breathed changeless love, and hope, and confidence in her. He was so fascinated that he read it through without pause.

"Laying it down, he sat pale, motionless, almost inanimate. From the hard-won sunny heights, he was once more cast down into the shadow of death. The second storm of his life began, howling and raging, with yet more awful lulls between. "Is she not *mine*?" he said, in agony. "Do I not feel that she is mine? Who will watch over her as I? Who will kiss her soul to life as I? Shall she be torn away from me, when my soul seems to have dwelt with hers for ever in an eternal house? But have I not a right to her? Have I not given my life for hers? Is he not a soldier, and are there not many chances that he may never return? And it may be that, although they were engaged in word, soul has never touched soul with them; their love has never reached that point where it passes from the mortal to the immortal, the indissoluble: and so, in a sense, she may be yet free. Will he do for her what I will do? Shall this precious heart of hers, in which I see the buds of so many beauties, be left to wither and die?"

"But here the voice within him cried out, "Art thou the disposer of destinies? Wilt thou, in a universe where the visible God hath died for the Truth's sake, do evil that a good, which He might neglect or overlook, may be gained? Leave thou her to Him, and do thou right." And he said within himself, "Now is the real trial for my life! Shall I conquer or no?" And his heart awoke and cried, "I will. God forgive me for wronging the poor soldier! A brave man, brave at least, is better for her than I."

"A great strength arose within him, and lifted him up to depart. "Surely I may kiss her once," he said. For the crisis was over, and she slept. He stooped towards her face, but before he had reached her lips he saw her eyelids tremble; and he who had longed for the opening of those eyes, as of the gates of heaven, that she might love him, stricken now with fear lest she should love him, fled from her, before the eyelids that hid such strife and such victory from the unconscious maiden had time to unclose. But it was agony—quietly to pack up his bundle of linen in the room below, when he knew she was lying awake above, with her dear, pale face, and living eyes! What remained of his money, except a few shillings, he put up in a scrap of paper, and went out with his bundle in his hand, first to seek a nurse for his friend, and then to go he knew not whither. He met the factory people with whom he had worked, going to dinner, and amongst them a girl who had herself but lately recovered from the fever, and was yet hardly able for work. She was the only friend the sick girl had seemed to have amongst the women at the factory, and she was easily persuaded to go and take charge of her. He put the money in her hand, begging her to use it for the invalid, and promising to send the equivalent of her wages for the time he thought she would have to wait on her. This he easily did by the sale of a ring, which, besides his mother's watch, was the only article of value he had retained. He begged her likewise not to mention his name in the matter; and was foolish enough to expect that she would entirely keep the promise she had made him.

"Wandering along the street, purposeless now and bereft, he spied a recruiting party at the door of a public-house; and on coming nearer, found, by one of those strange coincidences which do occur in life, and which have possibly their root in a hidden and wondrous law, that it was a party, perhaps a remnant, of the very regiment in which he had himself served, and in which his misfortune had befallen him. Almost simultaneously with the shock which the sight of the well-known number on the soldiers' knapsacks gave him, arose in his mind the romantic, ideal thought, of enlisting in the ranks of this same regiment, and recovering, as a private soldier and unknown, that honour which as officer he had lost. To this determination, the new necessity in which he now stood for action and change of life, doubtless contributed, though unconsciously. He offered himself to the sergeant; and, notwithstanding that his dress indicated a mode of life unsuitable as the antecedent to a soldier's, his appearance, and the necessity for recruits combined, led to his easy acceptance.

"The English armies were employed in expelling the enemy from an invaded and helpless country. Whatever might be the political motives which had induced the Government to this measure, the young man was now able to feel that he could go and fight, individually and for his part, in the cause of liberty. He was free to possess his own motives for joining in the execution of the schemes of those who commanded his commanders.

"With a heavy heart, but with more of inward hope and strength than he had ever known before, he marched with his comrades to the seaport and embarked. It seemed to him that because he had done right in his last trial, here was a new glorious chance held out to his hand. True, it was a terrible change to pass from a woman in whom he had hoped to find healing, into the society of rough men, to march with them, "*mit gleichem Tritt und Schritt,*" up to the bristling bayonets or the horrid vacancy of the cannon mouth. But it was the only cure for the evil that consumed his life.

"He reached the army in safety, and gave himself, with religious assiduity, to the smallest duties of his new position. No one had a brighter polish on his arms, or whiter belts than he. In the necessary movements, he soon became precise to a degree that attracted the attention of his officers; while his character was remarkable for all the virtues belonging to a perfect soldier.

"One day, as he stood sentry, he saw the eyes of his colonel intently fixed on him. He felt his lip quiver, but he compressed and stilled it, and tried to look as unconscious as he could; which effort was assisted by the formal bearing required by his position. Now the colonel, such had been the losses of the regiment, had been promoted from a lieutenancy in the same, and had belonged to it at the time of the ensign's degradation. Indeed, had not the changes in the regiment been so great, he could hardly have escaped so long without discovery. But the poor fellow would have felt that his name was already free of reproach, if he had seen what followed on the close inspection which had awakened his apprehensions, and which, in fact, had convinced the colonel of his identity with the disgraced ensign. With a hasty and less soldierly step than usual the colonel entered his tent, threw himself on his bed and wept like a child. When he rose he was overheard to say these words—and these only escaped his lips: 'He is nobler than I.'

"But this officer showed himself worthy of commanding such men as this private; for right nobly did he understand and meet his feelings. He uttered no word of the discovery he had made, till years afterwards; but it soon began to be remarked that whenever anything arduous, or in any manner distinguished, had to be done, this man was sure to be of the party appointed. In short, as often as he could, the colonel "set him in the forefront of the battle." Passing through all with wonderful escape, he was soon as much noticed for his reckless bravery, as hitherto for his precision in the discharge of duties bringing only commendation and not honour. But his final lustration was at hand.

"A great part of the army was hastening, by forced marches, to raise the siege of a town which was already on the point of falling into the hands of the enemy. Forming one of a reconnoitring party, which preceded the main body at some considerable distance, he and his companions came suddenly upon one of the enemy's outposts, occupying a high, and on one side precipitous rock, a short way from the town, which it commanded. Retreat was impossible, for they were already discovered, and the bullets were falling amongst them like the first of a hail-storm. The only possibility of escape remaining for them was a nearly hopeless improbability. It lay in forcing the post on this steep rock; which if they could do before assistance came to the enemy, they might, perhaps, be able to hold out, by means of its defences, till the arrival of the army. Their position was at once understood by all; and, by a sudden, simultaneous impulse, they found themselves half-way up the steep ascent, and in the struggle of a close conflict, without being aware of any order to that effect from their officer. But their courage was of no avail; the advantages of the place were too great; and in a few minutes the whole party was cut to pieces, or stretched helpless on the rock. Our youth had fallen amongst the foremost; for a musket ball had grazed his skull, and laid him insensible.

"But consciousness slowly returned, and he succeeded at last in raising himself and looking around him. The place was deserted. A few of his friends, alive, but grievously wounded, lay near him. The rest were dead. It appeared that, learning the proximity of the English forces from this rencontre with part of their advanced guard, and dreading lest the town, which was on the point of surrendering, should after all be snatched from their grasp, the commander of the enemy's forces had ordered an immediate and general assault; and had for this purpose recalled from their outposts the whole of his troops thus stationed, that he might make the attempt with the utmost strength he could accumulate.

"As the youth's power of vision returned, he perceived, from the height where he he lay, that the town was already in the hands of the enemy. But looking down into the level space immediately below him, he started to his feet at once; for a girl, bare-headed, was fleeing towards the rock, pursued by several soldiers. "Aha!" said he, divining her purpose—the soldiers behind and the rock before her—"I will help you to die!" And he stooped and wrenched from the dead fingers of a sergeant the sword which they clenched by the bloody hilt. A new throb of life pulsed through him to his very finger-tips; and on the brink of the unseen world he stood, with the blood rushing through his veins in a wild dance of excitement. One who lay near him wounded, but recovered afterwards, said that he looked like one inspired. With a keen eye he watched the chase. The girl drew nigh; and rushed up the path near which he was standing. Close on her footsteps came the soldiers, the distance gradually lessening between them.

"Not many paces higher up, was a narrower part of the ascent, where the path was confined by great stones, or pieces of rock. Here had been the chief defence in the preceding assault, and in it lay many bodies of his friends. Thither he went and took his stand.

"On the girl came, over the dead, with rigid hands and flying feet, the bloodless skin drawn tight on her features, and her eyes awfully large and wild. She did not see him though she bounded past so near that her hair flew in his eyes. "Never mind!" said he, "we shall meet soon." And he stepped into the narrow path just in time to face her pursuers—between her and them. Like the red lightning the bloody sword fell, and a man beneath it. Cling! clang! went the echoes in the rocks—and another man was down; for, in his excitement, he was a destroying angel to the breathless pursuers. His stature rose, his chest dilated; and as the third foe fell dead, the girl was safe; for her body lay a broken, empty, but undesecrated temple, at the foot of the rock. That moment his sword flew in shivers from his grasp. The next instant he fell, pierced to the heart; and his spirit rose triumphant, free, strong, and calm, above the stormy world, which at length lay vanquished beneath him."

"A capital story!" cried our host, the moment the curate had ceased reading. "But you should not have killed him. You should have made a general of him. By heaven! he deserved it."

Mr. Armstrong was evidently much pleased that the colonel so heartily sympathized with his tale. And every one else added some words of commendation. I could not help thinking with myself that he had only embodied the story of his own life in other more striking forms. But I knew that, if I said so, he would laugh at me, and answer that all he had done was quite easy to do—he had found no difficulty in it; whereas this man was a hero and did the thing that he found very difficult indeed. Still I was sure that the story was at least the outgrowth of his own mind.

"May we ask," I said, "how much of the tale is fact?"

"I am sorry it is not all fact," he answered.

"Tell us how much, then," I said.

"Well, I will tell you what made me write it. I heard an old lady at a dinner-table mention that she had once known a young officer who had his sword broken over his head, and was dismissed from the army, for cowardice. I began trying first to understand his feelings; then to see how the thing could have happened; and then to discover what could be done for him. And hence the story. That was all, I am sorry to say."

"I thought as much," I rejoined.

"Will you excuse me if I venture to make a remark?" said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"With all my heart," answered the curate.

"It seemed to me that there was nothing Christian in the story. And I cannot help feeling that a clergyman might, therefore, have done better."

"I allow that in words there is nothing Christian," answered Mr. Armstrong; "and I am quite ready to allow also that it might have been better if something of the kind you mean had been expressed in it. The whole thing, however, is only a sketch. But I cannot allow that, in spirit and scope, it is anything other than Christian, or indeed anything but Christian. It seems to me that the whole might be used as a Christian parable."

While the curate spoke, I had seen Adela's face flush; but the cause was not *visible* to me. As he uttered the last words, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Harry's voice said:

"At your parables again, Ralph?"

He had come in so gently that the only sign of his entrance had been the rose-light on Adela's cheeks.—Was he the sun? And was she a cloud of the east?

"Glad to see you safe amongst us again," said the colonel, backed by almost every one of the company.

"What's your quarrel with my parables, Harry?" said the curate.

"Quarrel? None at all. They are the delight of my heart. I only wish you would give our friends one of your best—*The Castle*, for instance."

"Not yet a while, Harry. It is not my turn for some time, I hope. Perhaps Miss Cathcart will be tired of the whole affair, before it comes round to me again."

"Then I shall deserve to be starved of stories all the rest of my life," answered Adela, laughing.

"If you will allow me, then," said Harry, "I will give you a parable, called *The Lost Church*, from the German poet, Uhland."

"Softly, Harry," said his brother; "you are ready enough with what is not yours to give; but where is your own story that you promised, and which indeed we should have a right to demand, whether you had promised it or not?"

"I am working at it, Ralph, in my spare moments, which are not very many; and I want to choose the right sort of night to tell it in, too. This one wouldn't do at all. There's no moon."

"If it is a horrid story, it is a pity you did not read it last time, before you set out to cross the moor."

"Oh, that night would not have done at all. A night like that drives all fear out of one's head. But indeed it is not finished yet.—May I repeat the parable now, Miss Cathcart?"

"What do you mean by a *parable*, Mr. Henry?" interrupted Mrs. Cathcart. "It sounds rather profane to me."

"I mean a picture in words, where more is meant than meets the ear."

"But why call it a parable?"

"Because it is one."

"Why not speak in plain words then?"

"Because a good parable is plainer than the plainest words. You remember what Tennyson says—that

'truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors'?"

"Goethe," said the curate, "has a little parable about poems, which is equally true about parables—

'Poems are painted window-panes.
If one looks from the square into the church,
Dusk and dimness are his gains—
Sir Philistine is left in the lurch.
The sight, so seen, may well enrage him,
Nor any words henceforth assuage him.

But come just inside what conceals;
Cross the holy threshold quite—
All at once,'tis rainbow-bright;
Device and story flash to light;
A gracious splendour truth reveals.
This, to God's children, is full measure;
It edifies and gives them pleasure.'"

"I can't follow that," said Adela.

"I will write it out for you," said Harry; "and then you will be able to follow it perfectly."

"Thank you very much. Now for your parable."

"It is called *The Lost Church*; and I assure you it is full of meaning."

"I hope I shall be able to find it out."

"You will find the more the longer you think about it.

'Oft in the far wood, overhead,
  Tones of a bell are heard obscurely;
How old the sounds no sage has said,
  Or yet explained the story surely.
From the lost church, the legend saith,
  Out on the winds, the ringing goeth;
Once full of pilgrims was the path—
  Now where to find it, no one knoweth.

Deep in the wood I lately went,
  Where no foot-trodden path is lying;
From the time's woe and discontent,
  My heart went forth to God in sighing.
When in the forest's wild repose,
  I heard the ringing somewhat clearer;
The higher that my longing rose,
  Downward it rang the fuller, nearer.

So on its thoughts my heart did brood,
  My sense was with the sound so busy,
That I have never understood
  How I clomb up the height so dizzy.
To me it seemed a hundred years
  Had passed away in dreaming, sighing—
When lo! high o'er the clouds, appears
  An open space in sunlight lying.

The heaven, dark-blue, above it bowed;
  The sun shone o'er it, large and glowing;
Beneath, a ministers structure proud
  Stood in the gold light, golden showing.
It seemed on those great clouds, sun-clear,
  Aloft to hover, as on pinions;
Its spire-point seemed to disappear,
  Melting away in high dominions.

The bell's clear tones, entrancing, full—
  The quivering tower, they, booming, swung it;
No human hand the rope did pull—
  The holy storm-winds sweeping rung it.
The storm, the stream, came down, came near,
  And seized my heart with longing holy;
Into the church I went, with fear,
  With trembling step, and gladness lowly.

The threshold crossed—I cannot show
  What in me moved; words cannot paint it.
Both dark and clear, the windows glow
  With noble forms of martyrs sainted.
I gazed and saw—transfigured glory!
  The pictures swell and break their barriers;
I saw the world and all its story
  Of holy women, holy warriors.

Down at the altar I sank slowly;
  My heart was like the face of Stephen.
Aloft, upon the arches holy,
  Shone out in gold the glow of heaven.
I prayed; I looked again; and lo!
  The dome's high sweep had flown asunder;
The heavenly gates wide open go;
  And every veil unveils a wonder.

What gloriousness I then beheld,
  Kneeling in prayer, silent and wondrous,
What sounds triumphant on me swelled,
  Like organs and like trumpets thunderous—
My mortal words can never tell;
  But who for such is sighing sorest,
Let him give heed unto the bell
  That dimly soundeth in the forest.'"

"Splendid!" cried the schoolmaster, with enthusiasm.

"What is the lost church?" asked Mrs. Cathcart.

"No one can tell, but him who finds it, like the poet," answered the curate.

"But I suppose *you* at least consider it the Church of England," returned the lady with one of her sweetest attempts at a smile.

"God forbid!" exclaimed the clergyman, with a kind of sacred horror.

"Not the Church of England!" cried Mrs. Cathcart, in a tone of horror likewise, dashed with amazement.

"No, madam—the Church of God; the great cathedral-church of the universe; of which Church I trust the Church of England is a little Jesus-chapel."

"God bless you, Mr. Armstrong!" cried the schoolmaster.

The colonel likewise showed some sign of emotion. Mrs. Cathcart looked set-down and indignant. Percy stared. Adela and Harry looked at each other.

"Whoever finds God in his own heart," said the clergyman, solemnly, "has found the lost Church—the Church of God."

And he looked at Adela as he spoke. She cast down her eyes, and thanked him with her heart.

A silence followed.

"Harry, you must come up with your story next time—positively," said Mr. Armstrong at length.

"I don't think I can. I cannot undertake to do so, at all events."

"Then what is to be done?—I have it. Lizzie, my dear, you have got that story you wrote once for a Christmas paper, have you not?"

"Yes, I have, Ralph; but that is far too slight a thing to be worth reading here."

"It will do at least to give Harry a chance for his. I mustn't praise it 'afore fowk,' you know."

"But it was never quite finished—at least so people said."

"Well, you can finish it to-morrow well enough."

"I haven't time."

"You needn't be working at that—all day long and every day. There is no such hurry."

The blank indicates a certain cessation of intelligible sound occasioned by the close application of Lizzie's palm to Ralph's lips. She did not, dare, however, to make any further opposition to his request.

"I think we have some claim on you, Mrs. Armstrong," said the host. "It will be my sister's turn next time, and after that Percy's."

Percy gave a great laugh; and his mother said, with a slight toss of her head:

"I am not so fond of being criticised myself!"

"Has criticism been *your* occupation, Mrs. Cathcart," I said, "during our readings? If so, then indeed we have a claim on you greater than I had supposed."

She could not hide some degree of confusion and annoyance. But I had had my revenge, and I had no wish for her story; so I said nothing more.

We parted with the understanding that Mrs. Armstrong would read her story on the following Monday.

Again, before he took his leave, Mr. Harry had a little therapeutic *tete-a-tete* with Miss Adela, which lasted about two minutes, Mrs. Cathcart watching them every second of the time, with her eyes as round and wide as she could make them, for they were by nature very long, and by art very narrow, for she rarely opened them to any width at all. They were not pleasant eyes, those eyes of Mrs. Cathcart's. Percy's were like them, only better, for though they had a reddish tinge, he did open them wider.

CHAPTER VII.

MY UNCLE PETER.

"Why don't you write a story, Percy?" said his mother to him next morning at breakfast.

"Plenty of quill-driving at Somerset-House, mother. I prefer something else in the holidays."

"But I don't like to see you showing to disadvantage, Percy," said his uncle kindly. "Why don't you try?"

"The doctor-fellow hasn't read one yet. And I don't think he will."

"Have patience. I think he will."

"I don't care. I don't want to hear it. It's all a confounded bore. They're nothing but goody humbug, or sentimental whining. His would be sure to smell of black draught. I'm not partial to drugs."

The mother frowned, and the uncle tried to smile kindly and excusingly. Percy rose and left the room.

"You see he's jealous of the doctor," remarked his mother, with an upward toss of the head.

The colonel did not reply, and I ventured no remark.

"There is a vein of essential vulgarity in both the brothers," said the lady.

"I don't think so," returned the colonel; and there the conversation ended.

Adela was practising at her piano the greater part of the day. The weather would not admit of a walk.

When we were all seated once more for our reading and Mrs. Armstrong had her paper in her hand, after a little delay of apparent irresolution, she said all at once:

"Ralph, I can't read. Will you read it for me?"

"Do try to read it yourself, my dear," said her husband.

"I am sure I shall break down," she answered.

"If you were able to write it, surely you are able to read it," said the colonel. "I know what my difficulty would be."

"It is a very different thing to read one's own writing. I could read anything else well enough.—Will you read it for me, Henry?"

"With pleasure, if it must be any other than yourself. I know your handwriting nearly as well as my own. It's none of your usual lady-hands-all point and no character. But what do you say, Ralph?"

"Read it by all means, if she will have it so. The company has had enough of my reading. It will be a change of voice at least."

I saw that Adela looked pleasedly expectant.

"Pray don't look for much," said Mrs. Armstrong in a pleading tone. "I assure you it is nothing, or at best a mere trifle. But I could not help myself, without feeling obstinate. And my husband lays so much on the cherished obstinacy of Lady Macbeth, holding that to be the key to her character, that he has terrified me from every indulgence of mine."

She laughed very sweetly; and her husband joining in the laugh, all further hindrance was swept away in the music of their laughter; and Harry, taking the papers from his sister's hand, commenced at once. It was partly in print, and partly in manuscript.

"MY UNCLE PETER.

"I will tell you the story of my Uncle Peter, who was born on Christmas-day. He was very anxious to die on Christmas-day as well; but I must confess that was rather ambitious in Uncle Peter. Shakespeare is said to have been born on St. George's-day, and there is some ground for believing that he died on St. George's-day. He thus fulfilled a cycle. But we cannot expect that of any but great men, and Uncle Peter was not a great man, though I think I shall be able to show that he was a good man. The only pieces of selfishness I ever discovered in him were, his self-gratulation at having been born on Christmas-day, and the ambition with regard to his death, which I have just recorded; and that this selfishness was not of a kind to be very injurious to his fellowmen, I think I shall be able to show as well.

"The first remembrance that I have of him, is his taking me one Christmas-eve to the largest toy-shop in London, and telling me to choose any toy whatever that I pleased. He little knew the agony of choice into which this request of his,—for it was put to me as a request, in the most polite, loving manner,—threw his astonished nephew. If a general right of choice from the treasures of the whole world had been unanimously voted me, it could hardly have cast me into greater perplexity. I wandered about, staring like a distracted ghost at the 'wealth of Ormus and of Ind,' displayed about me. Uncle Peter followed me with perfect patience; nay, I believe, with a delight that equalled my perplexity, for, every now and then when I looked round to him with a silent appeal for sympathy in the distressing dilemma into which he had thrown me, I found him rubbing his hands and spiritually chuckling over his victim. Nor would he volunteer the least assistance to save me from the dire consequences of too much liberty. How long I was in making up my mind I cannot tell; but as I look back upon this splendour of my childhood, I feel as if I must have wandered for weeks through interminable forest-alleys of toy-bearing trees. As often as I read the story of Aladdin—and I read it now and then still, for I have children about, and their books about—the subterranean orchard of jewels always brings back to my inward vision the inexhaustible riches of the toy-shop to which Uncle Peter took me that Christmas-eve. As soon as, in despair of choosing well, I had made a desperate plunge at decision, my Uncle Peter, as if to forestall any supervention of repentance, began buying like a maniac, giving me everything that took his fancy or mine, till we and our toys nearly filled the cab which he called to take us home.

"Uncle Peter was little round man, not *very* fat, resembling both in limbs and features an overgrown baby. And I believe the resemblance was not merely an external one; for, though his intellect was quite up to par, he retained a degree of simplicity of character and of tastes that was not childlike only, but bordered, sometimes, upon the childish. To look at him, you could not have fancied a face or a figure with less of the romantic about them; yet I believe that the whole region of his brain was held in fee-simple, whatever that may mean, by a race of fairy architects, who built aerial castles therein, regardless of expense. His imagination was the most distinguishing feature of his character. And to hear him defend any of his extravagancies, it would appear that he considered himself especially privileged in that respect. 'Ah, my dear,' he would say to my mother when she expostulated with him on making some present far beyond the small means he at that time possessed, 'ah, my dear, you see I was born on Christmas-day.' Many a time he would come in from town, where he was a clerk in a merchant's office, with the water running out of his boots, and his umbrella carefully tucked under his arm; and we would know very well that he had given the last coppers he had, for his omnibus home, to some beggar or crossing-sweeper, and had then been so delighted with the pleasure he had given, that he forgot to make the best of it by putting up his umbrella. Home he would trudge, in his worn suit of black, with his steel watch-chain and bunch of ancestral seals swinging and ringing from his fob, and the rain running into his trousers pockets, to the great endangerment of the health of his cherished old silver watch, which never went wrong because it was put right every day by St. Paul's. He was quite poor then, as I have said. I do not think he had more than a hundred pounds a-year, and he must have been five and thirty. I suppose his employers showed their care for the morals of their clerks, by never allowing them any margin to mis-spend. But Uncle Peter lived in constant hope and expectation of some unexampled good luck befalling him; 'For,' said he, 'I was born on Christmas-day.'

"He was never married. When people used to jest with him about being an old bachelor, he used to smile, for anything would make him smile; but I was a very little boy indeed when I began to observe that the smile on such occasions was mingled with sadness, and that Uncle Peter's face looked very much as if he were going to cry. But he never said anything on the subject, and not even my mother knew whether he had had any love-story or not. I have often wondered whether his goodness might not come in part from his having lost some one very dear to him, and having his life on earth purified by the thoughts of her life in heaven. But I never found out. After his death—for he did die, though not on Christmas-day—I found a lock of hair folded in paper with a date on it—that was all—in a secret drawer of his old desk. The date was far earlier than my first recollections of him. I reverentially burnt it with fire.

"He lived in lodgings by himself not far from our house; and, when not with us, was pretty sure to be found seated in his easy-chair, for he was fond of his simple comforts, beside a good fire, reading by the light of one candle. He had his tea always as soon as he came home, and some buttered toast or a hot muffin, of which he was sure to make me eat three-quarters if I chanced to drop in upon him at the right hour, which, I am rather ashamed to say, I not unfrequently did. He dared not order another, as I soon discovered. Yet, I fear, that did not abate my appetite for what there was. You see, I was never so good as Uncle Peter. When he had finished his tea, he turned his chair to the fire, and read—what do you think? Sensible Travels and Discoveries, or Political Economy, or Popular Geology? No: Fairy Tales, as many as he could lay hold of; and when they failed him, Romances or Novels. Almost anything in this way would do that was not bad. I believe he had read every word of Richardson's novels, and most of Fielding's and De Foe's. But once I saw him throw a volume in the fire, which he had been fidgeting over for a while. I was just finishing a sum I had brought across to him to help me with. I looked up, and saw the volume in the fire. The heat made it writhe open, and I saw the author's name, and that was *Sterne*. He had bought it at a book-stall as he came home. He sat awhile, and then got up and took down his Bible, and began reading a chapter in the New Testament, as if for an antidote to the book he had destroyed."

"I put in that piece," said the curate.

"But Uncle Peter's luck came at last—at least, he thought it did, when he received a lawyer's letter announcing the *demise* of a cousin of whom he had heard little for a great many years, although they had been warm friends while at school together. This cousin had been brought up to some trade in the wood line—had been a cooper or a carpenter, and had somehow or other got landed in India, and, though not in the Company's service, had contrived in one way and another to amass what might be called a large fortune in any rank of life. I am afraid to mention the amount of it, lest it should throw discredit on my story. The whole of this fortune he left to Uncle Peter, for he had no nearer relation, and had always remembered him with affection.

"I happened to be seated beside my uncle when the lawyer's letter arrived. He was reading 'Peter Wilkins.' He laid down the book with reluctance, thinking the envelope contained some advertisement of slaty coal for his kitchen-fire, or cottony silk for his girls' dresses. Fancy my surprise when my little uncle jumped up on his chair, and thence on the table, upon which he commenced a sort of demoniac hornpipe. But that sober article of furniture declined giving its support to such proceedings for a single moment, and fell with an awful crash to the floor. My uncle was dancing amidst its ruins like Nero in blazing Rome, when he was reduced to an awful sense of impropriety by the entrance of his landlady. I was sitting in open-mouthed astonishment at my uncle's extravagance, when he suddenly dropped into his chair, like a lark into its nest, leaving heaven silent. But silence did not reign long.

"'*Well*! Mr. Belper,' began his landlady, in a tone as difficult of description as it is easy of conception, for her fists had already planted themselves in her own opposing sides. But, to my astonishment, my uncle was not in the least awed, although I am sure, however much he tried to hide it, that I have often seen him tremble in his shoes at the distant roar of this tigress. But it is wonderful how much courage a pocketful of sovereigns will give. It is far better for rousing the pluck of a man than any number of bottles of wine in his head. What a brave thing a whole fortune must be then!

"'Take that rickety old thing away,' said my uncle.

"'Rickety, Mr. Belper! I'm astonished to hear a decent gentleman like you slander the very table as you've eaten off for the last—'

"'We won't be precise to a year, ma'am,' interrupted my uncle.

"'And if you will have little scapegraces of neveys into my house to break the furniture, why, them as breaks, pays, Mr. Belper.'

"'Very well. Of course I will pay for it. I broke it myself, ma'am; and if you don't get out of my room, I'll—'

"Uncle Peter jumped up once more, and made for the heap of ruins in the middle of the floor. The landlady vanished in a moment, and my uncle threw himself again into his chair, and absolutely roared with laughter.

"'Shan't we have rare fun, Charlie, my boy?' said he at last, and went off into another fit of laughter.

"'Why, uncle, what is the matter with you?' I managed to say, in utter bewilderment.

"'Nothing but luck, Charlie. It's gone to my head. I'm not used to it, Charlie, that's all. I'll come all right by-and-by. Bless you, my boy!'

"What do you think was the first thing my uncle did to relieve himself of the awful accession of power which had just befallen him? The following morning he gathered together every sixpence he had in the house, and went out of one grocer's shop into another, and out of one baker's shop into another, until he had changed the whole into threepenny pieces. Then he walked to town, as usual, to business. But one or two of his friends who were walking the same way, and followed behind him, could not think what Mr. Belper was about. Every crossing that he came to he made use of to cross to the other side. He crossed and recrossed the same street twenty times, they said. But at length they observed, that, with a legerdemain worthy of a professor, he slipped something into every sweeper's hand as he passed him. It was one of the threepenny pieces. When he walked home in the evening, he had nothing to give, and besides went through one of the wet experiences to which I have already alluded. To add to his discomfort, he found, when he got home, that his tobacco-jar was quite empty, so that he was forced to put on his wet shoes again—for he never, to the end of his days, had more than one pair at a time—in order to come across to my mother to borrow sixpence. Before the legacy was paid to him, he went through a good many of the tortures which result from being 'a king and no king.' The inward consciousness and the outward possibility did not in the least correspond. At length, after much manoeuvring with the lawyers, who seemed to sympathize with the departed cousin in this, that they too would prefer keeping the money till death parted them and it, he succeeded in getting a thousand pounds of it on Christmas-eve.

"'NOW!' said Uncle Peter, in enormous capitals.—That night a thundering knock came to our door. We were all sitting in our little dining-room—father, mother, and seven children of us—talking about what we should do next day. The door opened, and in came the most grotesque figure you could imagine. It was seven feet high at least, without any head, a mere walking tree-stump, as far as shape went, only it looked soft. The little ones were terrified, but not the bigger ones of us; for from top to toe (if it had a toe) it was covered with toys of every conceivable description, fastened on to it somehow or other. It was a perfect treasure-cave of Ali Baba turned inside out. We shrieked with delight. The figure stood perfectly still, and we gathered round it in a group to have a nearer view of the wonder. We then discovered that there were tickets on all the articles, which we supposed at first to record the price of each. But, upon still closer examination, we discovered that every one of the tickets had one or other of our names upon it. This caused a fresh explosion of joy. Nor was it the children only that were thus remembered. A little box bore my mother's name. When she opened it, we saw a real gold watch and chain, and seals and dangles of every sort, of useful and useless kind; and my mother's initials were on the back of the watch. My father had a silver flute, and to the music of it we had such a dance! the strange figure, now considerable lighter, joining in it without uttering a word. During the dance one of my sisters, a very sharp-eyed little puss, espied about half way up the monster two bright eyes looking out of a shadowy depth of something like the skirts of a great coat. She peeped and peeped; and at length, with a perfect scream of exultation, cried out, 'It's Uncle Peter! It's Uncle Peter!' The music ceased; the dance was forgotten; we flew upon him like a pack of hungry wolves; we tore him to the ground; despoiled him of coats, and plaids, and elevating sticks; and discovered the kernel of the beneficent monster in the person of real Uncle Peter; which, after all, was the best present he could have brought us on Christmas-eve, for we had been very dull for want of him, and had been wondering why he did not come.

"But Uncle Peter had laid great plans for his birthday, and for the carrying out of them he took me into his confidence,—I being now a lad of fifteen, and partaking sufficiently of my uncle's nature to enjoy at least the fun of his benevolence. He had been for some time perfecting his information about a few of the families in the neighbourhood; for he was a bit of a gossip, and did not turn his landlady out of the room when she came in with a whisper of news, in the manner in which he had turned her out when she came to expostulate about the table. But she knew her lodger well enough never to dare to bring him any scandal. From her he had learned that a certain artist in the neighbourhood was very poor. He made inquiry about him where he thought he could hear more, and finding that he was steady and hard-working (Uncle Peter never cared to inquire whether he had genius or not; it was enough to him that the poor fellow's pictures did not sell), resolved that he should have a more pleasant Christmas than he expected. One other chief outlet for his brotherly love, in the present instance, was a dissenting minister and his wife, who had a large family of little children. They lived in the same street with himself. Uncle Peter was an unwavering adherent to the Church of England, but he would have felt himself a dissenter at once if he had excommunicated any one by withdrawing his sympathies from him. He knew that this minister was a thoroughly good man, and he had even gone to hear him preach once or twice. He knew too that his congregation was not the more liberal to him that he was liberal to all men. So he resolved that he would act the part of one of the black angels that brought bread and meat to Elijah in the wilderness. Uncle Peter would never have pretended to rank higher than one of the foresaid ravens.

"A great part of the forenoon of Christmas-day was spent by my uncle and me in preparations. The presents he had planned were many, but I will only mention two or three of them in particular. For the minister and his family he got a small bottle with a large mouth. This he filled as full of new sovereigns as it would hold; labelled it outside, *Pickled Mushrooms*; 'for doesn't it grow in the earth without any seed?' said he; and then wrapped it up like a grocer's parcel. For the artist, he took a large shell from his chimney-piece; folded a fifty-pound note in a bit of paper, which he tied up with a green ribbon; inserted the paper in the jaws of the shell, so that the ends of the ribbon should hang out; folded it up in paper and sealed it; wrote outside, *Enquire within*; enclosed the whole in a tin box and directed it, *With Christmas-day's compliments*; 'for wasn't I born on Christmas-day?' concluded Uncle Peter for the twentieth time that forenoon. Then there were a dozen or two of the best port he could get, for a lady who had just had a baby, and whose husband and his income he knew from business relations. Nor were the children forgotten. Every house in his street and ours in which he knew there were little ones, had a parcel of toys and sweet things prepared for it.

"As soon as the afternoon grew dusky, we set out with as many as we could carry. A slight disguise secured me from discovery, my duty being to leave the parcels at the different houses. In the case of the more valuable of them, my duty was to ask for the master or mistress, and see the packet in safe hands. In this I was successful in every instance. It must have been a great relief to my uncle when the number of parcels was sufficiently diminished to restore to him the use of his hands, for to him they were as necessary for rubbing as a tail is to a dog for wagging—in both cases for electrical reasons, no doubt. He dropped several parcels in the vain attempt to hold them and perform the usual frictional movement notwithstanding; so he was compelled instead to go through a kind of solemn pace, which got more and more rapid as the parcels decreased in number, till it became at last, in its wild movements, something like a Highlander's sword-dance. We had to go home several times for more, keeping the best till the last. When Uncle Peter saw me give the 'pickled mushrooms' into the hands of the lady of the house, he uttered a kind of laugh, strangled into a crow, which startled the good lady, who was evidently rather alarmed already at the weight of the small parcel, for she said, with a scared look:—

"'It's not gunpowder, is it?'

"'No,' I said; 'I think it's shot.'

"'Shot!' said she, looking even more alarmed. 'Don't you think you had better take it back again?'

"She held out the parcel to me, and made as if she would shut the door.

"'Why, ma'am,' I answered, 'you would not have me taken up for stealing it?'

"It was a foolish reply; but it answered the purpose if not the question. She kept the parcel and shut the door. When I looked round I saw my uncle going through a regular series of convolutions, corresponding exactly to the bodily contortions he must have executed at school every time he received a course of what they call *palmies* in Scotland; if, indeed, Uncle Peter was ever even suspected of improper behaviour at school. It consisted first of a dance, then a double-up; then another dance, then another double-up, and so on.

"'Some stupid hoax, I suppose!' said the artist, as I put the parcel into his hands. He looked gloomy enough, poor fellow.

"'Don't be too sure of that, if you please, sir,' said I, and vanished.

"Everything was a good joke to uncle all that evening.

"'Charlie,' said he, 'I never had such a birthday in my life before; but, please God, now I've begun, this will not be the last of the sort. But, you young rascal, if you split, why, I'll thrash the life out of you. No, I won't—'here my uncle assumed a dignified attitude, and concluded with mock solemnity—'No, I won't. I will cut you off with a shilling.'

"This was a *crescendo* passage, ending in a howl; upon which he commenced once more an edition of the Highland fling, with impromptu variations.

"When all the parcels were delivered, we walked home together to my uncle's lodgings, where he gave me a glass of wine and a sovereign for my trouble. I believe I felt as rich as any of them.

"But now I must tell you the romance of my uncle's life. I do not mean the suspected hidden romance, for that no one knew—except, indeed, a dead one knew all about it. It was a later romance, which, however, nearly cost him his life once.

"One Christmas-eve we had been occupied, as usual, with the presents of the following Christmas-day, and—will you believe it?—in the same lodgings, too, for my uncle was a thorough Tory in his hatred of change. Indeed, although two years had passed, and he had had the whole of his property at his disposal since the legal term of one year, he still continued to draw his salary of £100 of Messrs. Buff and Codgers. One Christmas-eve, I say, I was helping him to make up parcels, when, from a sudden impulse, I said to him—

"'How good you are, uncle!'

"'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed he; 'that's the best joke of all. Good, my boy! Ha! ha! ha! Why, Charlie, you don't fancy I care one atom for all these people, do you? I do it all to please myself. Ha! ha! ha! It's the cheapest pleasure at the money, considering the quality, that I know. That *is* a joke. Good, indeed! Ha! ha! ha!'

"I am happy to say I was an old enough bird not to be caught with this metaphysical chaff. But my uncle's face grew suddenly very grave, even sad in its expression; and after a pause he resumed, but this time without any laughing:—

"'Good, Charlie! Why, I'm no use to anybody.'

"'You do me good, anyhow, uncle,' I answered. 'If I'm not a better man for having you for an uncle, why I shall be a great deal the worse, that's all.'

"'Why, there it is!' rejoined my uncle; 'I don't know whether I do good or harm. But for you, Charlie, you're a good boy, and don't want any good done to you. It would break my heart, Charlie, if I thought you weren't a good boy.'

"He always called me a boy after I was a grown man. But then I believe he always felt like a boy himself, and quite forgot that we were uncle and nephew.

"I was silent, and he resumed,—

"'I wish I could be of real, unmistakeable use to anyone! But I fear I am not good enough to have that honour done me.'

"Next morning,—that was Christmas-day,—he went out for a walk alone, apparently oppressed with the thought with which the serious part of our conversation on the preceding evening had closed. Of course nothing less than a threepenny piece would do for a crossing-sweeper on Christmas-day; but one tiny little girl touched his heart so that the usual coin was doubled. Still this did not relieve the heart of the giver sufficiently; for the child looked up in his face in a way, whatever the way was, that made his heart ache. So he gave her a shilling. But he felt no better after that.—I am following his own account of feelings and circumstances.

"'This won't do,' said Uncle Peter to himself. 'What is your name?' said Uncle Peter to the little girl.

"'Little Christmas,' she answered.

"'Little Christmas!' exclaimed Uncle Peter. 'I see why that wouldn't do now. What do you mean?'

"'Little Christmas, sir; please, sir.'

"'Who calls you that?'

"'Everybody, sir.'

"'Why do they call you that?'

"'It's my name, sir.'

"'What's your father's name?'

"'I ain't got none, sir'

"'But you know what his name was?'

"'No, sir.'

"'How did you get your name then? It must be the same as your father's, you know.'

"'Then I suppose my father was Christmas-day, sir, for I knows of none else. They always calls me Little Christmas.'

"'H'm! A little sister of mine, I see,' said Uncle Peter to himself.

"'Well, who's your mother?'

"'My aunt, sir. She knows I'm out, sir.'

"There was not the least impudence in the child's tone or manner in saying this. She looked up at him with her gipsy eye in the most confident manner. She had not struck him in the least as beautiful; but the longer he looked at her, the more he was pleased with her.

"'Is your aunt kind to you?'

"'She gives me my wittles.'

"'Suppose you did not get any money all day, what would she say to you?'

"'Oh, she won't give me a hidin' to-day, sir, supposin' I gets no more. You've giv' me enough already, sir; thank you, sir. I'll change it into ha'pence.'

"'She does beat you sometimes, then?'

"'Oh, my!'

"Here she rubbed her arms and elbows as if she ached all over at the thought, and these were the only parts she could reach to rub for the whole.

"'I *will*,' said Uncle Peter to himself.

"'Do you think you were born on Christmas-day, little one?'

"'I think I was once, sir.'

"'I shall teach the child to tell lies if I go on asking her questions in this way,' thought my uncle. 'Will you go home with me?' he said coaxingly.

"'Yes, sir, if you will tell me where to put my broom, for I must not go home without it, else aunt would wollop me.'

"'I will buy you a new broom.'

"'But aunt would wollop me all the same if I did not bring home the old one for our Christmas fire.'

"'Never mind. I will take care of you. You may bring your broom if you like, though,' he added, seeing a cloud come over the little face.

"'Thank you, sir,' said the child; and, shouldering her broom, she trotted along behind him, as he led the way home.

"But this would not do, either. Before they had gone twelve paces, he had the child in one hand; and before they had gone a second twelve, he had the broom in the other. And so Uncle Peter walked home with his child and his broom. The latter he set down inside the door, and the former he led upstairs to his room. There he seated her on a chair by the fire, and ringing the bell, asked the landlady to bring a basin of bread and milk. The woman cast a look of indignation and wrath at the poor little immortal. She might have been the impersonation of Christmas-day in the catacombs, as she sat with her feet wide apart, and reaching halfway down the legs of the chair, and her black eyes staring from the midst of knotted tangles of hair that never felt comb or brush, or were defended from the wind by bonnet or hood. I dare say uncle's poor apartment, with its cases of stuffed birds and its square piano that was used for a cupboard, seemed to her the most sumptuous of conceivable abodes. But she said nothing—only stared. When her bread and milk came, she ate it up without a word, and when she had finished it, sat still for a moment, as if pondering what it became her to do next. Then she rose, dropped a courtesy, and said:—'Thank you, sir. Please, sir, where's my broom?'

"'Oh, but I want you to stop with me, and be my little girl.'

"'Please, sir, I would rather go to my crossing.'

"The face of Little Christmas lengthened visibly, and she was upon the point of crying. Uncle Peter saw that he had been too precipitate, and that he must woo the child before he could hope to win her; so he asked her for her address. But though she knew the way to her home perfectly, she could give only what seemed to him the most confused directions how to find it. No doubt to her they seemed as clear as day. Afraid of terrifying her by following her, the best way seemed to him to promise her a new frock on the morrow, if she would come and fetch it. Her face brightened so at the sound of a new frock, that my uncle had very little fear of the fault being hers if she did not come.

"'Will you know the way back, my dear?'"

"'I always know my way anywheres,' answered she. So she was allowed to depart with her cherished broom."

"Uncle Peter took my mother into council upon the affair of the frock. She thought an old one of my sister's would do best. But my uncle had said a *new* frock, and a new one it must be. So next day my mother went with him to buy one, and was excessively amused with his entire ignorance of what was suitable for the child. However, the frock being purchased, he saw how absurd it would be to put a new frock over such garments as she must have below, and accordingly made my mother buy everything to clothe her completely. With these treasures he hastened home, and found poor Little Christmas and her broom waiting for him outside the door, for the landlady would not let her in. This roused the wrath of my uncle to such a degree, that, although he had borne wrongs innumerable and aggravated for a long period of years without complaint, he walked in and gave her notice that he would leave in a week. I think she expected he would forget all about it before the day arrived; but with his further designs for Little Christmas, he was not likely to forget it; and I fear I have seldom enjoyed anything so much as the consternation of the woman (whom I heartily hated) when she saw a truck arrive to remove my uncle's few personal possessions from her inhospitable roof. I believe she took her revenge by giving her cronies to understand that she had turned my uncle away at a week's warning for bringing home improper companions to her respectable house.—But to return to Little Christmas. She fared all the better for the landlady's unkindness; for my mother took her home and washed her with her own soft hands from head to foot; and then put all the new clothes on her, and she looked charming. How my uncle would have managed I can't think. He was delighted at the improvement in her appearance. I saw him turn round and wipe his eyes with his handkerchief.

"'Now, Little Christmas, will you come and live with me?' said he.

"She pulled the same face, though not quite so long as before, and said, 'I would rather go to my crossing, please, sir.'

"My uncle heaved a sigh and let her go.

"She shouldered her broom as if it had been the rifle of a giant, and trotted away to her work.

"But next day, and the next, and the next, she was not to be seen at her wonted corner. When a whole week had passed and she did not make her appearance, my uncle was in despair. "'You see, Charlie,' said he, 'I am fated to be of no use to anybody, though I was born on Christmas-day.'

"The very next day, however, being Sunday, my uncle found her as he went to church. She was sweeping a new crossing. She seemed to have found a lower deep still, for, alas! all her new clothes were gone, and she was more tattered and wretched-looking than before. As soon as she saw my uncle she burst into tears.

"'Look,' she said, pulling up her little frock, and showing her thigh with a terrible bruise upon it; '*she* did it.'

"A fresh burst of tears followed.

"'Where are your new clothes, Little Christmas?' asked my uncle.

"'She sold them for gin, and then beat me awful. Please, sir, I couldn't help it.'

"The child's tears were so bitter, that my uncle, without thinking, said—

"'Never mind, dear; you shall have another frock.'

"Her tears ceased, and her face brightened for a moment; but the weeping returned almost instantaneously with increased violence, and she sobbed out:

"'It's no use, sir; she'd only serve me the same, sir.'

"'Will you come home and live with me, then?'

"'Yes, please.'

"She flung her broom from her into the middle of the street, nearly throwing down a cab-horse, betwixt whose fore-legs it tried to pass; then, heedless of the oaths of the man, whom my uncle pacified with a shilling, put her hand in that of her friend and trotted home with him. From that day till the day of his death she never left him—of her own accord, at least.

"My uncle had, by this time, got into lodgings with a woman of the right sort, who received the little stray lamb with open arms and open heart. Once more she was washed and clothed from head to foot, and from skin to frock. My uncle never allowed her to go out without him, or some one who was capable of protecting her. He did not think it at all necessary to supply the woman, who might not be her aunt after all, with gin unlimited, for the privilege of rescuing Little Christmas from her cruelty. So he felt that she was in great danger of being carried off, for the sake either of her earnings or her ransom; and, in fact, some very suspicious-looking characters were several times observed prowling about in the neighbourhood. Uncle Peter, however, took what care he could to prevent any report of this reaching the ears of Little Christmas, lest she should live in terror; and contented himself with watching her carefully. It was some time before my mother would consent to our playing with her freely and beyond her sight; for it was strange to hear the ugly words which would now and then break from her dear little innocent lips. But she was very easily cured of this, although, of course, some time must pass before she could be quite depended upon. She was a sweet-tempered, loving child. But the love seemed for some time to have no way of showing itself, so little had she been used to ways of love and tenderness. When we kissed her she never returned the kiss, but only stared; yet whatever we asked her to do she would do as if her whole heart was in it; and I did not doubt it was. Now I know it was.

"After a few years, when Christmas began to be considered tolerably capable of taking care of herself, the vigilance of my uncle gradually relaxed a little. A month before her thirteenth birthday, as near as my uncle could guess, the girl disappeared. She had gone to the day-school as usual, and was expected home in the afternoon; for my uncle would never part with her to go to a boarding-school, and yet wished her to have the benefit of mingling with her fellows, and not being always tied to the button-hole of an old bachelor. But she did not return at the usual hour. My uncle went to inquire about her. She had left the school with the rest. Night drew on. My uncle was in despair. He roamed the streets all night; spoke about his child to every policeman he met; went to the station-house of the district, and described her; had bills printed, and offered a hundred pounds reward for her restoration. All was unavailing. The miscreants must have seen bills, but feared to repose confidence in the offer. Poor Uncle Peter drooped and grew thin. Before the month was out, his clothes were hanging about him like a sack. He could hardly swallow a mouthful; hardly even sit down to a meal. I believe he loved his Little Christmas every whit as much as if she had been his own daughter—perhaps more—for he could not help thinking of what she might have been if he had not rescued her; and he felt that God had given her to him as certainly as if she had been his own child, only that she had come in another way. He would get out of bed in the middle of the night, unable to sleep, and go wandering up and down the streets, and into dreadful places, sometimes, to try to find her. But fasting and watching could not go on long without bringing friends with them. Uncle Peter was seized with a fever, which grew and grew till his life was despaired of. He was very delirious at times, and then the strangest fancies had possession of his brain. Sometimes he seemed to see the horrid woman she called her aunt, torturing the poor child; sometimes it was old Pagan Father Christmas, clothed in snow and ice, come to fetch his daughter; sometimes it was his old landlady shutting her out in the frost; or himself finding her afterwards, but frozen so hard to the ground that he could not move her to get her indoors. The doctors seemed doubtful, and gave as their opinion—a decided shake of the head.

"Christmas-day arrived. In the afternoon, to the wonder of all about him, although he had been wandering a moment before, he suddenly said—

"'I was born on Christmas-day, you know. This is the first Christmas-day that didn't bring me good luck.'

"Turning to me, he added—

"'Charlie, my boy, its' a good thing ANOTHER besides me was born on Christmas-day, isn't it?'

"'Yes, dear uncle,' said I; and it was all I could say. He lay quite quiet for a few minutes, when there came a gentle knock to the street door.

"'That's Chrissy!' he cried, starting up in bed, and stretching out his arms with trembling eagerness. 'And me to say this Christmas-day would bring me no good!'

"He fell back on his pillow, and burst into a flood of tears.

"I rushed down to the door, and reached it before the servant. I stared. There stood a girl about the size of Chrissy, with an old battered bonnet on, and a ragged shawl. She was standing on the door-step, trembling. I felt she was trembling somehow, for I don't think I saw it. She had Chrissy's eyes too, I thought; but the light was dim now, for the evening was coming on.

"All this passed through my mind in a moment, during which she stood silent.

"'What is it?' I said, in a tremor of expectation.

"'Charlie, don't you know me?' she said, and burst into tears.

"We were in each other's arms in a moment—for the first time. But Chrissy is my wife now. I led her up stairs in triumph, and into my uncle's room.

"'I knew it was my lamb!' he cried, stretching out his arms, and trying to lift himself up, only he was too weak.

"Chrissy flew to his arms. She was very dirty, and her clothes had such a smell of poverty! But there she lay in my uncle's bosom, both of them sobbing, for a long time; and when at last she withdrew, she tumbled down on the floor, and there she lay motionless. I was in a dreadful fright, but my mother came in at the moment, while I was trying to put some brandy within her cold lips, and got her into a warm bath, and put her to bed.

"In the morning she was much better, though the doctor would not let her get up for a day or two. I think, however, that was partly for my uncle's sake.

"When at length she entered the room one morning, dressed in her own nice clothes, for there were plenty in the wardrobe in her room, my uncle stretched out his arms to her once more, and said:

"'Ah! Chrissy, I thought I was going to have my own way, an die on Christmas-day; but it would have been one too soon, before I had found you, my darling."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ADELA CATHCART, VOLUME 2 ***

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