ELIZABETH GASKELL's

NORTH AND SOUTH

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CONTENTS

VOLUME II

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CHAPTER I

MOTHER AND SON

'I have found that holy place of rest

Still changeless.'

MRS. HEMANS.

When Mr. Thornton had left the house that morning he was almost blinded by his baffled passion. He was as dizzy as if Margaret, instead of looking, and speaking, and moving like a tender graceful woman, had been a sturdy fish-wife, and given him a sound blow with her fists. He had positive bodily pain,--a violent headache, and a throbbing intermittent pulse. He could not bear the noise, the garish light, the continued rumble and movement of the street. He called himself a fool for suffering so; and yet he could not, at the moment, recollect the cause of his suffering, and whether it was adequate to the consequences it had produced. It would have been a relief to him, if he could have sat down and cried on a door-step by a little child, who was raging and storming, through his passionate tears, at some injury he had received. He said to himself, that he hated Margaret, but a wild, sharp sensation of love cleft his dull, thunderous feeling like lightning, even as he shaped the words expressive of hatred. His greatest comfort was in hugging his torment; and in feeling, as he had indeed said to her, that though she might despise him, contemn him, treat him with her proud sovereign indifference, he did not change one whit. She could not make him change. He loved her, and would love her; and defy her, and this miserable bodily pain.

He stood still for a moment, to make this resolution firm and clear. There was an omnibus passing--going into the country; the conductor thought he was wishing for a place, and stopped near the pavement. It was too much trouble to apologise and explain; so he mounted upon it, and was borne away,--past long rows of houses--then past detached villas with trim gardens, till they came to real country hedge-rows, and, by-and-by, to a small country town.

Then every body got down; and so did Mr. Thornton, and because they walked away he did so too. He went into the fields, walking briskly, because the sharp motion relieved his mind. He could remember all about it now; the pitiful figure he must have cut; the absurd way in which he had gone and done the very thing he had so often agreed with himself in thinking would be the most foolish thing in the world; and had met with exactly the consequences which, in these wise moods, he had always fore-told were certain to follow, if he ever did make such a fool of himself. Was he bewitched by those beautiful eyes, that soft, half-open, sighing mouth which lay so close upon his shoulder only yesterday? He could not even shake off the recollection that she had been there; that her arms had been round him, once--if never again. He only caught glimpses of her; he did not understand her altogether. At one time she was so brave, and at another so timid; now so tender, and then so haughty and regal-proud. And then he thought over every time he had ever seen her once again, by way of finally forgetting her. He saw her in every dress, in every mood, and did not know which became her best. Even this morning, how magnificent she had looked,--her eyes flashing out upon him at the idea that, because she had shared his danger yesterday, she had cared for him the least!

If Mr. Thornton was a fool in the morning, as he assured himself at least twenty times he was, he did not grow much wiser in the afternoon. All that he gained in return for his sixpenny omnibus ride, was a more vivid conviction that there never was, never could be, any one like Margaret; that she did not love him and never would; but that she--no! nor the whole world--should never hinder him from loving her. And so he returned to the little market-place, and remounted the omnibus to return to Milton.

It was late in the afternoon when he was set down, near his warehouse. The accustomed places brought back the accustomed habits and trains of thought. He knew how much he had to do--more than his usual work, owing to the commotion of the day before. He had to see his brother magistrates; he had to complete the arrangements, only half made in the morning, for the comfortand safety of his newly imported Irish hands; he had to secure them from all chance of communication with the discontented work-people of Milton. Last of all, he had to go home and encounter his mother.

Mrs. Thornton had sat in the dining-room all day, every moment expecting the news of her son's acceptance by Miss Hale. She had braced herself up many and many a time, at some sudden noise in the house; had caught up the half-dropped work, and begun to ply her needle diligently, though through dimmed spectacles, and with an unsteady hand! and many times had the door opened, and some indifferent person entered on some insignificant errand. Then her rigid face unstiffened from its gray frost-bound expression, and the features dropped into the relaxed look of despondency, so unusual to their sternness. She wrenched herself away from the contemplation of all the dreary changes that would be brought about to herself by her son's marriage; she forced her thoughts into the accustomed household grooves. The newly-married couple-to-be would need fresh household stocks of linen; and Mrs. Thornton had clothes-basket upon clothes-basket, full of table-cloths and napkins, brought in, and began to reckon up the store. There was some confusion between what was hers, and consequently marked G. H. T. (for George and Hannah Thornton), and what was her son's--bought with his money, marked with his initials. Some of those marked G. H. T. were Dutch damask of the old kind, exquisitely fine; none were like them now. Mrs. Thornton stood looking at them long,--they had been her pride when

she was first married. Then she knit her brows, and pinched and compressed her lips tight, and carefully unpicked the G. H. She went so far as to search for the Turkey-red marking-thread to put in the new initials; but it was all used,--and she had no heart to send for any more just yet. So she looked fixedly at vacancy; a series of visions passing before her, in all of which her son was the principal, the sole object,--her son, her pride, her property. Still he did not come. Doubtless he was with Miss Hale. The new love was displacing her already from her place as first in his heart. A terrible pain--a pang of vain jealousy--shot through her: she hardly knew whether it was more physical or mental; but it forced her to sit down. In a moment, she was up again as straight as ever,--a grim smile upon her face for the first time that day, ready for the door opening, and the rejoicing triumphant one, who should never know the sore regret his mother felt at his marriage. In all this, there was little thought enough of the future daughter-in-law as an individual. She was to be John's wife. To take Mrs. Thornton's place as mistress of the house, was only one of the rich consequences which decked out the supreme glory; all household plenty and comfort, all purple and fine linen, honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, would all come as naturally as jewels on a king's robe, and be as little thought of for their separate value. To be chosen by John, would separate a kitchen-wench from the rest of the world. And Miss Hale was not so bad. If she had been a Milton lass, Mrs. Thornton would have positively liked her. She was pungent, and had taste, and spirit, and flavour in her. True, she was sadly prejudiced, and veryignorant; but that was to be expected from her southern breeding. A strange sort of mortified comparison of Fanny with her, went on in Mrs. Thornton's mind; and for once she spoke harshly to her daughter; abused her roundly; and then, as if by way of penance, she took up Henry's Commentaries, and tried to fix her attention on it, instead of pursuing the employment she took pride and pleasure in, and continuing her inspection of the table-linen.

His step at last! She heard him, even while she thought she was finishing a sentence; while her eye did pass over it, and her memory could mechanically have repeated it word for word, she heard him come in at the hall-door. Her quickened sense could interpret every sound of motion: now he was at the hat-stand--now at the very room-door. Why did he pause? Let her know the worst.

Yet her head was down over the book; she did not look up. He came close to the table, and stood still there, waiting till she should have finished the paragraph which apparently absorbed her. By an effort she looked up. Well, John?'

He knew what that little speech meant. But he had steeled himself. He longed to reply with a jest; the bitterness of his heart could have uttered one, but his mother deserved better of him. He came round behind her, so that she could not see his looks, and, bending back her gray, stony face, he kissed it, murmuring:

'No one loves me,--no one cares for me, but you, mother.'

He turned away and stood leaning his head against the mantel-piece, tears forcing themselves into his manly eyes. She stood up,--she tottered. For the first time in her life, the strong woman tottered. She put her hands on his shoulders; she was a tall woman. She looked into his face; she made him look at her.

'Mother's love is given by God, John. It holds fast for ever and ever. A girl's love is like a puff of smoke,--it changes with every wind. And she would not have you, my own lad, would not she?' She set her teeth; she showed them like a dog for the whole length of her mouth. He shook his head.

'I am not fit for her, mother; I knew I was not.'

She ground out words between her closed teeth. He could not hear what she said; but the look in her eyes interpreted it to be a curse,--if not as coarsely worded, as fell in intent as ever was uttered. And yet her heart leapt up light, to know he was her own again.

'Mother!' said he, hurriedly, 'I cannot hear a word against her. Spare me,--spare me! I am very weak in my sore heart;--I love her yet; I love her more than ever.'

'And I hate her,' said Mrs. Thornton, in a low fierce voice. 'I tried not to hate her, when she stood between you and me, because,--I said to myself,--she will make him happy; and I would give my heart's blood to do that. But now, I hate her for your misery's sake. Yes, John, it's no use hiding up your aching heart from me. I am the mother that bore you, and your sorrow is my agony; and if you don't hate her, I do.'

'Then, mother, you make me love her more. She is unjustly treated by you, and I must make the balance even. But why do we talk of love or hatred? She does not care for me, and that is enough,--too much. Let us never name the subject again. It is the only thing you can do for me in the matter. Let us never name her.'

'With all my heart. I only wish that she, and all belonging to her, were swept back to the place they came from.'

He stood still, gazing into the fire for a minute or two longer. Her dry dim eyes filled with unwonted tears as she looked at him; but she seemed just as grim and quiet as usual when he next spoke.

'Warrants are out against three men for conspiracy, mother. The riot yesterday helped to knock up the strike.'

And Margaret's name was no more mentioned between Mrs. Thornton and her son. They fell back into their usual mode of talk,--about facts, not opinions, far less feelings. Their voices and tones were calm and cold a stranger might have gone away and thought that he had never seen such frigid indifference of demeanour between such near relations.

CHAPTER II

FRUIT-PIECE

'For never any thing can be amiss

1.

When simpleness and duty tender it.'

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Mr. Thornton went straight and clear into all the interests of the following day. There was a slight demand for finished goods; and as it affected his branch of the trade, he took advantage of it, and drove hard bargains. He was sharp to the hour at the meeting of his brother magistrates,--giving them the best assistance of his strong sense, and his power of seeing consequences at a glance, and so coming to a rapid decision. Older men, men of long standing in the town, men of far greater wealth--realised and turned into land, while his was all floating capital, engaged in his trade--looked to him for prompt, ready wisdom. He was the one deputed to see and arrange with the police--to lead in all the requisite steps. And he cared for their unconscious deference no more than for the soft west wind, that scarcely made the smoke from the great tall chimneys swerve in its straight upward course. He was not aware of the silent respect paid to him. If it had been otherwise, he would have felt it as an obstacle in his progress to the object he had in view. As it was, he looked to the speedy accomplishment of that alone. It was his mother's greedy ears that sucked in, from the women-kind of these magistrates and wealthy men, how highly Mr. This or Mr. That thought of Mr. Thornton; that if he had not been there, things would have gone on very differently,--very badly, indeed. He swept off his business right and left that day. It seemed as though his deep mortification of yesterday, and the stunned purposeless course of the hours afterwards, had cleared away all the mists from his intellect. He felt his power and revelled in it. He could almost defy his heart. If he had known it, he could have sang the song of the miller who lived by the river Dee:--

1. *'I care for nobody--*
2. *Nobody cares for me.'*

The evidence against Boucher, and other ringleaders of the riot, was taken before him; that against the three others, for conspiracy, failed. But he sternly charged the police to be on the watch; for the swift right arm of the law should be in readiness to strike, as soon as they could prove a fault. And then he left the hot reeking room in the borough court, and went out into the fresher, but still sultry street. It seemed as though he gave way all at once; he was so languid

that he could not control his thoughts; they would wander to her; they would bring back the scene,--not of his repulse and rejection the day before but the looks, the actions of the day before that. He went along the crowded streets mechanically, winding in and out among the people, but never seeing them,--almost sick with longing for that one half-hour--that one brief space of time when she clung to him, and her heart beat against his--to come once again.

'Why, Mr. Thornton you're cutting me very coolly, I must say. And how is Mrs. Thornton? Brave weather this! We doctors don't like it, I can tell you!'

'I beg your pardon, Dr. Donaldson. I really didn't see you. My mother's quite well, thank you. It is a fine day, and good for the harvest, I hope. If the wheat is well got in, we shall have a brisk trade next year, whatever you doctors have.'

'Ay, ay. Each man for himself Your bad weather, and your bad times, are my good ones. When trade is bad, there's more undermining of health, and preparation for death, going on among you Milton men than you're aware of.'

'Not with me, Doctor. I'm made of iron. The news of the worst bad debt I ever had, never made my pulse vary. This strike, which affects me more than any one else in Milton,--more than Hamper,--never comes near my appetite. You must go elsewhere for a patient, Doctor.'

'By the way, you've recommended me a good patient, poor lady! Not to go on talking in this heartless way, I seriously believe that Mrs. Hale--that lady in Crampton, you know--hasn't many weeks to live. I never had any hope of cure, as I think I told you; but I've been seeing her to-day, and I think very badly of her.'

Mr. Thornton was silent. The vaunted steadiness of pulse failed him for an instant.

'Can I do anything, Doctor?' he asked, in an altered voice. 'You know--you would see, that money is not very plentiful; are there any comforts or dainties she ought to have?'

'No,' replied the Doctor, shaking his head. 'She craves for fruit,--she has a constant fever on her; but jargonelle pears will do as well as anything, and there are quantities of them in the market.'

'You will tell me, if there is anything I can do, I'm sure, replied Mr. Thornton. 'I rely upon you.'

'Oh! never fear! I'll not spare your purse,--I know it's deep enough. I wish you'd give me carte-blanche for all my patients, and all their wants.'

But Mr. Thornton had no general benevolence,--no universal philanthropy; few even would have given him credit for strong affections. But he went straight to the first fruit-shop in Milton, and chose out the bunch of purple grapes with the most delicate bloom upon them,--the richest-coloured peaches,--the freshest vine-leaves. They were packed into a basket, and the shopman awaited the answer to his inquiry, 'Where shall we send them to, sir?'

There was no reply. 'To Marlborough Mills, I suppose, sir?'

'No!' Mr. Thornton said. 'Give the basket to me,--I'll take it.'

It took up both his hands to carry it; and he had to pass through the busiest part of the town for feminine shopping. Many a young lady of his acquaintance turned to look after him, and thought it strange to see him occupied just like a porter or an errand-boy.

He was thinking, 'I will not be daunted from doing as I choose by the thought of her. I like to take this fruit to the poor mother, and it is simply right that I should. She shall never scorn me out of doing what I please. A pretty joke, indeed, if, for fear of a haughty girl, I failed in doing a kindness to a man I liked I do it for Mr. Hale; I do it in defiance of her.'

He went at an unusual pace, and was soon at Crampton. He went upstairs two steps at a time, and entered the drawing-room before Dixon could announce him,--his face flushed, his eyes shining with kindly earnestness. Mrs. Hale lay on the sofa, heated with fever. Mr. Hale was reading aloud. Margaret was working on a low stool by her mother's side. Her heart fluttered, if his did not, at this interview. But he took no notice of her, hardly of Mr. Hale himself; he went up straight with his basket to Mrs. Hale, and said, in that subdued and gentle tone, which is so touching when used by a robust man in full health, speaking to a feeble invalid--

'I met Dr. Donaldson, ma'am, and as he said fruit would be good for you, I have taken the liberty--the great liberty of bringing you some that seemed to me fine.' Mrs. Hale was excessively surprised; excessively pleased; quite in a tremble of eagerness. Mr. Hale with fewer words expressed a deeper gratitude.

'Fetch a plate, Margaret--a basket--anything.' Margaret stood up by the table, half afraid of moving or making any noise to arouse Mr. Thornton into a consciousness of her being in the room. She thought it would be awkward for both to be brought into conscious collision; and fancied that, from her being on a low seat at first, and now standing behind her father, he had overlooked her in his haste. As if he did not feel the consciousness of her presence all over, though his eyes had never rested on her!

'I must go,' said he, 'I cannot stay. If you will forgive this liberty,--my rough ways,--too abrupt, I fear--but I will be more gentle next time. You will allow me the pleasure of bringing you some fruit again, if I should see any that is tempting. Good afternoon, Mr. Hale. Good-bye, ma'am.'

He was gone. Not one word: not one look to Margaret. She believed that he had not seen her. She went for a plate in silence, and lifted the fruit out tenderly, with the points of her delicate taper fingers. It was good of him to bring it; and after yesterday too!

'Oh! it is so delicious!' said Mrs. Hale, in a feeble voice. 'How kind of him to think of me! Margaret love, only taste these grapes! Was it not good of him?'

'Yes!' said Margaret, quietly.

'Margaret!' said Mrs. Hale, rather querulously, 'you won't like anything Mr. Thornton does. I never saw anybody so prejudiced.'

Mr. Hale had been peeling a peach for his wife; and, cutting off a small piece for himself, he said:

'If I had any prejudices, the gift of such delicious fruit as this would melt them all away. I have not tasted such fruit--no! not even in Hampshire--since I was a boy; and to boys, I fancy, all fruit is good. I remember eating sloes and crabs with a relish. Do you remember the matted-up currant bushes, Margaret, at the corner of the west-wall in the garden at home?'

Did she not? Did she not remember every weather-stain on the old stone wall; the gray and yellow lichens that marked it like a map; the little crane's-bill that grew in the crevices? She had been shaken by the events of the last two days; her whole life just now was a strain upon her fortitude; and, somehow, these careless words of her father's, touching on the remembrance of the sunny times of old, made her start up, and, dropping her sewing on the ground, she went hastily out of the room into her own little chamber. She had hardly given way to the first choking sob, when she became aware of Dixon standing at her drawers, and evidently searching for something.

'Bless me, miss! How you startled me! Missus is not worse, is she? Is anything the matter?'

'No, nothing. Only I'm silly, Dixon, and want a glass of water. What are you looking for? I keep my muslins in that drawer.'

Dixon did not speak, but went on rummaging. The scent of lavender came out and perfumed the room.

At last Dixon found what she wanted; what it was Margaret could not see. Dixon faced round, and spoke to her:

'Now I don't like telling you what I wanted, because you've fretting enough to go through, and I know you'll fret about this. I meant to have kept it from you till night, may be, or such times as that.'

'What is the matter? Pray, tell me, Dixon, at once.'

'That young woman you go to see--Higgins, I mean.'

'Well?'

'Well! she died this morning, and her sister is here--come to beg a strange thing. It seems, the young woman who died had a fancy for being buried in something of yours, and so the sister's come to ask for it,--and I was looking for a night-cap that wasn't too good to give away.'

'Oh! let me find one,' said Margaret, in the midst of her tears. 'Poor Bessy! I never thought I should not see her again.'

'Why, that's another thing. This girl down-stairs wanted me to ask you, if you would like to see her.'

'But she's dead!' said Margaret, turning a little pale. 'I never saw a dead person. No! I would rather not.'

'I should never have asked you, if you hadn't come in. I told her you wouldn't.'

'I will go down and speak to her,' said Margaret, afraid lest Dixon's harshness of manner might wound the poor girl. So, taking the cap in her hand, she went to the kitchen. Mary's face was all swollen with crying, and she burst out afresh when she saw Margaret.

'Oh, ma'am, she loved yo', she loved yo', she did indeed!' And for a long time, Margaret could not get her to say anything more than this. At last, her sympathy, and Dixon's scolding, forced out a few facts. Nicholas Higgins had gone out in the morning, leaving Bessy as well as on the day before. But in an hour she was taken worse; some neighbour ran to the room where Mary was working; they did not know where to find her father; Mary had only come in a few minutes before she died.

'It were a day or two ago she axed to be buried in somewhat o' yourn. She were never tired o' talking o' yo'. She used to say yo' were the prettiest thing she'd ever clapped eyes on. She loved yo' dearly Her last words were, "Give her my affectionate respects; and keep father fro' drink." Yo'll come and see her, ma'am. She would ha' thought it a great compliment, I know.'

Margaret shrank a little from answering.

'Yes, perhaps I may. Yes, I will. I'll come before tea. But where's your father, Mary?'

Mary shook her head, and stood up to be going.

'Miss Hale,' said Dixon, in a low voice, 'where's the use o' your going to see the poor thing laid out? I'd never say a word against it, if it could do the girl any good; and I wouldn't mind a bit going myself, if that would satisfy her. They've just a notion, these common folks, of its being a respect to the departed. Here,' said she, turning sharply round, 'I'll come and see your sister. Miss Hale is busy, and she can't come, or else she would.'

The girl looked wistfully at Margaret. Dixon's coming might be a compliment, but it was not the same thing to the poor sister, who had had her little pangs of jealousy, during Bessy's lifetime, at the intimacy between her and the young lady.

'No, Dixon!' said Margaret with decision. 'I will go. Mary, you shall see me this afternoon.' And for fear of her own cowardice, she went away, in order to take from herself any chance of changing her determination.

CHAPTER III

COMFORT IN SORROW

1.

'Through cross to crown!--And though thy spirit's life
- *Trials untold assail with giant strength,*
- *Good cheer! good cheer! Soon ends the bitter strife,*
- *And thou shalt reign in peace with Christ at length.'*

KOSEGARTEN.

'Ay sooth, we feel too strong in weal, to need Thee on that road;But woe being come, the soul is dumb, that crieth not on "God."'MRS. BROWNING.That afternoon she walked swiftly to the Higgins's house. Mary was looking out for her, with a half-distrustful face. Margaret smiled into her eyes to re-assure her. They passed quickly through the house-place, upstairs, and into the quiet presence of the dead. Then Margaret was glad that she had come. The face, often so weary with pain, so restless with troublous thoughts, had now the faint soft smile of eternal rest upon it. The slow tears gathered into Margaret's eyes, but a deep calm entered into her soul. And that was death! It looked more peaceful than life. All beautiful scriptures came into her mind. 'They rest from their labours.' 'The weary are at rest.' 'He giveth His beloved sleep.'

Slowly, slowly Margaret turned away from the bed. Mary was humbly sobbing in the back-ground. They went down stairs without a word.

Resting his hand upon the house-table, Nicholas Higgins stood in the midst of the floor; his great eyes startled open by the news he had heard, as he came along the court, from many busy tongues. His eyes were dry and fierce; studying the reality of her death; bringing himself to understand that her place should know her no more. For she had been sickly, dying so long, that he had persuaded himself she would not die; that she would 'pull through.'

Margaret felt as if she had no business to be there, familiarly acquainting herself with the surroundings of death which he, the father, had only just learnt. There had been a pause of an instant on the steep crooked stair, when she first saw him; but now she tried to steal past his abstracted gaze, and to leave him in the solemn circle of his household misery.

Mary sat down on the first chair she came to, and throwing her apron over her head, began to cry.

The noise appeared to rouse him. He took sudden hold of Margaret's arm, and held her till he could gather words to speak. seemed dry; they came up thick, and choked, and hoarse:

'Were yo' with her? Did yo' see her die?'

'No!' replied Margaret, standing still with the utmost patience, now she found herself perceived. It was some time before he spoke again, but he kept his hold on her arm.

'All men must die,' said he at last, with a strange sort of gravity, which first suggested to Margaret the idea that he had been drinking--not enough to intoxicate himself, but enough to make his thoughts bewildered. 'But she were younger than me.' Still he pondered over the event, not looking at Margaret, though he grasped her tight. Suddenly, he looked up at her with a wild searching inquiry in his glance. 'Yo're sure and certain she's dead--not in a dwam, a faint?--she's been so before, often.'

'She is dead,' replied Margaret. She felt no fear in speaking to him, though he hurt her arm with his gripe, and wild gleams came across the stupidity of his eyes.

'She is dead!' she said.

He looked at her still with that searching look, which seemed to fade out of his eyes as he gazed. Then he suddenly let go his hold of Margaret, and, throwing his body half across the table, he shook it and every piece of furniture in the room, with his violent sobs. Mary came trembling towards him.

'Get thee gone!--get thee gone!' he cried, striking wildly and blindly at her. 'What do I care for thee?' Margaret took her hand, and held it softly in hers. He tore his hair, he beat his head against the hard wood, then he lay exhausted and stupid. Still his daughter and Margaret did not move. Mary trembled from head to foot.

At last--it might have been a quarter of an hour, it might have been an hour--he lifted himself up. His eyes were swollen and bloodshot, and he seemed to have forgotten that any one was by; he scowled at the watchers when he saw them. He Shook himself heavily, gave them one more sullen look, spoke never a word, but made for the door.

'Oh, father, father!' said Mary, throwing herself upon his arm,--'not to-night! Any night but to-night. Oh, help me! he's going out to drink again! Father, I'll not leave yo'. Yo' may strike, but I'll not leave yo'. She told me last of all to keep yo' fro' drink!'

But Margaret stood in the doorway, silent yet commanding. He looked up at her defyingly.

'It's my own house. Stand out o' the way, wench, or I'll make yo'!' He had shaken off Mary with violence; he looked ready to strike Margaret. But she never moved a feature--never took her deep, serious eyes off him. He stared back on her with gloomy fierceness. If she had stirred hand or foot, he would have thrust her aside with even more violence than he had used to his own daughter, whose face was bleeding from her fall against a chair.

'What are yo' looking at me in that way for?' asked he at last, daunted and awed by her severe calm. 'If yo' think for to keep me from going what gait I choose, because she loved yo'--and in my own house, too, where I never asked yo' to come, yo're mista'en. It's very hard upon a man that he can't go to the only comfort left.'

Margaret felt that he acknowledged her power. What could she do next? He had seated himself on a chair, close to the door; half-conquered, half-resenting; intending to go out as soon as she left her position, but unwilling to use the violence he had threatened not five minutes before. Margaret laid her hand on his arm.

'Come with me,' she said. 'Come and see her!'

The voice in which she spoke was very low and solemn; but there was no fear or doubt expressed in it, either of him or of his compliance. He sullenly rose up. He stood uncertain, with dogged irresolution upon his face. She waited him there; quietly and patiently waited for his time to move. He had a strange pleasure in making her wait; but at last he moved towards the stairs.

She and he stood by the corpse.

'Her last words to Mary were, "Keep my father fro' drink."'

'It canna hurt her now,' muttered he. 'Nought can hurt her now.' Then, raising his voice to a wailing cry, he went on: 'We may quarrel and fall out--we may make peace and be friends--we may clem to skin and bone--and nought o' all our griefs will ever touch her more. Hoo's had her portion on 'em. What wi' hard work first, and sickness at last, hoo's led the life of a dog. And to die without knowing one good piece o' rejoicing in all her days! Nay, wench, whatever hoo said, hoo can know nought about it now, and I mun ha' a sup o' drink just to steady me again sorrow.'

'No,' said Margaret, softening with his softened manner. 'You shall not. If her life has been what you say, at any rate she did not fear death as some do. Oh, you should have heard her speak of the life to come--the life hidden with God, that she is now gone to.'

He shook his head, glancing sideways up at Margaret as he did so. His pale, haggard face struck her painfully.

'You are sorely tired. Where have you been all day--not at work?'

'Not at work, sure enough,' said he, with a short, grim laugh. 'Not at what you call work. I were at the Committee, till I were sickened out wi' trying to make fools hear reason. I were fetched to Boucher's wife afore seven this morning. She's bed-fast, but she were raving and raging to know where her dunder-headed brute of a chap was, as if I'd to keep him--as if he were fit to be ruled by me. The d--d fool, who has put his foot in all our plans! And I've walked my feet sore wi' going about for to see men who wouldn't be seen, now the law is raised again us. And I were sore-hearted, too, which is worse than sore-footed; and if I did see a friend who ossed to treat me, I never knew hoo lay a-dying here. Bess, lass, thou'd believe me, thou wouldst--wouldstn't thou?' turning to the poor dumb form with wild appeal.

'I am sure,' said Margaret, 'I am sure you did not know: it was quite sudden. But now, you see, it would be different; you do know; you do see her lying there; you hear what she said with her last breath. You will not go?'

No answer. In fact, where was he to look for comfort?

'Come home with me,' said she at last, with a bold venture, half trembling at her own proposal as she made it. 'At least you shall have some comfortable food, which I'm sure you need.'

'Yo'r father's a parson?' asked he, with a sudden turn in his ideas.

'He was,' said Margaret, shortly.

'I'll go and take a dish o' tea with him, since yo've asked me. I've many a thing I often wished to say to a parson, and I'm not particular as to whether he's preaching now, or not.'

Margaret was perplexed; his drinking tea with her father, who would be totally unprepared for his visitor--her mother so ill--seemed utterly out of the question; and yet if she drew back now, it would be worse than ever--sure to drive him to the gin-shop. She thought that if she could only get him to their own house, it was so great a step gained that she would trust to the chapter ofaccidents for the next.

'Goodbye, ou'd wench! We've parted company at last, we have! But thou'st been a blessin' to thy father ever sin' thou wert born. Bless thy white lips, lass,--they've a smile on 'em now! and I'm glad to see it once again, though I'm lone and forlorn for evermore.'

He stooped down and fondly kissed his daughter; covered up her face, and turned to follow Margaret. She had hastily gone down stairs to tell Mary of the arrangement; to say it was the only way she could think of to keep him from the gin-palace; to urge Mary to come too, for her heart smote her at the idea of leaving the poor affectionate girl alone. But Mary had friends among the neighbours, she said, who would come in and sit a bit with her, it was all right; but father--

He was there by them as she would have spoken more. He had shaken off his emotion, as if he was ashamed of having ever given way to it; and had even o'erleaped himself so much that he assumed a sort of bitter mirth, like the crackling of thorns under a pot.

'I'm going to take my tea wi' her father, I am!'

But he slouched his cap low down over his brow as he went out into the street, and looked neither to the right nor to the left, while he tramped along by Margaret's side; he feared being upset by the words, still more the looks, of sympathising neighbours. So he and Margaret walked in silence.

As he got near the street in which he knew she lived, he looked down at his clothes, his hands, and shoes.

'I should m'appen ha' cleaned mysel', first?'

It certainly would have been desirable, but Margaret assured him he should be allowed to go into the yard, and have soap and towel provided; she could not let him slip out of her hands just then.

While he followed the house-servant along the passage, and through the kitchen, stepping cautiously on every dark mark in the pattern of the oil-cloth, in order to conceal his dirty foot-prints, Margaret ran upstairs. She met Dixon on the landing.

'How is mamma?--where is papa?'

Missus was tired, and gone into her own room. She had wanted to go to bed, but Dixon had persuaded her to lie down on the sofa, and have her tea brought to her there; it would be better than getting restless by being too long in bed.

So far, so good. But where was Mr. Hale? In the drawing-room. Margaret went in half breathless with the hurried story she had to tell. Of course, she told it incompletely; and her father was rather 'taken aback' by the idea of the drunken weaver awaiting him in his quiet study, with whom he was expected to drink tea, and on whose behalf Margaret was anxiously pleading. The meek, kind-hearted Mr. Hale would have readily tried to console him in his grief, but, unluckily, the point Margaret dwelt upon most forcibly was the fact of his having been drinking, and her having brought him home with her as a last expedient to keep him from the gin-shop. One little event had come out of another so naturally that Margaret was hardly conscious of what she had done, till she saw the slight look of repugnance on her father's face.

'Oh, papa! he really is a man you will not dislike--if you won't be shocked to begin with.'

'But, Margaret, to bring a drunken man home--and your mother so ill!'

Margaret's countenance fell. 'I am sorry, papa. He is very quiet--he is not tipsy at all. He was only rather strange at first, but that might be the shock of poor Bessy's death.' Margaret's

eyes filled with tears. Mr. Hale took hold of her sweet pleading face in both his hands, and kissed her forehead.

'It is all right, dear. I'll go and make him as comfortable as I can, and do you attend to your mother. Only, if you can come in and make a third in the study, I shall be glad.'

'Oh, yes--thank you.' But as Mr. Hale was leaving the room, she ran after him:

'Papa--you must not wonder at what he says: he's an----I mean he does not believe in much of what we do.'

'Oh dear! a drunken infidel weaver!' said Mr. Hale to himself, in dismay. But to Margaret he only said, 'If your mother goes to sleep, be sure you come directly.'

Margaret went into her mother's room. Mrs. Hale lifted herself up from a doze.

'When did you write to Frederick, Margaret? Yesterday, or the day before?'

'Yesterday, mamma.'

'Yesterday. And the letter went?'

'Yes. I took it myself'

'Oh, Margaret, I'm so afraid of his coming! If he should be recognised! If he should be taken! If he should be executed, after all these years that he has kept away and lived in safety! I keep falling asleep and dreaming that he is caught and being tried.'

'Oh, mamma, don't be afraid. There will be some risk no doubt; but we will lessen it as much as ever we can. And it is so little! Now, if we were at Helstone, there would be twenty--a hundred times as much. There, everybody would remember him and if there was a stranger known to be in the house, they would be sure to guess it was Frederick; while here, nobody knows or cares for us enough to notice what we do. Dixon will keep the door like a dragon--won't you, Dixon--while he is here?'

'They'll be clever if they come in past me!' said Dixon, showing her teeth at the bare idea.

'And he need not go out, except in the dusk, poor fellow!'

'Poor fellow!' echoed Mrs. Hale. 'But I almost wish you had not written. Would it be too late to stop him if you wrote again, Margaret?'

'I'm afraid it would, mamma,' said Margaret, remembering the urgency with which she had entreated him to come directly, if he wished to see his mother alive.

'I always dislike that doing things in such a hurry,' said Mrs. Hale.

Margaret was silent.

'Come now, ma am,' said Dixon, with a kind of cheerful authority, 'you know seeing Master Frederick is just the very thing of all others you're longing for. And I'm glad Miss Margaret wrote off straight, without shilly-shallying. I've had a great mind to do it myself. And we'll keep him snug, depend upon it. There's only Martha in the house that would not do a good deal to save him on a pinch; and I've been thinking she might go and see her mother just at that very time. She's been saying once or twice she should like to go, for her mother has had a stroke since she came here, only she didn't like to ask. But I'll see about her being safe off, as soon as we know when he comes, God bless him! So take your tea, ma'am, in comfort, and trust to me.'

Mrs. Hale did trust in Dixon more than in Margaret. Dixon's words quieted her for the time. Margaret poured out the tea in silence, trying to think of something agreeable to say; but her thoughts made answer something like Daniel O'Rourke, when the man-in-the-moon asked him to get off his reaping-hook. 'The more you ax us, the more we won't stir.' The more she tried to think of something anything besides the danger to which Frederick would be exposed--the more closely her imagination clung to the unfortunate idea presented to her. Her mother prattled with Dixon, and seemed to have utterly forgotten the possibility of Frederick being tried and executed--utterly forgotten that at her wish, if by Margaret's deed, he was summoned into this danger. Her mother was one of those who throw out terrible possibilities, miserable probabilities, unfortunate chances of all kinds, as a rocket throws out sparks; but if the sparks light on some combustible matter, they smoulder first, and burst out into a frightful flame at last. Margaret was glad when, her filial duties gently and carefully performed, she could go down into the study. She wondered how her father and Higgins had got on.

In the first place, the decorous, kind-hearted, simple, old-fashioned gentleman, had unconsciously called out, by his own refinement and courteousness of manner, all the latent courtesy in the other.

Mr. Hale treated all his fellow-creatures alike: it never entered into his head to make any difference because of their rank. He placed a chair for Nicholas stood up till he, at Mr. Hale's request, took a seat; and called him, invariably, 'Mr. Higgins,' instead of the curt 'Nicholas' or 'Higgins,' to which the 'drunken infidel weaver' had been accustomed. But Nicholas was neither an habitual drunkard nor a thorough infidel. He drank to drown care, as he would have himself expressed it: and he was infidel so far as he had never yet found any form of faith to which he could attach himself, heart and soul.

Margaret was a little surprised, and very much pleased, when she found her father and Higgins in earnest conversation--each speaking with gentle politeness to the other, however their opinions might clash. Nicholas--clean, tidied (if only at the pump-trough), and quiet spoken--was a new creature to her, who had only seen him in the rough independence of his own hearthstone. He had 'slicked' his hair down with the fresh water; he had adjusted his neck-handkerchief, and borrowed an odd candle-end to polish his clogs with and there he sat, enforcing some opinion on her father, with a strong Darkshire accent, it is true, but with a lowered voice, and a good, earnest composure on his face. Her father, too, was interested in what his companion was saying. He looked round as she came in, smiled, and quietly gave her his chair, and then sat

down afresh as quickly as possible, and with a little bow of apology to his guest for the interruption. Higgins nodded to her as a sign of greeting; and she softly adjusted her working materials on the table, and prepared to listen.

'As I was a-sayin, sir, I reckon yo'd not ha' much belief in yo' if yo' lived here,--if yo'd been bred here. I ax your pardon if I use wrong words; but what I mean by belief just now, is a-thinking on sayings and maxims and promises made by folk yo' never saw, about the things and the life, yo' never saw, nor no one else. Now, yo' say these are true things, and true sayings, and a true life. I just say, where's the proof? There's many and many a one wiser, and scores better learned than I am around me,--folk who've had time to think on these things,--while my time has had to be gi'en up to getting my bread. Well, I sees these people. Their lives is pretty much open to me. They're real folk. They don't believe i' the Bible,--not they. They may say they do, for form's sake; but Lord, sir, d'ye think their first cry i' th' morning is, "What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?" or "What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day? Where shall I go? What bargains shall I strike?" The purse and the gold and the notes is real things; things as can be felt and touched; them's realities; and eternal life is all a talk, very fit for--I ax your pardon, sir; yo'r a parson out o' work, I believe. Well! I'll never speak disrespectful of a man in the same fix as I'm in mysel'. But I'll just ax yo another question, sir, and I dunnot want yo to answer it, only to put in yo'r pipe, and smoke it, afore yo' go for to set down us, who only believe in what we see, as fools and noddies. If salvation, and life to come, and what not, was true--not in men's words, but in men's hearts' core--dun yo' not think they'd din us wi' it as they do wi' political 'conomy? They're mighty anxious to come round us wi' that piece o' wisdom; but t'other would be a greater convarsion, if it were true.'

'But the masters have nothing to do with your religion. All that they are connected with you in is trade,--so they think,--and all that it concerns them, therefore, to rectify your opinions in is the science of trade.'

'I'm glad, sir,' said Higgins, with a curious wink of his eye, 'that yo' put in, "so they think." I'd ha' thought yo' a hypocrite, I'm afeard, if yo' hadn't, for all yo'r a parson, or rayther because yo'r a parson. Yo' see, if yo'd spoken o' religion as a thing that, if it was true, it didn't concern all men to press on all men's attention, above everything else in this 'varsal earth, I should ha' thought yo' a knave for to be a parson; and I'd rather think yo' a fool than a knave. No offence, I hope, sir.'

'None at all. You consider me mistaken, and I consider you far more fatally mistaken. I don't expect to convince you in a day,--not in one conversation; but let us know each other, and speak freely to each other about these things, and the truth will prevail. I should not believe in God if I did not believe that. Mr. Higgins, I trust, whatever else you have given up, you believe'--(Mr. Hale's voice dropped low in reverence)--'you believe in Him.'

Nicholas Higgins suddenly stood straight, stiff up. Margaret started to her feet,--for she thought, by the working of his face, he was going into convulsions. Mr. Hale looked at her dismayed. At last Higgins found words:

'Man! I could fell yo' to the ground for tempting me. Whatten business have yo' to try me wi' your doubts? Think o' her lying theere, after the life hoo's led and think then how yo'd deny me the one sole comfort left--that there is a God, and that He set her her life. I dunnot believe she'll ever live again,' said he, sitting down, and drearily going on, as if to the unsympathising fire. 'I dunnot believe in any other life than this, in which she dreed such trouble, and had such never-ending care; and I cannot bear to think it were all a set o' chances, that might ha' been altered wi' a breath o' wind. There's many a time when I've thought I didna believe in God, but I've never put it fair out before me in words, as many men do. I may ha' laughed at those who did, to brave it out like--but I have looked round at after, to see if He heard me, if so be there was a He; but to-day, when I'm left desolate, I wunnot listen to yo' wi' yo'r questions, and yo'r doubts. There's but one thing steady and quiet i' all this reeling world, and, reason or no reason, I'll cling to that. It's a' very well for happy folk'----

Margaret touched his arm very softly. She had not spoken before, nor had he heard her rise.

'Nicholas, we do not want to reason; you misunderstand my father. We do not reason--we believe; and so do you. It is the one sole comfort in such times.'

He turned round and caught her hand. 'Ay! it is, it is--(brushing away the tears with the back of his hand). --'But yo' know, she's lying dead at home and I'm welly dazed wi' sorrow, and at times I hardly know what I'm saying. It's as if speeches folk ha' made--clever and smart things as I've thought at the time--come up now my heart's welly brossen. Th' strike's failed as well; dun yo' know that, miss? I were coming whoam to ask her, like a beggar as I am, for a bit o' comfort i' that trouble; and I were knocked down by one who telled me she were dead--just dead That were all; but that were enough for me.

Mr. Hale blew his nose, and got up to snuff the candles in order to conceal his emotion. 'He's not an infidel, Margaret; how could you say so?' muttered he reproachfully 'I've a good mind to read him the fourteenth chapter of Job.'

'Not yet, papa, I think. Perhaps not at all. Let us ask him about the strike, and give him all the sympathy he needs, and hoped to have from poor Bessy.'

So they questioned and listened. The workmen's calculations were based (like too many of the masters') on false premises. They reckoned on their fellow-men as if they possessed the calculable powers of machines, no more, no less; no allowance for human passions getting the better of reason, as in the case of Boucher and the rioters; and believing that the representations of their injuries would have the same effect on strangers far away, as the injuries (fancied or real) had upon themselves. They were consequently surprised and indignant at the poor Irish, who had allowed themselves to be imported and brought over to take their places. This indignation was tempered, in some degree, by contempt for 'them Irishers,' and by pleasure at the idea of the bungling way in which they would set to work, and perplex their new masters with their ignorance and stupidity, strange exaggerated stories of which were already spreading through the town. But the most cruel cut of all was that of the Milton workmen, who had defied

and disobeyed the commands of the Union to keep the peace, whatever came; who had originated discord in the camp, and spread the panic of the law being arrayed against them.

'And so the strike is at an end,' said Margaret.

'Ay, miss. It's save as save can. Th' factory doors will need open wide to-morrow to let in all who'll be axing for work; if it's only just to show they'd nought to do wi' a measure, which if we'd been made o' th' right stuff would ha' brought wages up to a point they'n not been at this ten year.'

'You'll get work, shan't you?' asked Margaret. 'You're a famous workman, are not you?'

'Hamper'll let me work at his mill, when he cuts off his right hand--not before, and not after,' said Nicholas, quietly. Margaret was silenced and sad.

'About the wages,' said Mr. Hale. 'You'll not be offended, but I think you make some sad mistakes. I should like to read you some remarks in a book I have.' He got up and went to his book-shelves.

'Yo' needn't trouble yoursel', sir,' said Nicholas. 'Their book-stuff goes in at one ear and out at t'other. I can make nought on't. Afore Hamper and me had this split, th' overlooker telled him I were stirring up the men to ask for higher wages; and Hamper met me one day in th' yard. He'd a thin book i' his hand, and says he, "Higgins, I'm told you're one of those damned fools that think you can get higher wages for asking for 'em; ay, and keep 'em up too, when you've forced 'em up. Now, I'll give yo' a chance and try if yo've any sense in yo'. Here's a book written by a friend o' mine, and if yo'll read it yo'll see how wages find their own level, without either masters or men having aught to do with them; except the men cut their own throats wi' striking, like the confounded noodles they are." Well, now, sir, I put it to yo', being a parson, and having been in th' preaching line, and having had to try and bring folk o'er to what yo' thought was a right way o' thinking--did yo' begin by calling 'em fools and such like, or didn't yo' rayther give 'em some kind words at first, to make 'em ready for to listen and be convinced, if they could; and in yo'r preaching, did yo' stop every now and then, and say, half to them and half to yo'rsel', "But yo're such a pack o' fools, that I've a strong notion it's no use my trying to put sense into yo'?" I were not i' th' best state, I'll own, for taking in what Hamper's friend had to say--I were so vexed at the way it were put to me;--but I thought, "Come, I'll see what these chaps has got to say, and try if it's them or me as is th' noodle." So I took th' book and tugged at it; but, Lord bless yo', it went on about capital and labour, and labour and capital, till it fair sent me off to sleep. I ne'er could rightly fix i' my mind which was which; and it spoke on 'em as if they was vartues or vices; and what I wanted for to know were the rights o' men, whether they were rich or poor--so be they only were men.'

'But for all that,' said Mr. Hale, 'and granting to the full the offensiveness, the folly, the unchristianness of Mr. Hamper's way of speaking to you in recommending his friend's book, yet if it told you what he said it did, that wages find their own level, and that the most successful strike can only force them up for a moment, to sink in far greater proportion afterwards, in consequence of that very strike, the book would have told you the truth.'

'Well, sir,' said Higgins, rather doggedly; 'it might, or it might not. There's two opinions go to settling that point. But suppose it was truth double strong, it were no truth to me if I couldna take it in. I daresay there's truth in yon Latin book on your shelves; but it's gibberish and not truth to me, unless I know the meaning o' the words. If yo', sir, or any other knowledgable, patient man come to me, and says he'll larn me what the words mean, and not blow me up if I'm a bit stupid, or forget how one thing hangs on another--why, in time I may get to see the truth of it; or I may not. I'll not be bound to say I shall end in thinking the same as any man. And I'm not one who think truth can be shaped out in words, all neat and clean, as th' men at th' foundry cut out sheet-iron. Same bones won't go down wi' every one. It'll stick here i' this man's throat, and there i' t'other's. Let alone that, when down, it may be too strong for this one, too weak for that. Folk who sets up to doctor th' world wi' their truth, mun suit different for different minds; and be a bit tender in th' way of giving it too, or th' poor sick fools may spit it out i' their faces. Now Hamper first gi'es me a box on my ear, and then he throws his big bolus at me, and says he reckons it'll do me no good, I'm such a fool, but there it is.'

'I wish some of the kindest and wisest of the masters would meet some of you men, and have a good talk on these things; it would, surely, be the best way of getting over your difficulties, which, I do believe, arise from your ignorance--excuse me, Mr. Higgins--on subjects which it is for the mutual interest of both masters and men should be well understood by both. I wonder'--(half to his daughter), 'if Mr. Thornton might not be induced to do such a thing?'

'Remember, papa,' said she in a very low voice, 'what he said one day--about governments, you know.' She was unwilling to make any clearer allusion to the conversation they had held on the mode of governing work-people--by giving men intelligence enough to rule themselves, or by a wise despotism on the part of the master--for she saw that Higgins had caught Mr. Thornton s name, if not the whole of the speech: indeed, he began to speak of him.

'Thornton! He's the chap as wrote off at once for these Irishers; and led to th' riot that ruined th' strike. Even Hamper wi' all his bullying, would ha' waited a while--but it's a word and a blow wi' Thornton. And, now, when th' Union would ha' thanked him for following up th' chase after Boucher, and them chaps as went right again our commands, it's Thornton who steps forrard and coolly says that, as th' strike's at an end, he, as party injured, doesn't want to press the charge again the rioters. I thought he'd had more pluck. I thought he'd ha' carried his point, and had his revenge in an open way; but says he (one in court telled me his very words) "they are well known; they will find the natural punishment of their conduct, in the difficulty they will meet wi' in getting employment. That will be severe enough." I only wish they'd cotched Boucher, and had him up before Hamper. I see th' oud tiger setting on him! would he ha' let him off? Not he!'

'Mr. Thornton was right,' said Margaret. You are angry against Boucher, Nicholas; or else you would be the first to see, that where the natural punishment would be severe enough for the offence, any farther punishment would be something like revenge.

'My daughter is no great friend of Mr. Thornton's,' said Mr. Hale, smiling at Margaret; while she, as red as any carnation, began to work with double diligence, 'but I believe what she says is the truth. I like him for it.'

'Well, sir, this strike has been a weary piece o' business to me; and yo'll not wonder if I'm a bit put out wi' seeing it fail, just for a few men who would na suffer in silence, and hou'd out, brave and firm.'

'You forget!' said Margaret. 'I don't know much of Boucher; but the only time I saw him it was not his own sufferings he spoke of, but those of his sick wife--his little children.'

'True! but he were not made of iron himsel'. He'd ha' cried out for his own sorrows, next. He were not one to bear.'

'How came he into the Union?' asked Margaret innocently. 'You don't seem to have much respect for him; nor gained much good from having him in.'

Higgins's brow clouded. He was silent for a minute or two.Then he said, shortly enough:

'It's not for me to speak o' th' Union. What they does, they does. Them that is of a trade mun hang together; and if they're not willing to take their chance along wi' th' rest, th' Union has ways and means.'

Mr. Hale saw that Higgins was vexed at the turn the conversation had taken, and was silent. Not so Margaret, though she saw Higgins's feeling as clearly as he did. By instinct she felt, that if he could but be brought to express himself in plain words, something clear would be gained on which to argue for the right and the just.

'And what are the Union's ways and means?'

He looked up at her, as if on' the point of dogged resistance to her wish for information. But her calm face, fixed on his, patient and trustful, compelled him to answer.

'Well! If a man doesn't belong to th' Union, them as works next looms has orders not to speak to him--if he's sorry or ill it's a' the same; he's out o' bounds; he's none o' us; he comes among us, he works among us, but he's none o' us. I' some places them's fined who speaks to him. Yo' try that, miss; try living a year or two among them as looks away if yo' look at 'em; try working within two yards o' crowds o' men, who, yo' know, have a grinding grudge at yo' in their hearts--to whom if yo' say yo'r glad, not an eye brightens, nor a lip moves,--to whom if your heart's heavy, yo' can never say nought, because they'll ne'er take notice on your sighs or sad looks (and a man 's no man who'll groan out loud 'bout folk asking him what 's the matter?)--just yo' try that, miss--ten hours for three hundred days, and yo'll know a bit what th' Union is.'

'Why!' said Margaret, 'what tyranny this is! Nay, Higgins, I don't care one straw for your anger. I know you can't be angry with me if you would, and I must tell you the truth: that I never read, in all the history I have read, of a more slow, lingering torture than this. And you belong to the Union! And you talk of the tyranny of the masters!'

'Nay,' said Higgins, 'yo' may say what yo' like! The dead stand between yo and every angry word o' mine. D' ye think I forget who's lying there, and how hoo loved yo'? And it's th'

masters as has made us sin, if th' Union is a sin. Not this generation maybe, but their fathers. Their fathers ground our fathers to the very dust; ground us to powder! Parson! I reckon, I've heerd my mother read out a text, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and th' children's teeth are set on edge." It's so wi' them. In those days of sore oppression th' Unions began; it were a necessity. It's a necessity now, according to me. It's a withstanding of injustice, past, present, or to come. It may be like war; along wi' it come crimes; but I think it were a greater crime to let it alone. Our only chance is binding men together in one common interest; and if some are cowards and some are fools, they mun come along and join the great march, whose only strength is in numbers.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Hale, sighing, 'your Union in itself would be beautiful, glorious,--it would be Christianity itself--if it were but for an end which affected the good of all, instead of that of merely one class as opposed to another.'

'I reckon it's time for me to be going, sir,' said Higgins, as the clock struck ten.

'Home?' said Margaret very softly. He understood her, and took her offered hand. 'Home, miss. Yo' may trust me, tho' I am one o' th' Union.'

'I do trust you most thoroughly, Nicholas.'

'Stay!' said Mr. Hale, hurrying to the book-shelves. 'Mr. Higgins! I'm sure you'll join us in family prayer?'

Higgins looked at Margaret, doubtfully. Hey grave sweet eyes met his; there was no compulsion, only deep interest in them. He did not speak, but he kept his place.

Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm.

CHAPTER IV

A RAY OF SUNSHINE

'Some wishes crossed my mind and dimly cheered it,

And one or two poor melancholy pleasures,

- *Each in the pale unwarming light of hope,*
- *Silvering its flimsy wing, flew silent by--*
- *Moths in the moonbeam!'*

COLERIDGE.

The next morning brought Margaret a letter from Edith. It was affectionate and inconsequent like the writer. But the affection was charming to Margaret's own affectionate nature; and she had grown up with the inconsequence, so she did not perceive it. It was as follows:--

'Oh, Margaret, it is worth a journey from England to see my boy! He is a superb little fellow, especially in his caps, and most especially in the one you sent him, you good, dainty-fingered, persevering little lady! Having made all the mothers here envious, I want to show him to somebody new, and hear a fresh set of admiring expressions; perhaps, that's all the reason; perhaps it is not,--nay, possibly, there is just a little cousinly love mixed with it; but I do want you so much to come here, Margaret! I'm sure it would be the very best thing for Aunt Hale's health; everybody here is young and well, and our skies are always blue, and our sun always shines, and the band plays deliciously from morning till night; and, to come back to the burden of my ditty, my baby always smiles. I am constantly wanting you to draw him for me, Margaret. It does not signify what he is doing; that very thing is prettiest, gracefulest, best. I think I love him a great deal better than my husband, who is getting stout, and grumpy,--what he calls "busy." No! he is not. He has just come in with news of such a charming pic-nic, given by the officers of the Hazard, at anchor in the bay below. Because he has brought in such a pleasant piece of news, I retract all I said just now. Did not somebody burn his hand for having said or done something he was sorry for? Well, I can't burn mine, because it would hurt me, and the scar would be ugly; but I'll retract all I said as fast as I can. Cosmo is quite as great a darling as baby, and not a bit stout, and as un-grumpy as ever husband was; only, sometimes he is very, very busy. I may say that without love--wifely duty--where was I?--I had something very particular to say, I know, once. Oh, it is this--Dearest Margaret! --you must come and see me; it would do Aunt Hale good, as I said before. Get the doctor to order it for her. Tell him that it's the smoke of Milton that does her harm. I have no doubt it is that, really. Three months (you must not come for less) of this delicious climate--all sunshine, and grapes as common as blackberries, would quite cure her. I don't ask my uncle'--(Here the letter became more constrained, and better written; Mr. Hale was in the corner, like a naughty child, for having given up his living.)--'because, I dare say, he disapproves of war, and soldiers, and bands of music; at least, I know that many Dissenters are members of the Peace Society, and I am afraid he would not like to come; but, if he would, dear, pray say that Cosmo and I will do our best to make him happy; and I'll hide up Cosmo's red coat and sword, and make the band play all sorts of grave, solemn things; or, if they do play pomps and vanities, it shall be in double slow time. Dear Margaret, if he would like to accompany you and Aunt Hale, we will try and make it pleasant, though I'm

rather afraid of any one who has done something for conscience sake. You never did, I hope. Tell Aunt Hale not to bring many warm clothes, though I'm afraid it will be late in the year before you can come. But you have no idea of the heat here! I tried to wear my great beauty Indian shawl at a pic-nic. I kept myself up with proverbs as long as I could; "Pride must abide,"--and such wholesome pieces of pith; but it was of no use. I was like mamma's little dog Tiny with an elephant's trappings on; smothered, hidden, killed with my finery; so I made it into a capital carpet for us all to sit down upon. Here's this boy of mine, Margaret,--if you don't pack up your things as soon as you get this letter, a come straight off to see him, I shall think you're descended from King Herod!'

Margaret did long for a day of Edith's life--her freedom from care, her cheerful home, her sunny skies. If a wish could have transported her, she would have gone off; just for one day. She yearned for the strength which such a change would give,--even for a few hours to be in the midst of that bright life, and to feel young again. Not yet twenty! and she had had to bear up against such hard pressure that she felt quite old. That was her first feeling after reading Edith's letter. Then she read it again, and, forgetting herself, was amused at its likeness to Edith's self, and was laughing merrily over it when Mrs. Hale came into the drawing-room, leaning on Dixon's arm. Margaret flew to adjust the pillows. Her mother seemed more than usually feeble.

'What were you laughing at, Margaret?' asked she, as soon as she had recovered from the exertion of settling herself on the sofa.

'A letter I have had this morning from Edith. Shall I read it you, mamma?'

She read it aloud, and for a time it seemed to interest her mother, who kept wondering what name Edith had given to her boy, and suggesting all probable names, and all possible reasons why each and all of these names should be given. Into the very midst of these wonders Mr. Thornton came, bringing another offering of fruit for Mrs. Hale. He could not--say rather, he would not--deny himself the chance of the pleasure of seeing Margaret. He had no end in this but the present gratification. It was the sturdy wilfulness of a man usually most reasonable and self-controlled. He entered the room, taking in at a glance the fact of Margaret's presence; but after the first cold distant bow, he never seemed to let his eyes fall on her again. He only stayed to present his peaches--to speak some gentle kindly words--and then his cold offended eyes met Margaret's with a grave farewell, as he left the room. She sat down silent and pale.

'Do you know, Margaret, I really begin quite to like Mr. Thornton.'

No answer at first. Then Margaret forced out an icy 'Do you?'

'Yes! I think he is really getting quite polished in his manners.'

Margaret's voice was more in order now. She replied,

'He is very kind and attentive,--there is no doubt of that.'

'I wonder Mrs. Thornton never calls. She must know I am ill, because of the water-bed.'

'I dare say, she hears how you are from her son.'

'Still, I should like to see her You have so few friends here, Margaret.'

Margaret felt what was in her mother's thoughts,--a tender craving to bespeak the kindness of some woman towards the daughter that might be so soon left motherless. But she could not speak.

'Do you think,' said Mrs. Hale, after a pause, 'that you could go and ask Mrs. Thornton to come and see me? Only once,--I don't want to be troublesome.'

'I will do anything, if you wish it, mamma,--but if--but when Frederick comes----'

'Ah, to be sure! we must keep our doors shut,--we must let no one in. I hardly know whether I dare wish him to come or not. Sometimes I think I would rather not. Sometimes I have such frightful dreams about him.'

'Oh, mamma! we'll take good care. I will put my arm in the bolt sooner than he should come to the slightest harm. Trust the care of him to me, mamma. I will watch over him like a lioness over her young.'

'When can we hear from him?'

'Not for a week yet, certainly,--perhaps more.'

'We must send Martha away in good time. It would never do to have her here when he comes, and then send her off in a hurry.'

'Dixon is sure to remind us of that. I was thinking that, if we wanted any help in the house while he is here, we could perhaps get Mary Higgins. She is very slack of work, and is a good girl, and would take pains to do her best, I am sure, and would sleep at home, and need never come upstairs, so as to know who is in the house.'

'As you please. As Dixon pleases. But, Margaret, don't get to use these horrid Milton words. "Slack of work:" it is a provincialism. What will your aunt Shaw say, if she hears you use it on her return?'

'Oh, mamma! don't try and make a bugbear of aunt Shaw' said Margaret, laughing. 'Edith picked up all sorts of military slang from Captain Lennox, and aunt Shaw never took any notice of it.'

'But yours is factory slang.'

'And if I live in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it. Why, mamma, I could astonish you with a great many words you never heard in your life. I don't believe you know what a knobstick is.'

'Not I, child. I only know it has a very vulgar sound and I don't want to hear you using it.'

'Very well, dearest mother, I won't. Only I shall have to use a whole explanatory sentence instead.'

'I don't like this Milton,' said Mrs. Hale. 'Edith is right enough in saying it's the smoke that has made me so ill.'

Margaret started up as her mother said this. Her father had just entered the room, and she was most anxious that the faint impression she had seen on his mind that the Milton air had injured her mother's health, should not be deepened,--should not receive any confirmation. She could not tell whether he had heard what Mrs. Hale had said or not; but she began speaking hurriedly of other things, unaware that Mr. Thornton was following him.

'Mamma is accusing me of having picked up a great deal of vulgarity since we came to Milton.'

The 'vulgarity' Margaret spoke of, referred purely to the use of local words, and the expression arose out of the conversation they had just been holding. But Mr. Thornton's brow darkened; and Margaret suddenly felt how her speech might be misunderstood by him; so, in the natural sweet desire to avoid giving unnecessary pain, she forced herself to go forwards with a little greeting, and continue what she was saying, addressing herself to him expressly.

'Now, Mr. Thornton, though "knobstick" has not a very pretty sound, is it not expressive? Could I do without it, in speaking of the thing it represents? If using local words is vulgar, I was very vulgar in the Forest,--was I not, mamma?'

It was unusual with Margaret to obtrude her own subject of conversation on others; but, in this case, she was so anxious to prevent Mr. Thornton from feeling annoyance at the words he had accidentally overheard, that it was not until she had done speaking that she coloured all over with consciousness, more especially as Mr. Thornton seemed hardly to understand the exact gist or bearing of what she was saying, but passed her by, with a cold reserve of ceremonious movement, to speak to Mrs. Hale.

The sight of him reminded her of the wish to see his mother, and commend Margaret to her care. Margaret, sitting in burning silence, vexed and ashamed of her difficulty in keeping her right place, and her calm unconsciousness of heart, when Mr. Thornton was by, heard her mother's slow entreaty that Mrs. Thornton would come and see her; see her soon; to-morrow, if it were possible. Mr. Thornton promised that she should--conversed a little, and then took his leave; and Margaret's movements and voice seemed at once released from some invisible chains. He never looked at her; and yet, the careful avoidance of his eyes betokened that in some way he knew exactly where, if they fell by chance, they would rest on her. If she spoke, he gave no sign of attention, and yet his next speech to any one else was modified by what she had said; sometimes there was an express answer to what she had remarked, but given to another person as though unsuggested by her. It was not the bad manners of ignorance it was the wilful bad manners arising from deep offence. It was wilful at the time, repented of afterwards. But no deep

plan, no careful cunning could have stood him in such good stead. Margaret thought about him more than she had ever done before; not with any tinge of what is called love, but with regret that she had wounded him so deeply,--and with a gentle, patient striving to return to their former position of antagonistic friendship; for a friend's position was what she found that he had held in her regard, as well as in that of the rest of the family. There was a pretty humility in her behaviour to him, as if mutely apologising for the over-strong words which were the reaction from the deeds of the day of the riot.

But he resented those words bitterly. They rung in his ears; and he was proud of the sense of justice which made him go on in every kindness he could offer to her parents. He exulted in the power he showed in compelling himself to face her, whenever he could think of any action which might give her father or mother pleasure. He thought that he disliked seeing one who had mortified him so keenly; but he was mistaken. It was a stinging pleasure to be in the room with her, and feel her presence. But he was no great analyser of his own motives, and was mistaken as [have said.

CHAPTER V

HOME AT LAST

'The saddest birds a season find to sing.'

SOUTHWELL.

1. *'Never to fold the robe o'er secret pain,*
2. *Never, weighed down by memory's clouds again,*
3. *To bow thy head! Thou art gone home!'*

MRS. HEMANS.

Mrs. Thornton came to see Mrs. Hale the next morning. She was much worse. One of those sudden changes--those great visible strides towards death, had been taken in the night, and her own family were startled by the gray sunken look her features had assumed in that one

twelve hours of suffering. Mrs. Thornton--who had not seen her for weeks--was softened all at once. She had come because her son asked it from her as a personal favour, but with all the proud bitter feelings of her nature in arms against that family of which Margaret formed one. She doubted the reality of Mrs. Hale's illness; she doubted any want beyond a momentary fancy on that lady's part, which should take her out of her previously settled course of employment for the day. She told her son that she wished they had never come near the place; that he had never got acquainted with them; that there had been no such useless languages as Latin and Greek ever invented. He bore all this pretty silently; but when she had ended her invective against the dead languages, he quietly returned to the short, curt, decided expression of his wish that she should go and see Mrs. Hale at the time appointed, as most likely to be convenient to the invalid. Mrs. Thornton submitted with as bad a grace as she could to her son's desire, all the time liking him the better for having it; and exaggerating in her own mind the same notion that he had of extraordinary goodness on his part in so perseveringly keeping up with the Hales.

His goodness verging on weakness (as all the softer virtues did in her mind), and her own contempt for Mr. and Mrs. Hale, and positive dislike to Margaret, were the ideas which occupied Mrs. Thornton, till she was struck into nothingness before the dark shadow of the wings of the angel of death. There lay Mrs. Hale--a mother like herself--a much younger woman than she was,--on the bed from which there was no sign of hope that she might ever rise again No more variety of light and shade for her in that darkened room; no power of action, scarcely change of movement; faint alternations of whispered sound and studious silence; and yet that monotonous life seemed almost too much! When Mrs. Thornton, strong and prosperous with life, came in, Mrs. Hale lay still, although from the look on her face she was evidently conscious of who it was. But she did not even open her eyes for a minute or two. The heavy moisture of tears stood on the eye-lashes before she looked up, then with her hand groping feebly over the bed-clothes, for the touch of Mrs. Thornton's large firm fingers, she said, scarcely above her breath--Mrs. Thornton had to stoop from her erectness to listen,--

'Margaret--you have a daughter--my sister is in Italy. My child will be without a mother;--in a strange place,--if I die--will you'----

And her filmy wandering eyes fixed themselves with an intensity of wistfulness on Mrs. Thornton's face For a minute, there was no change in its rigidness; it was stern and unmoved;--nay, but that the eyes of the sick woman were growing dim with the slow-gathering tears, she might have seen a dark cloud cross the cold features. And it was no thought of her son, or of her living daughter Fanny, that stirred her heart at last; but a sudden remembrance, suggested by something in the arrangement of the room,--of a little daughter--dead in infancy--long years ago--that, like a sudden sunbeam, melted the icy crust, behind which there was a real tender woman.

'You wish me to be a friend to Miss Hale,' said Mrs. Thornton, in her measured voice, that would not soften with her heart, but came out distinct and clear.

Mrs. Hale, her eyes still fixed on Mrs. Thornton's face, pressed the hand that lay below hers on the coverlet. She could not speak. Mrs. Thornton sighed, 'I will. be a true friend, if circumstances require it Not a tender friend. That I cannot be,'--('to her,' she was on the point of

adding, but she relented at the sight of that poor, anxious face.)--'It is not my nature to show affection even where I feel it, nor do I volunteer advice in general. Still, at your request,--if it will be any comfort to you, I will promise you.' Then came a pause. Mrs. Thornton was too conscientious to promise what she did not mean to perform; and to perform any-thing in the way of kindness on behalf of Margaret, more disliked at this moment than ever, was difficult; almost impossible.

'I promise,' said she, with grave severity; which, after all, inspired the dying woman with faith as in something more stable than life itself,--flickering, flitting, wavering life! 'I promise that in any difficulty in which Miss Hale'----

'Call her Margaret!' gasped Mrs. Hale.

'In which she comes to me for help, I will help her with every power I have, as if she were my own daughter. I also promise that if ever I see her doing what I think is wrong'----

'But Margaret never does wrong--not wilfully wrong,' pleaded Mrs. Hale. Mrs. Thornton went on as before; as if she had not heard:

'If ever I see her doing what I believe to be wrong--such wrong not touching me or mine, in which case I might be supposed to have an interested motive--I will tell her of it, faithfully and plainly, as I should wish my own daughter to be told.'

There was a long pause. Mrs. Hale felt that this promise did not include all; and yet it was much. It had reservations in it which she did not understand; but then she was weak, dizzy, and tired. Mrs. Thornton was reviewing all the probable cases in which she had pledged herself to act. She had a fierce pleasure in the idea of telling Margaret unwelcome truths, in the shape of performance of duty. Mrs. Hale began to speak:

'I thank you. I pray God to bless you. I shall never see you again in this world. But my last words are, I thank you for your promise of kindness to my child.'

'Not kindness!' testified Mrs. Thornton, ungraciously truthful to the last. But having eased her conscience by saying these words, she was not sorry that they were not heard. She pressed Mrs. Hale's soft languid hand; and rose up and went her way out of the house without seeing a creature.

During the time that Mrs. Thornton was having this interview with Mrs. Hale, Margaret and Dixon were laying their heads together, and consulting how they should keep Frederick's coming a profound secret to all out of the house. A letter from him might now be expected any day; and he would assuredly follow quickly on its heels. Martha must be sent away on her holiday; Dixon must keep stern guard on the front door, only admitting the few visitors that ever came to the house into Mr. Hale's room down-stairs--Mrs. Hale's extreme illness giving her a good excuse for this. If Mary Higgins was required as a help to Dixon in the kitchen she was to hear and see as little of Frederick as possible; and he was, if necessary to be spoken of to her

under the name of Mr. Dickinson. But. her sluggish and incurious nature was the greatest safeguard of all.

They resolved that Martha should leave them that very afternoon for this visit to her mother. Margaret wished that she had been sent away on the previous day, as she fancied it might be thought strange to give a servant a holiday when her mistress's state required so much attendance.

Poor Margaret! All that afternoon she had to act the part of a Roman daughter, and give strength out of her own scanty stock to her father. Mr. hale would hope, would not despair, between the attacks of his wife's malady; he buoyed himself up in every respite from her pain, and believed that it was the beginning of ultimate recovery. And so, when the paroxysms came on, each more severe than the last, they were fresh agonies, and greater disappointments to him. This afternoon, he sat in the drawing-room, unable to bear the solitude of his study, or to employ himself in any way. He buried his head in his arms, which lay folded on the table. Margaret's heart ached to see him; yet, as he did not speak, she did not like to volunteer any attempt at comfort. Martha was gone. Dixon sat with Mrs. Hale while she slept. The house was very still and quiet, and darkness came on, without any movement to procure candles. Margaret sat at the window, looking out at the lamps and the street, but seeing nothing,--only alive to her father's heavy sighs. She did not like to go down for lights, lest the tacit restraint of her presence being withdrawn, he might give way to more violent emotion, without her being at hand to comfort him. Yet she was just thinking that she ought to go and see after the well-doing of the kitchen fire, which there was nobody but herself to attend to when she heard the muffled door-ring with so violent a pull, that the wires jingled all through the house, though the positive sound was not great. She started up, passed her father, who had never moved at the veiled, dull sound,--returned, and kissed him tenderly. And still he never moved, nor took any notice of her fond embrace. Then she went down softly, through the dark, to the door. Dixon would have put the chain on before she opened it, but Margaret had not a thought of fear in her pre-occupied mind. A man's tall figure stood between her and the luminous street. He was looking away; but at the sound of the latch he turned quickly round.

'Is this Mr. Hale's?' said he, in a clear, full, delicate voice.

Margaret trembled all over; at first she did not answer. In a moment she sighed out,

'Frederick!' and stretched out both her hands to Catch his, and draw him in.

'Oh, Margaret!' said he, holding her off by her shoulders, after they had kissed each other, as if even in that darkness he could see her face, and read in its expression a quicker answer to his question than words could give,--

'My mother! is she alive?'

'Yes, she is alive, dear, dear brother! She--as ill as she can be she is; but alive! She is alive!'

'Thank God!' said he.

'Papa is utterly prostrate with this great grief.'

'You expect me, don't you?'

'No, we have had no letter.'

'Then I have come before it. But my mother knows I am coming?'

'Oh! we all knew you would come. But wait a little! Step in here. Give me your hand. What is this? Oh! your carpet-bag. Dixon has shut the shutters; but this is papa's study, and I can take you to a chair to rest yourself for a few minutes; while I go and tell him.'

She groped her way to the taper and the lucifer matches. She suddenly felt shy, when the little feeble light made them visible. All she could see was, that her brother's face was unusually dark in complexion, and she caught the stealthy look of a pair of remarkably long-cut blue eyes, that suddenly twinkled up with a droll consciousness of their mutual purpose of inspecting each other. But though the brother and sister had an instant of sympathy in their reciprocal glances, they did not exchange a word; only, Margaret felt sure that she should like her brother as a companion as much as she already loved him as a near relation. Her heart was wonderfully lighter as she went up-stairs; the sorrow was no less in reality, but it became less oppressive from having some one in precisely the same relation to it as that in which she stood. Not her father's desponding attitude had power to damp her now. He lay across the table, helpless as ever; but she had the spell by which to rouse him. She used it perhaps too violently in her own great relief.

'Papa,' said she, throwing her arms fondly round his neck; pulling his weary head up in fact with her gentle violence, till it rested in her arms, and she could look into his eyes, and let them gain strength and assurance from hers.

'Papa! guess who is here!'

He looked at her; she saw the idea of the truth glimmer into their filmy sadness, and be dismissed thence as a wild imagination.

He threw himself forward, and hid his face once more in his stretched-out arms, resting upon the table as heretofore. She heard him whisper; she bent tenderly down to listen. 'I don't know. Don't tell me it is Frederick--not Frederick. I cannot bear it,--I am too weak. And his mother is dying!'He began to cry and wail like a child. It was so different to all which Margaret had hoped and expected, that she turned sick with disappointment, and was silent for an instant. Then she spoke again--very differently--not so exultingly, far more tenderly and carefully.

'Papa, it is Frederick! Think of mamma, how glad she will be! And oh, for her sake, how glad we ought to be! For his sake, too,--our poor, poor boy!'

Her father did not change his attitude, but he seemed to be trying to understand the fact.

'Where is he?' asked he at last, his face still hidden in his prostrate arms.

'In your study, quite alone. I lighted the taper, and ran up to tell you. He is quite alone, and will be wondering why--'

'I will go to him,' broke in her father; and he lifted himself up and leant on her arm as on that of a guide.

Margaret led him to the study door, but her spirits were so agitated that she felt she could not bear to see the meeting. She turned away, and ran up-stairs, and cried most heartily. It was the first time she had dared to allow herself this relief for days. The strain had been terrible, as she now felt. But Frederick was come! He, the one precious brother, was there, safe, amongst them again! She could hardly believe it. She stopped her crying, and opened her bedroom door. She heard no sound of voices, and almost feared she might have dreamt. She went down-stairs, and listened at the study door. She heard the buzz of voices; and that was enough. She went into the kitchen, and stirred up the fire, and lighted the house, and prepared for the wanderer's refreshment. How fortunate it was that her mother slept! She knew that she did, from the candle-lighter thrust through the keyhole of her bedroom door. The traveller could be refreshed and bright, and the first excitement of the meeting with his father all be over, before her mother became aware of anything unusual.

When all was ready, Margaret opened the study door, and went in like a serving-maiden, with a heavy tray. held in her extended arms. She was proud of serving Frederick. But he, when he saw her, sprang up in a minute, and relieved her of her burden. It was a type, a sign, of all the coming relief which his presence would bring. The brother and sister arranged the table together, saying little, but their hands touching, and their eyes speaking the natural language of expression, so intelligible to those of the same blood. The fire had gone out; and Margaret applied herself to light it, for the evenings had begun to be chilly; and yet it was desirable to make all noises as distant as possible from Mrs. Hale's room.

'Dixon says it is a gift to light a fire; not an art to be acquired.'

'Poeta nascitur, non fit,' murmured Mr. Hale; and Margaret was glad to hear a quotation once more, however languidly given.

'Dear old Dixon! How we shall kiss each other!' said Frederick. 'She used to kiss me, and then look in my face to be sure I was the right person, and then set to again! But, Margaret, what a bungler you are! I never saw such a little awkward, good-for-nothing pair of hands. Run away, and wash them, ready to cut bread-and-butter for me, and leave the fire. I'll manage it. Lighting fires is one of my natural accomplishments.'

So Margaret went away; and returned; and passed in and out of the room, in a glad restlessness that could not be satisfied with sitting still. The more wants Frederick had, the better she was pleased; and he understood all this by instinct. It was a joy snatched in the house of

mourning, and the zest of it was all the more pungent, because they knew in the depths of their hearts what irremediable sorrow awaited them.

In the middle, they heard Dixon's foot on the stairs. Mr. Hale started from his languid posture in his great armchair, from which he had been watching his children in a dreamy way, as if they were acting some drama of happiness, which it was pretty to look at, but which was distinct from reality, and in which he had no part. He stood up, and faced the door, showing such a strange, sudden anxiety to conceal Frederick from the sight of any person entering, even though it were the faithful Dixon, that a shiver came over Margaret's heart: it reminded her of the new fear in their lives. She caught at Frederick's arm, and clutched it tight, while a stern thought compressed her brows, and caused her to set her teeth. And yet they knew it was only Dixon's measured tread. They heard her walk the length of the passage, into the kitchen. Margaret rose up.

I will go to her, and tell her. And I shall hear how mamma is.' Mrs. Hale was awake. She rambled at first; but after they had given her some tea she was refreshed, though not disposed to talk. It was better that the night should pass over before she was told of her son's arrival. Dr. Donaldson's appointed visit would bring nervous excitement enough for the evening; and he might tell them how to prepare her for seeing Frederick. He was there, in the house; could be summoned at any moment.

Margaret could not sit still. It was a relief to her to aid Dixon in all her preparations for 'Master Frederick.' It seemed as though she never could be tired again. Each glimpse into the room where he sate by his father, conversing with him, about, she knew not what, nor cared to know,--was increase of strength to her. Her own time for talking and hearing would come at last, and she was too certain of this to feel in a hurry to grasp it now. She took in his appearance and liked it. He had delicate features, redeemed from effeminacy by the swarthiness of his complexion, and his quick intensity of expression. His eyes were generally merry-looking, but at times they and his mouth so suddenly changed, and gave her such an idea of latent passion, that it almost made her afraid. But this look was only for an instant; and had in it no doggedness, no vindictiveness; it was rather the instantaneous ferocity of expression that comes over the countenances of all natives of wild or southern countries--a ferocity which enhances the charm of the childlike softness into which such a look may melt away. Margaret might fear the violence of the impulsive nature thus occasionally betrayed, but there was nothing in it to make her distrust, or recoil in the least, from the new-found brother. On the contrary, all their intercourse was peculiarly charming to her from the very first. She knew then how much responsibility she had had to bear, from the exquisite sensation of relief which she felt in Frederick's presence. He understood his father and mother--their characters and their weaknesses, and went along with a careless freedom, which was yet most delicately careful not to hurt or wound any of their feelings. He seemed to know instinctively when a little of the natural brilliancy of his manner and conversation would not jar on the deep depression of his father, or might relieve his mother's pain. Whenever it would have been out of tune, and out of time, his patient devotion and watchfulness came into play, and made him an admirable nurse. Then Margaret was almost touched into tears by the allusions which he often made to their childish days in the New Forest; he had never forgotten her--or Helstone either--all the time he had been roaming among distant countries and foreign people. She might talk to him of the old spot, and never fear tiring him. She

had been afraid of him before he came, even while she had longed for his coming; seven or eight years had, she felt, produced such great changes in herself that, forgetting how much of the original Margaret was left, she had reasoned that if her tastes and feelings had so materially altered, even in her stay-at-home life, his wild career, with which she was but imperfectly acquainted, must have almost substituted another Frederick for the tall stripling in his middy's uniform, whom she remembered looking up to with such admiring awe. But in their absence they had grown nearer to each other in age, as well as in many other things. And so it was that the weight, this sorrowful time, was lightened to Margaret. Other light than that of Frederick's presence she had none. For a few hours, the mother rallied on seeing her son. She sate with his hand in hers; she would not part with it even while she slept; and Margaret had to feed him like a baby, rather than that he should disturb her mother by removing a finger. Mrs. Hale wakened while they were thus engaged; she slowly moved her head round on the pillow, and smiled at her children, as she understood what they were doing, and why it was done.

'I am very selfish,' said she; 'but it will not be for long.' Frederick bent down and kissed the feeble hand that imprisoned his.

This state of tranquillity could not endure for many days, nor perhaps for many hours; so Dr. Donaldson assured Margaret. After the kind doctor had gone away, she stole down to Frederick, who, during the visit, had been adjured to remain quietly concealed in the back parlour, usually Dixon's bedroom, but now given up to him.

Margaret told him what Dr. Donaldson said.

'I don't believe it,' he exclaimed. 'She is very ill; she may be dangerously ill, and in immediate danger, too; but I can't imagine that she could be as she is, if she were on the point of death. Margaret! she should have some other advice--some London doctor. Have you never thought of that?'

'Yes,' said Margaret, 'more than once. But I don't believe it would do any good. And, you know, we have not the money to bring any great London surgeon down, and I am sure Dr. Donaldson is only second in skill to the very best,--if, indeed, he is to them.'

Frederick began to walk up and down the room impatiently.

'I have credit in Cadiz,' said he, 'but none here, owing to this wretched change of name. Why did my father leave Helstone? That was the blunder.'

'It was no blunder,' said Margaret gloomily. 'And above all possible chances, avoid letting papa hear anything like what you have just been saying. I can see that he is tormenting himself already with the idea that mamma would never have been ill if we had stayed at Helstone, and you don't know papa's agonising power of self-reproach!'

Frederick walked away as if he were on the quarter-deck. At last he stopped right opposite to Margaret, and looked at her drooping and desponding attitude for an instant.

'My little Margaret!' said he, caressing her. 'Let us hope as long as we can. Poor little woman! what! is this face all wet with tears? I will hope. I will, in spite of a thousand doctors. Bear up, Margaret, and be brave enough to hope!'

Margaret choked in trying to speak, and when she did it was very low.

'I must try to be meek enough to trust. Oh, Frederick! mamma was getting to love me so! And I was getting to understand her. And now comes death to snap us asunder!'

'Come, come, come! Let us go up-stairs, and do something, rather than waste time that may be so precious. Thinking has, many a time, made me sad, darling; but doing never did in all my life. My theory is a sort of parody on the maxim of "Get money, my son, honestly if you can; but get money. My precept is, "Do something, my sister, do good if you can; but, at any rate, do something."'

'Not excluding mischief,' said Margaret, smiling faintly through her tears.

'By no means. What I do exclude is the remorse afterwards. Blot your misdeeds out (if you are particularly conscientious), by a good deed, as soon as you can; just as we did a correct sum at school on the slate, where an incorrect one was only half rubbed out. It was better than wetting our sponge with our tears; both less loss of time where tears had to be waited for, and a better effect at last.'

If Margaret thought Frederick's theory rather a rough one at first, she saw how he worked it out into continual production of kindness in fact. After a bad night with his mother (for he insisted on taking his turn as a sitter-up) he was busy next morning before breakfast, contriving a leg-rest for Dixon, who was beginning to feel the fatigues of watching. At breakfast-time, he interested Mr. Hale with vivid, graphic, rattling accounts of the wild life he had led in Mexico, South America, and elsewhere. Margaret would have given up the effort in despair to rouse Mr. Hale out of his dejection; it would even have affected herself and rendered her incapable of talking at all. But Fred, true to his theory, did something perpetually; and talking was the only thing to be done, besides eating, at breakfast.

Before the night of that day, Dr. Donaldson's opinion was proved to be too well founded. Convulsions came on; and when they ceased, Mrs. Hale was unconscious. Her husband might lie by her shaking the bed with his sobs; her son's strong arms might lift her tenderly up into a comfortable position; her daughter's hands might bathe her face; but she knew them not. She would never recognise them again, till they met in Heaven.

Before the morning came all was over.

Then Margaret rose from her trembling and despondency, and became as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother. For Frederick had broken down now, and all his theories were of no use to him. He cried so violently when shut up alone in his little room at night, that Margaret and Dixon came down in affright to warn him to be quiet: for the house partitions were but thin, and the next-door neighbours might easily hear his youthful passionate sobs, so

different from the slower trembling agony of after-life, when we become inured to grief, and dare not be rebellious against the inexorable doom, knowing who it is that decrees.

Margaret sate with her father in the room with the dead. If he had cried, she would have been thankful. But he sate by the bed quite quietly; only, from time to time, he uncovered the face, and stroked it gently, making a kind of soft inarticulate noise, like that of some mother-animal caressing her young. He took no notice of Margaret's presence. Once or twice she came up to kiss him; and he submitted to it, giving her a little push away when she had done, as if her affection disturbed him from his absorption in the dead. He started when he heard Frederick's cries, and shook his head:--'Poor boy! poor boy!' he said, and took no more notice. Margaret's heart ached within her. She could not think of her own loss in thinking of her father's case. The night was wearing away, and the day was at hand, when, without a word of preparation, Margaret's voice broke upon the stillness of the room, with a clearness of sound that startled even herself: 'Let not your heart be troubled,' it said; and she went steadily on through all that chapter of unspeakable consolation.

CHAPTER VI

'SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT?'

'Show not that manner, and these features all,

1.

The serpent's cunning, and the sinner's fall?'

CRABBE.

The chill, shivery October morning came; not the October morning of the country, with soft, silvery mists, clearing off before the sunbeams that bring out all the gorgeous beauty of colouring, but the October morning of Milton, whose silver mists were heavy fogs, and where the sun could only show long dusky streets when he did break through and shine. Margaret went languidly about, assisting Dixon in her task of arranging the house. Her eyes were continually

blinded by tears, but she had no time to give way to regular crying. The father and brother depended upon her; while they were giving way to grief, she must be working, planning, considering. Even the necessary arrangements for the funeral seemed to devolve upon her.

When the fire was bright and crackling--when everything was ready for breakfast, and the tea-kettle was singing away, Margaret gave a last look round the room before going to summon Mr. Hale and Frederick. She wanted everything to look as cheerful as possible; and yet, when it did so, the contrast between it and her own thoughts forced her into sudden weeping. She was kneeling by the sofa, hiding her face in the cushions that no one might hear her cry, when she was touched on the shoulder by Dixon.

'Come, Miss Hale--come, my dear! You must not give way, or where shall we all be? There is not another person in the house fit to give a direction of any kind, and there is so much to be done. There's who's to manage the funeral; and who's to come to it; and where it's to be; and all to be settled: and Master Frederick's like one crazed with crying, and master never was a good one for settling; and, poor gentleman, he goes about now as if he was lost. It's bad enough, my dear, I know; but death comes to us all; and you're well off never to have lost any friend till now.'Perhaps so. But this seemed a loss by itself; not to bear comparison with any other event in the world. Margaret did not take any comfort from what Dixon said, but the unusual tenderness of the prim old servant's manner touched her to the heart; and, more from a desire to show her gratitude for this than for any other reason, she roused herself up, and smiled in answer to Dixon's anxious look at her; and went to tell her father and brother that breakfast was ready.

Mr. Hale came--as if in a dream, or rather with the unconscious motion of a sleep-walker, whose eyes and mind perceive other things than what are present. Frederick came briskly in, with a forced cheerfulness, grasped her hand, looked into her eyes, and burst into tears. She had to try and think of little nothings to say all breakfast-time, in order to prevent the recurrence of her companions' thoughts too strongly to the last meal they bad taken together, when there had been a continual strained listening for some sound or signal from the sick-room.

After breakfast, she resolved to speak to her father, about the funeral. He shook his head, and assented to all she proposed, though many of her propositions absolutely contradicted one another. Margaret gained no real decision from him; and was leaving the room languidly, to have a consultation with Dixon, when Mr. Hale motioned her back to his side.

'Ask Mr. Bell,' said he in a hollow voice.

'Mr. Bell!' said she, a little surprised. 'Mr. Bell of Oxford?'

'Mr. Bell,' he repeated. 'Yes. He was my groom's-man.'

Margaret understood the association.

'I will write to-day,' said she. He sank again into listlessness. All morning she toiled on, longing for rest, but in a continual whirl of melancholy business.

Towards evening, Dixon said to her:

'I've done it, miss. I was really afraid for master, that he'd have a stroke with grief. He's been all this day with poor missus; and when I've listened at the door, I've heard him talking to her, and talking to her, as if she was alive. When I went in he would be quite quiet, but all in a maze like. So I thought to myself, he ought to be roused; and if it gives him a shock at first, it will, maybe, be the better afterwards. So I've been and told him, that I don't think it's safe for Master Frederick to be here. And I don't. It was only on Tuesday, when I was out, that I met-a Southampton man--the first I've seen since I came to Milton; they don't make their way much up here, I think. Well, it was young Leonards, old Leonards the draper's son, as great a scamp as ever lived--who plagued his father almost to death, and then ran off to sea. I never could abide him. He was in the Orion at the same time as Master Frederick, I know; though I don't recollect if he was there at the mutiny.'

'Did he know you?' said Margaret, eagerly.

'Why, that's the worst of it. I don't believe he would have known me but for my being such a fool as to call out his name. He were a Southampton man, in a strange place, or else I should never have been so ready to call cousins with him, a nasty, good-for-nothing fellow. Says he, "Miss Dixon! who would ha' thought of seeing you here? But perhaps I mistake, and you're Miss Dixon no longer?" So I told him he might still address me as an unmarried lady, though if I hadn't been so particular, I'd had good chances of matrimony. He was polite enough: "He couldn't look at me and doubt me." But I were not to be caught with such chaff from such a fellow as him, and so I told him; and, by way of being even, I asked him after his father (who I knew had turned him out of doors), as if they was the best friends as ever was. So then, to spite me--for you see we were getting savage, for all we were so civil to each other--he began to inquire after Master Frederick, and said, what a scrape he'd got into (as if Master Frederick's scrapes would ever wash George Leonards' white, or make 'em look otherwise than nasty, dirty black), and how he'd be hung for mutiny if ever he were caught, and how a hundred pound reward had been offered for catching him, and what a disgrace he had been to his family--all to spite me, you see, my dear, because before now I've helped old Mr. Leonards to give George a good rating, down in Southampton. So I said, there were other families be thankful if they could think they were earning an honest living as I knew, who had far more cause to blush for their sons, and to far away from home. To which he made answer, like the impudent chap he is, that he were in a confidential situation, and if I knew of any young man who had been so unfortunate as to lead vicious courses, and wanted to turn steady, he'd have no objection to lend him his patronage. He, indeed! Why, he'd corrupt a sairt. I've not felt so bad myself for years as when I were standing talking to him the other day. I could have cried to think I couldn't spite him better, for he kept smiling in my face, as if he took all my compliments for earnest; and I couldn't see that he minded what I said in the least, while I was mad with all his speeches.'

'But you did not tell him anything about us--about Frederick?'

'Not I,' said Dixon. 'He had never the grace to ask where I was staying; and I shouldn't have told him if he had asked. Nor did I ask him what his precious situation was. He was waiting for a bus, and just then it drove up, and he hailed it. But, to plague me to the last, he turned back

before he got in, and said, "If you can help me to trap Lieutenant Hale, Miss Dixon, we'll go partners in the reward. I know you'd like to be my partner, now wouldn't you? Don't be shy, but say yes." And he jumped on the bus, and I saw his ugly face leering at me with a wicked smile to think how he'd had the last word of plaguing.'

Margaret was made very uncomfortable by this account of Dixon's.

'Have you told Frederick?' asked she.

'No,' said Dixon. 'I were uneasy in my mind at knowing that bad Leonards was in town; but there was so much else to think about that I did not dwell on it at all. But when I saw master sitting so stiff, and with his eyes so glazed and sad, I thought it might rouse him to have to think of Master Frederick's safety a bit. So I told him all, though I blushed to say how a young man had been speaking to me. And it has done master good. And if we're to keep Master Frederick in hiding, he would have to go, poor fellow, before Mr. Bell came.'

'Oh, I'm not afraid of Mr. Bell; but I am afraid of this Leonards. I must tell Frederick. What did Leonards look like?'

'A bad-looking fellow, I can assure you, miss. Whiskers such as I should be ashamed to wear--they are so red. And for all he said he'd got a confidential situation, he was dressed in fustian just like a working-man.'

It was evident that Frederick must go. Go, too, when he had so completely vaulted into his place in the family, and promised to be such a stay and staff to his father and sister. Go, when his cares for the living mother, and sorrow for the dead, seemed to make him one of those peculiar people who are bound to us by a fellow-love for them that are taken away. Just as Margaret was thinking all this, sitting over the drawing-room fire--her father restless and uneasy under the pressure of this newly-aroused fear, of which he had not as yet spoken--Frederick came in, his brightness dimmed, but the extreme violence of his grief passed away. He came up to Margaret, and kissed her forehead.

'How wan you look, Margaret!' said he in a low voice. 'You have been thinking of everybody, and no one has thought of you. Lie on this sofa--there is nothing for you to do.'

'That is the worst,' said Margaret, in a sad whisper. But she went and lay down, and her brother covered her feet with a shawl, and then sate on the ground by her side; and the two began to talk in a subdued tone.

Margaret told him all that Dixon had related of her interview with young Leonards. Frederick's lips closed with a long whew of dismay.

'I should just like to have it out with that young fellow. A worse sailor was never on board ship--nor a much worse man either. I declare, Margaret--you know the circumstances of the whole affair?'

'Yes, mamma told me.'

'Well, when all the sailors who were good for anything were indignant with our captain, this fellow, to curry favour--pah! And to think of his being here! Oh, if he'd a notion I was within twenty miles of him, he'd ferret me out to pay off old grudges. I'd rather anybody had the hundred pounds they think I am worth than that rascal. What a pity poor old Dixon could not be persuaded to give me up, and make a provision for her old age!'

'Oh, Frederick, hush! Don't talk so.'

Mr. Hale came towards them, eager and trembling. He had overheard what they were saying. He took Frederick's hand in both of his:

'My boy, you must go. It is very bad--but I see you must. You have done all you could--you have been a comfort to her.'

'Oh, papa, must he go?' said Margaret, pleading against her own conviction of necessity.

'I declare, I've a good mind to face it out, and stand my trial. If I could only pick up my evidence! I cannot endure the thought of being in the power of such a blackguard as Leonards. I could almost have enjoyed--in other circumstances--this stolen visit: it has had all the charm which the French-woman attributed to forbidden pleasures.'

'One of the earliest things I can remember,' said Margaret, 'was your being in some great disgrace, Fred, for stealing apples. We had plenty of our own--trees loaded with them; but some one had told you that stolen fruit tasted sweetest, which you took au pied de la lettre, and off you went a-robbing. You have not changed your feelings much since then.'

'Yes--you must go,' repeated Mr. Hale, answering Margaret's question, which she had asked some time ago. His thoughts were fixed on one subject, and it was an effort to him to follow the zig-zag remarks of his children--an effort which ho did not make.

Margaret and Frederick looked at each other. That quick momentary sympathy would be theirs no longer if he went away. So much was understood through eyes that could not be put into words. Both coursed the same thought till it was lost in sadness. Frederick shook it off first:

'Do you know, Margaret, I was very nearly giving both Dixon and myself a good fright this afternoon. I was in my bedroom; I had heard a ring at the front door, but I thought the ringer must have done his business and gone away long ago; so I was on the point of making my appearance in the passage, when, as I opened my room door, I saw Dixon coming downstairs; and she frowned and kicked me into hiding again. I kept the door open, and heard a message given to some man that was in my father's study, and that then went away. Who could it have been? Some of the shopmen?'

'Very likely,' said Margaret, indifferently. 'There was a little quiet man who came up for orders about two o'clock.'

'But this was not a little man--a great powerful fellow; and it was past four when he was here.'

'It was Mr. Thornton,' said Mr. Hale. They were glad to have drawn him into the conversation.

'Mr. Thornton!' said Margaret, a little surprised. 'I thought----'

'Well, little one, what did you think?' asked Frederick, as she did not finish her sentence.

'Oh, only,' said she, reddening and looking straight at him, 'I fancied you meant some one of a different class, not a gentleman; somebody come on an errand.'

'He looked like some one of that kind,' said Frederick, carelessly. 'I took him for a shopman, and he turns out a manufacturer.'

Margaret was silent. She remembered how at first, before she knew his character, she had spoken and thought of him just as Frederick was doing. It was but a natural impression that was made upon him, and yet she was a little annoyed by it. She was unwilling to speak; she wanted to make Frederick understand what kind of person Mr. Thornton was--but she was tongue-tied.

Mr. Hale went on. 'He came to offer any assistance in his power, I believe. But I could not see him. I told Dixon to ask him if he would like to see you--I think I asked her to find you, and you would go to him. I don't know what I said.'

'He has been a very agreeable acquaintance, has he not?' asked Frederick, throwing the question like a ball for any one to catch who chose.

'A very kind friend,' said Margaret, when her father did not answer.

Frederick was silent for a time. At last he spoke:

'Margaret, it is painful to think I can never thank those who have shown you kindness. Your acquaintances and mine must be separate. Unless, indeed, I run the chances of a court-martial, or unless you and my father would come to Spain.' He threw out this last suggestion as a kind of feeler; and then suddenly made the plunge. 'You don't know how I wish you would. I have a good position--the chance of a better,' continued he, reddening like a girl. 'That Dolores Barbour that I was telling you of, Margaret--I only wish you knew her; I am sure you would like--no, love is the right word, like is so poor--you would love her, father, if you knew her. She is not eighteen; but if she is in the same mind another year, she is to be my wife. Mr. Barbour won't let us call it an engagement. But if you would come, you would find friends everywhere, besides Dolores. Think of it, father. Margaret, be on my side.'

'No--no more removals for me,' said Mr. Hale. 'One removal has cost me my wife. No more removals in this life. She will be here; and here will I stay out my appointed time.'

'Oh, Frederick,' said Margaret, 'tell us more about her. I never thought of this; but I am so glad. You will have some one to love and care for you out there. Tell us all about it.'

'In the first place, she is a Roman Catholic. That's the only objection I anticipated. But my father's change of opinion--nay, Margaret, don't sigh.'

Margaret had reason to sigh a little more before the conversation ended. Frederick himself was Roman Catholic in fact, though not in profession as yet. This was, then, the reason why his sympathy in her extreme distress at her father's leaving the Church had been so faintly expressed in his letters. She had thought it was the carelessness of a sailor; but the truth was, that even then he was himself inclined to give up the form of religion into which he had been baptised, only that his opinions were tending in exactly the opposite direction to those of his father. How much love had to do with this change not even Frederick himself could have told. Margaret gave up talking about this branch of the subject at last; and, returning to the fact of the engagement, she began to consider it in some fresh light:

'But for her sake, Fred, you surely will try and clear yourself of the exaggerated charges brought against you, even if the charge of mutiny itself be true. If there were to be a court-martial, and you could find your witnesses, you might, at any rate, show how your disobedience to authority was because that authority was unworthily exercised.'

Mr. Hale roused himself up to listen to his son's answer.

'In the first place, Margaret, who is to hunt up my witnesses? All of them are sailors, drafted off to other ships, except those whose evidence would go for very little, as they took part, or sympathised in the affair. In the next place, allow me to tell you, you don't know what a court-martial is, and consider it as an assembly where justice is administered, instead of what it really is--a court where authority weighs nine-tenths in the balance, and evidence forms only the other tenth. In such cases, evidence itself can hardly escape being influenced by the prestige of authority.'

'But is it not worth trying, to see how much evidence might be discovered and arrayed on your behalf? At present, all those who knew you formerly, believe you guilty without any shadow of excuse. You have never tried to justify yourself, and we have never known where to seek for proofs of your justification. Now, for Miss Barbour's sake, make your conduct as clear as you can in the eye of the world. She may not care for it; she has, I am sure, that trust in you that we all have; but you ought not to let her ally herself to one under such a serious charge, without showing the world exactly how it is you stand. You disobeyed authority--that was bad; but to have stood by, without word or act, while the authority was brutally used, would have been infinitely worse. People know what you did; but not the motives that elevate it out of a crime into an heroic protection of the weak. For Dolores' sake, they ought to know.'

'But how must I make them know? I am not sufficiently sure of the purity and justice of those who would be my judges, to give myself up to a court-martial, even if I could bring a whole array of truth-speaking witnesses. I can't send a bellman about, to cry aloud and proclaim in the

streets what you are pleased to call my heroism. No one would read a pamphlet of self-justification so long after the deed, even if I put one out.'

'Will you consult a lawyer as to your chances of exculpation?' asked Margaret, looking up, and turning very red.

'I must first catch my lawyer, and have a look at him, and see how I like him, before I make him into my confidant. Many a briefless barrister might twist his conscience into thinking, that he could earn a hundred pounds very easily by doing a good action--in giving me, a criminal, up to justice.'

'Nonsense, Frederick!--because I know a lawyer on whose honour I can rely; of whose cleverness in his profession people speak very highly; and who would, I think, take a good deal of trouble for any of--of Aunt Shaw's relations Mr. Henry Lennox, papa.'

'I think it is a good idea,' said Mr. Hale. 'But don't propose anything which will detain Frederick in England. Don't, for your mother's sake.'

'You could go to London to-morrow evening by a night-train,' continued Margaret, warming up into her plan. 'He must go to-morrow, I'm afraid, papa,' said she, tenderly; 'we fixed that, because of Mr. Bell, and Dixon's disagreeable acquaintance.'

'Yes; I must go to-morrow,' said Frederick decidedly.

Mr. Hale groaned. 'I can't bear to part with you, and yet I am miserable with anxiety as long as you stop here.'

'Well then,' said Margaret, 'listen to my plan. He gets to London on Friday morning. I will--you might--no! it would be better for me to give him a note to Mr. Lennox. You will find him at his chambers in the Temple.'

'I will write down a list of all the names I can remember on board the Orion. I could leave it with him to ferret them out. He is Edith's husband's brother, isn't he? I remember your naming him in your letters. I have money in Barbour's hands. I can pay a pretty long bill, if there is any chance of success Money, dear father, that I had meant for a different purpose; so I shall only consider it as borrowed from you and Margaret.'

'Don't do that,' said Margaret. 'You won't risk it if you do. And it will be a risk only it is worth trying. You can sail from London as well as from Liverpool?'

'To be sure, little goose. Wherever I feel water heaving under a plank, there I feel at home. I'll pick up some craft or other to take me off, never fear. I won't stay twenty-four hours in London, away from you on the one hand, and from somebody else on the other.'

It was rather a comfort to Margaret that Frederick took it into his head to look over her shoulder as she wrote to Mr. Lennox. If she had not been thus compelled to write steadily and

concisely on, she might have hesitated over many a word, and been puzzled to choose between many an expression, in the awkwardness of being the first to resume the intercourse of which the concluding event had been so unpleasant to both sides. However, the note was taken from her before she had even had time to look it over, and treasured up in a pocket-book, out of which fell a long lock of black hair, the sight of which caused Frederick's eyes to glow with pleasure.

'Now you would like to see that, wouldn't you?' said he. 'No! you must wait till you see her herself She is too perfect to be known by fragments. No mean brick shall be a specimen of the building of my palace.'

CHAPTER VII

MISCHANCES

'What! remain to be

1.

Denounced--dragged, it may be, in chains.'

WERNER.

All the next day they sate together--they three. Mr. Hale hardly ever spoke but when his children asked him questions, and forced him, as it were, into the present. Frederick's grief was no more to be seen or heard; the first paroxysm had passed over, and now he was ashamed of having been so battered down by emotion; and though his sorrow for the loss of his mother was a deep real feeling, and would last out his life, it was never to be spoken of again. Margaret, not so passionate at first, was more suffering now. At times she cried a good deal; and her manner, even when speaking on indifferent things, had a mournful tenderness about it, which was deepened whenever her looks fell on Frederick, and she thought of his rapidly approaching departure. She was glad he was going, on her father's account, however much she might grieve over it on her own. The anxious terror in which Mr. Hale lived lest his son should be detected and captured, far out-weighed the pleasure he derived from his presence. The nervousness had

increased since Mrs. Hale's death, probably because he dwelt upon it more exclusively. He started at every unusual sound; and was never comfortable unless Frederick sate out of the immediate view of any one entering the room. Towards evening he said:

'You will go with Frederick to the station, Margaret? I shall want to know he is safely off. You will bring me word that he is clear of Milton, at any rate?'

'Certainly,' said Margaret. 'I shall like it, if you won't be lonely without me, papa.'

'No, no! I should always be fancying some one had known him, and that he had been stopped, unless you could tell me you had seen him off. And go to the Outwood station. It is quite as near, and not so many people about. Take a cab there. There is less risk of his being seen. What time is your train, Fred?'

'Ten minutes past six; very nearly dark. So what will you do, Margaret?'

'Oh, I can manage. I am getting very brave and very hard. it is a well-lighted road all the way home, if it should be dark. But I was out last week much later.'

Margaret was thankful when the parting was over--the parting from the dead mother and the living father. She hurried Frederick into the cab, in order to shorten a scene which she saw was so bitterly painful to her father, who would accompany his son as he took his last look at his mother. Partly in consequence of this, and partly owing to one of the very common mistakes in the 'Railway Guide' as to the times when trains arrive at the smaller stations, they found, on reaching Outwood, that they had nearly twenty minutes to spare. The booking-office was not open, so they could not even take the ticket. They accordingly went down the flight of steps that led to the level of the ground below the railway. There was a broad cinder-path diagonally crossing a field which lay along-side of the carriage-road, and they went there to walk backwards and forwards for the few minutes they had to spare.

Margaret's hand lay in Frederick's arm. He took hold of it affectionately.

'Margaret! I am going to consult Mr. Lennox as to the chance of exculpating myself, so that I may return to England whenever I choose, more for your sake than for the sake of any one else. I can't bear to think of your lonely position if anything should happen to my father. He looks sadly changed--terribly shaken. I wish you could get him to think of the Cadiz plan, for manyreasons. What could you do if he were taken away? You have nofriend near. We are curiously bare of relations.'

Margaret could hardly keep from crying at the tender anxiety with which Frederick was bringing before her an event which she herself felt was not very improbable, so severely had the cares of the last few months told upon Mr. Hale. But she tried to rally as she said:

'There have been such strange unexpected changes in my life during these last two years, that I feel more than ever that it is not worth while to calculate too closely what I should do if any future event took place. I try to think only upon the present.' She paused; they were standing

still for a moment, close on the field side of the stile leading into the road; the setting sun fell on their faces. Frederick held her hand in his, and looked with wistful anxiety into her face, reading there more care and trouble than she would betray by words. She went on:

'We shall write often to one another, and I will promise--for I see it will set your mind at ease--to tell you every worry I have. Papa is'--she started a little, a hardly visible start--but Frederick felt the sudden motion of the hand he held, and turned his full face to the road, along which a horseman was slowly riding, just passing the very stile where they stood. Margaret bowed; her bow was stiffly returned.

'Who is that?' said Frederick, almost before he was out of hearing.Margaret was a little drooping, a little flushed, as she replied:

'Mr. Thornton; you saw him before, you know.'

'Only his back. He is an unprepossessing-looking fellow. What a scowl he has!'

'Something has happened to vex him,' said Margaret, apologetically. 'You would not have thought him unprepossessing if you had seen him with mamma.'

'I fancy it must be time to go and take my ticket. If I had known how dark it would be, we wouldn't have sent back the cab, Margaret.'

'Oh, don't fidget about that. I can take a cab here, if I like; or go back by the rail-road, when I should have shops and people and lamps all the way from the Milton station-house. Don't think of me; take care of yourself. I am sick with the thought that Leonards may be in the same train with you. Look well into the carriage before you get in.'

They went back to the station. Margaret insisted upon going into the full light of the flaring gas inside to take the ticket. Some idle-looking young men were lounging about with the stationmaster. Margaret thought she had seen the face of one of them before, and returned him a proud look of offended dignity for his somewhat impertinent stare of undisguised admiration. She went hastily to her brother, who was standing outside, and took hold of his arm. 'Have you got your bag? Let us walk about here on the platform,' said she, a little flurried at the idea of so soon being left alone, and her bravery oozing out rather faster than she liked to acknowledge even to herself. She heard a step following them along the flags; it stopped when they stopped, looking out along the line and hearing the whizz of the coming train. They did not speak; their hearts were too full. Another moment, and the train would be here; a minute more, and he would be gone. Margaret almost repented the urgency with which she had entreated him to go to London; it was throwing more chances of detection in his way. If he had sailed for Spain by Liverpool, he might have been off in two or three hours.

Frederick turned round, right facing the lamp, where the gas darted up in vivid anticipation of the train. A man in the dress of a railway porter started forward; a bad-looking man, who seemed to have drunk himself into a state of brutality, although his senses were in perfect order.

'By your leave, miss!' said he, pushing Margaret rudely on one side, and seizing Frederick by the collar.

'Your name is Hale, I believe?'

In an instant--how, Margaret did not see, for everything danced before her eyes--but by some sleight of wrestling, Frederick had tripped him up, and he fell from the height of three or four feet, which the platform was elevated above the space of soft ground, by the side of the railroad. There he lay.

'Run, run!' gasped Margaret. 'The train is here. It was Leonards, was it? oh, run! I will carry your bag.' And she took him by the arm to push him along with all her feeble force. A door was opened in a carriage--he jumped in; and as he leant out t say, 'God bless you, Margaret!' the train rushed past her; an she was left standing alone. She was so terribly sick and faint that she was thankful to he able to turn into the ladies' waiting-room, and sit down for an instant. At first she could do nothing but gasp for breath. It was such a hurry; such a sickening alarm; such a near chance. If the train had not been there at the moment, the man would have jumped up again and called for assistance to arrest him. She wondered if the man had got up: she tried to remember if she had seen him move; she wondered if he could have been seriously hurt. She ventured out; the platform was all alight, but still quite deserted; she went to the end, and looked over, somewhat fearfully. No one was there; and then she was glad she had made herself go, and inspect, for otherwise terrible thoughts would have haunted her dreams. And even as it was, she was so trembling and affrighted that she felt she could not walk home along the road, which did indeed seem lonely and dark, as she gazed down upon it from the blaze of the station. She would wait till the down train passed and take her seat in it. But what if Leonards recognised her as Frederick's companion! She peered about, before venturing into the booking-office to take her ticket. There were only some railway officials standing about; and talking loud to one another.

'So Leonards has been drinking again!' said one, seemingly in authority. 'He'll need all his boasted influence to keep his place this time.'

'Where is he?' asked another, while Margaret, her back towards them, was counting her change with trembling fingers, not daring to turn round until she heard the answer to this question.

'I don't know. He came in not five minutes ago, with some long story or other about a fall he'd had, swearing awfully; and wanted to borrow some money from me to go to London by the next up-train. He made all sorts of tipsy promises, but I'd something else to do than listen to him; I told him to go about his business; and he went off at the front door.'

'He's at the nearest vaults, I'll be bound,' said the first speaker. 'Your money would have gone there too, if you'd been such a fool as to lend it.'

'Catch me! I knew better what his London meant. Why, he has never paid me off that five shillings'--and so they went on.

And now all Margaret's anxiety was for the train to come. She hid herself once more in the ladies' waiting-room, and fancied every noise was Leonards' step--every loud and boisterous voice was his. But no one came near her until the train drew up; when she was civilly helped into a carriage by a porter, into whose face she durst not look till they were in motion, and then she saw that it was not Leonards'.

CHAPTER VIII

PEACE

'Sleep on, my love, in thy cold bed,

1.

Never to be disquieted!

- *My last Good Night--thou wilt not wake*
- *Till I thy fate shall overtake.'*

DR. KING.

Home seemed unnaturally quiet after all this terror and noisy commotion. Her father had seen all due preparation made for her refreshment on her return; and then sate down again in his accustomed chair, to fall into one of his sad waking dreams. Dixon had got Mary Higgins to scold and direct in the kitchen; and her scolding was not the less energetic because it was delivered in an angry whisper; for, speaking above her breath she would have thought irreverent, as long as there was any one dead lying in the house. Margaret had resolved not to mention the crowning and closing affright to her father. There was no use in speaking about it; it had ended well; the only thing to be feared was lest Leonards should in some way borrow money enough to effect his purpose of following Frederick to London, and hunting him out there. But there were immense chances against the success of any such plan; and Margaret determined not to torment herself by thinking of what she could do nothing to prevent. Frederick would be as much on his guard as she could put him; and in a day or two at most he would be safely out of England.

'I suppose we shall hear from Mr. Bell to-morrow,' said Margaret.

'Yes,' replied her father. 'I suppose so.'

'If he can come, he will be here to-morrow evening, I should think.'

'If he cannot come, I shall ask Mr. Thornton to go with me to the funeral. I cannot go alone. I should break down utterly.'

'Don't ask Mr. Thornton, papa. Let me go with you,' said Margaret, impetuously.

'You! My dear, women do not generally go.'

'No: because they can't control themselves. Women of our class don't go, because they have no power over their emotions, and yet are ashamed of showing them. Poor women go, and don't care if they are seen overwhelmed with grief. But I promise you, papa, that if you will let me go, I will be no trouble. Don't have a stranger, and leave me out. Dear papa! if Mr. Bell cannot come, I shall go. I won't urge my wish against your will, if he does.'

Mr. Bell could not come. He had the gout. It was a most affectionate letter, and expressed great and true regret for his inability to attend. He hoped to come and pay them a visit soon, if they would have him; his Milton property required some looking after, and his agent had written to him to say that his presence was absolutely necessary; or else he had avoided coming near Milton as long as he could, and now the only thing that would reconcile him to this necessary visit was the idea that he should see, and might possibly be able to comfort his old friend.

Margaret had all the difficulty in the world to persuade her father not to invite Mr. Thornton. She had an indescribable repugnance to this step being taken. The night before the funeral, came a stately note from Mrs. Thornton to Miss Hale, saying that, at her son's desire, their carriage should attend the funeral, if it would not be disagreeable to the family. Margaret tossed the note to her father.

'Oh, don't let us have these forms,' said she. 'Let us go alone--you and me, papa. They don't care for us, or else he would have offered to go himself, and not have proposed this sending an empty carriage.'

'I thought you were so extremely averse to his going, Margaret,' said Mr. Hale in some surprise.

'And so I am. I don't want him to come at all; and I should especially dislike the idea of our asking him. But this seems such a mockery of mourning that I did not expect it from him.' She startled her father by bursting into tears. She had been so subdued in her grief, so thoughtful for others, so gentle and patient in all things, that he could not understand her impatient ways to-night; she seemed agitated and restless; and at all the tenderness which her father in his turn now lavished upon her, she only cried the more.

She passed so bad a night that she was ill prepared for the additional anxiety caused by a letter received from Frederick. Mr. Lennox was out of town; his clerk said that he would return by the following Tuesday at the latest; that he might possibly be at home on Monday. Consequently, after some consideration, Frederick had determined upon remaining in London a day or two longer. He had thought of coming down to Milton again; the temptation had been very strong; but the idea of Mr. Bell domesticated in his father's house, and the alarm he had received at the last moment at the railway station, had made him resolve to stay in London. Margaret might be assured he would take every precaution against being tracked by Leonards. Margaret was thankful that she received this letter while her father was absent in her mother's room. If he had been present, he would have expected her to read it aloud to him, and it would have raised in him a state of nervous alarm which she would have found it impossible to soothe away. There was not merely the fact, which disturbed her excessively, of Frederick's detention in London, but there were allusions to the recognition at the last moment at Milton, and the possibility of a pursuit, which made her blood run cold; and how then would it have affected her father? Many a time did Margaret repent of having suggested and urged on the plan of consulting Mr. Lennox. At the moment, it had seemed as if it would occasion so little delay--add so little to the apparently small chances of detection; and yet everything that had since occurred had tended to make it so undesirable. Margaret battled hard against this regret of hers for what could not now be helped; this self-reproach for having said what had at thetime appeared to be wise, but which after events were proving to have been so foolish. But her father was in too depressed a state of mind and body to struggle healthily; he would succumb to all these causes for morbid regret over what could not be recalled. Margaret summoned up all her forces to her aid. Her father seemed to have forgotten that they had any reason to expect a letter from Frederick that morning. He was absorbed in one idea--that the last visible token of the presence of his wife was to be carried away from him, and hidden from his sight. He trembled pitifully as the undertaker's man was arranging his crape draperies around him. He looked wistfully at Margaret; and, when released, he tottered towards her, murmuring, 'Pray for me, Margaret. I have no strength left in me. I cannot pray. I give her up because I must. I try to bear it: indeed I do. I know it is God's will. But I cannot see why she died. Pray for me, Margaret, that I may have faith to pray. It is a great strait, my child.'

Margaret sat by him in the coach, almost supporting him in her arms; and repeating all the noble verses of holy comfort, or texts expressive of faithful resignation, that she could remember. Her voice never faltered; and she herself gained strength by doing this. Her father's lips moved after her, repeating the well-known texts as her words suggested them; it was terrible to see the patient struggling effort to obtain the resignation which he had not strength to take into his heart as a part of himself.

Margaret's fortitude nearly gave way as Dixon, with a slight motion of her hand, directed her notice to Nicholas Higgins and his daughter, standing a little aloof, but deeply attentive to the ceremonial. Nicholas wore his usual fustian clothes, but had a bit of black stuff sewn round his hat--a mark of mourning which he had never shown to his daughter Bessy's memory. But Mr. Hale saw nothing. He went on repeating to himself, mechanically as it were, all the funeral service as it was read by the officiating clergyman; he sighed twice or thrice when all was ended; and then, putting his hand on Margaret's arm, he mutely entreated to be led away, as if he were blind, and she his faithful guide.

Dixon sobbed aloud; she covered her face with her handkerchief, and was so absorbed in her own grief, that she did not perceive that the crowd, attracted on such occasions, was dispersing, till she was spoken to by some one close at hand. It was Mr. Thornton. He had been present all the time, standing, with bent head, behind a group of people, so that, in fact, no one had recognised him.

'I beg your pardon,--but, can you tell me how Mr. Hale is? And Miss Hale, too? I should like to know how they both are.'

'Of course, sir. They are much as is to be expected. Master is terribly broke down. Miss Hale bears up better than likely.'

Mr. Thornton would rather have heard that she was suffering the natural sorrow. In the first place, there was selfishness enough in him to have taken pleasure in the idea that his great love might come in to comfort and console her; much the same kind of strange passionate pleasure which comes stinging through a mother's heart, when her drooping infant nestles close to her, and is dependent upon her for everything. But this delicious vision of what might have been--in which, in spite of all Margaret's repulse, he would have indulged only a few days ago--was miserably disturbed by the recollection of what he had seen near the Outwood station. 'Miserably disturbed!' that is not strong enough. He was haunted by the remembrance of the handsome young man, with whom she stood in an attitude of such familiar confidence; and the remembrance shot through him like an agony, till it made him clench his hands tight in order to subdue the pain. At that late hour, so far from home! It took a great moral effort to galvanise his trust--erewhile so perfect--in Margaret's pure and exquisite maidenliness, into life; as soon as the effort ceased, his trust dropped down dead and powerless: and all sorts of wild fancies chased each other like dreams through his mind. Here was a little piece of miserable, gnawing confirmation. 'She bore up better than likely' under this grief. She had then some hope to look to, so bright that even in her affectionate nature it could come in to lighten the dark hours of a daughter newly made motherless. Yes! he knew how she would love. He had not loved her without gaining that instinctive knowledge of what capabilities were in her. Her soul would walk in glorious sunlight if any man was worthy, by his power of loving, to win back her love. Even in her mourning she would rest with a peaceful faith upon his sympathy. His sympathy! Whose? That other man's. And that it was another was enough to make Mr. Thornton's pale grave face grow doubly wan and stern at Dixon's answer.

'I suppose I may call,' said he coldly. 'On Mr. Hale, I mean. He will perhaps admit me after to-morrow or so.'

He spoke as if the answer were a matter of indifference to him. But it was not so. For all his pain, he longed to see the author of it. Although he hated Margaret at times, when he thought of that gentle familiar attitude and all the attendant circumstances, he had a restless desire to renew her picture in his mind--a longing for the very atmosphere she breathed. He was in the Charybdis of passion, and must perforce circle and circle ever nearer round the fatal centre.

'I dare say, sir, master will see you. He was very sorry to have to deny you the other day; but circumstances was not agreeable just then.'

For some reason or other, Dixon never named this interview that she had had with Mr. Thornton to Margaret. It might have been mere chance, but so it was that Margaret never heard that he had attended her poor mother's funeral.

CHAPTER IX

FALSE AND TRUE

'Truth will fail thee never, never!

1.

Though thy bark be tempest-driven,
- *Though each plank be rent and riven,*
- *Truth will bear thee on for ever!'*

ANON.

The 'bearing up better than likely' was a terrible strain upon Margaret. Sometimes she thought she must give way, and cry out with pain, as the sudden sharp thought came across her, even during her apparently cheerful conversations with her father, that she had no longer a mother. About Frederick, too, there was great uneasiness. The Sunday post intervened, and interfered with their London letters; and on Tuesday Margaret was surprised and disheartened to find that there was still no letter. She was quite in the dark as to his plans, and her father was miserable at all this uncertainty. It broke in upon his lately acquired habit of sitting still in one easy chair for half a day together. He kept pacing up and down the room; then out of it; and she heard him upon the landing opening and shutting the bed-room doors, without any apparent object. She tried to tranquillise him by reading aloud; but it was evident he could not listen for long together. How thankful she was then, that she had kept to herself the additional cause for anxiety produced by their encounter with Leonards. She was thankful to hear Mr. Thornton announced. His visit would force her father's thoughts into another channel.

He came up straight to her father, whose hands he took and wrung without a word--holding them in his for a minute or two, during which time his face, his eyes, his look, told of more sympathy than could be put into words. Then he turned to Margaret. Not 'better than likely' did she look. Her stately beauty was dimmed with much watching and with many tears. The expression on her countenance was of gentle patient sadness--nay of positive present suffering. He had not meant to greet her otherwise than with his late studied coldness of demeanour; but he could not help going up to her, as she stood a little aside, rendered timid by the uncertainty of his manner of late, and saying the few necessary common-place words in so tender a voice, that her eyes filled with tears, and she turned away to hide her emotion. She took her work and sate down very quiet and silent. Mr. Thornton's heart beat quick and strong, and for the time he utterly forgot the Outwood lane. He tried to talk to Mr. Hale: and--his presence always a certain kind of pleasure to Mr. Hale, as his power and decision made him, and his opinions, a safe, sure port--was unusually agreeable to her father, as Margaret saw.

Presently Dixon came to the door and said, 'Miss Hale, you are wanted.'

Dixon's manner was so flurried that Margaret turned sick at heart. Something had happened to Fred. She had no doubt of that. It was well that her father and Mr. Thornton were so much occupied by their conversation.

'What is it, Dixon?' asked Margaret, the moment she had shut the drawing-room door.

'Come this way, miss,' said Dixon, opening the door of what had been Mrs. Hale's bed-chamber, now Margaret's, for her father refused to sleep there again after his wife's death. 'It's nothing, miss,' said Dixon, choking a little. 'Only a police-inspector. He wants to see you, miss. But I dare say, it's about nothing at all.'

'Did he name--' asked Margaret, almost inaudibly.

'No, miss; he named nothing. He only asked if you lived here, and if he could speak to you. Martha went to the door, and let him in; she has shown him into master's study. I went to him myself, to try if that would do; but no--it's you, miss, he wants.'

Margaret did not speak again till her hand was on the lock of the study door. Here she turned round and said, 'Take care papa does not come down. Mr. Thornton is with him now.'

The inspector was almost daunted by the haughtiness of her manner as she entered. There was something of indignation expressed in her countenance, but so kept down and controlled, that it gave her a superb air of disdain. There was no surprise, no curiosity. She stood awaiting the opening of his business there. Not a question did she ask.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am, but my duty obliges me to ask you a few plain questions. A man has died at the Infirmary, in consequence of a fall, received at Outwood station, between the hours of five and six on Thursday evening, the twenty-sixth instant. At the time, this fall did not seem of much consequence; but it was rendered fatal, the doctors say, by the presence of some internal complaint, and the man's own habit of drinking.'

The large dark eyes, gazing straight into the inspector's face, dilated a little. Otherwise there was no motion perceptible to his experienced observation. Her lips swelled out into a richer curve than ordinary, owing to the enforced tension of the muscles, but he did not know what was their usual appearance, so as to recognise the unwonted sullen defiance of the firm sweeping lines. She never blenched or trembled. She fixed him with her eye. Now--as he paused before going on, she said, almost as if she would encourage him in telling his tale--'Well--go on!'

'It is supposed that an inquest will have to be held; there is some slight evidence to prove that the blow, or push, or scuffle that caused the fall, was provoked by this poor fellow's half-tipsy impertinence to a young lady, walking with the man who pushed the deceased over the edge of the platform. This much was observed by some one on the platform, who, however, thought no more about the matter, as the blow seemed of slight consequence. There is also some reason to identify the lady with yourself; in which case--'

'I was not there,' said Margaret, still keeping her expressionless eyes fixed on his face, with the unconscious look of a sleep-walker.

The inspector bowed but did not speak. The lady standing before him showed no emotion, no fluttering fear, no anxiety, no desire to end the interview. The information he had received was very vague; one of the porters, rushing out to be in readiness for the train, had seen a scuffle, at the other end of the platform, between Leonards and a gentleman accompanied by a lady, but heard no noise; and before the train had got to its full speed after starting, he had been almost knocked down by the headlong run of the enraged half intoxicated Leonards, swearing and cursing awfully. He had not thought any more about it, till his evidence was routed out by the inspector, who, on making some farther inquiry at the railroad station, had heard from the station-master that a young lady and gentleman had been there about that hour--the lady remarkably handsome--and said, by some grocer's assistant present at the time, to be a Miss Hale, living at Crampton, whose family dealt at his shop. There was no certainty that the one lady and gentleman were identical with the other pair, but there was great probability. Leonards himself had gone, half-mad with rage and pain, to the nearest gin-palace for comfort; and his tipsy words had not been attended to by the busy waiters there; they, however, remembered his starting up and cursing himself for not having sooner thought of the electric telegraph, for some purpose unknown; and they believed that he left with the idea of going there. On his way, overcome by pain or drink, he had lain down in the road, where the police had found him and taken him to the Infirmary: there he had never recovered sufficient consciousness to give any distinct account of his fall, although once or twice he had had glimmerings of sense sufficient to make the authorities send for the nearest magistrate, in hopes that he might be able to take down the dying man's deposition of the cause of his death. But when the magistrate had come, he was rambling about being at sea, and mixing up names of captains and lieutenants in an indistinct manner with those of his fellow porters at the railway; and his last words were a curse on the 'Cornish trick' which had, he said, made him a hundred pounds poorer than he ought to have been. The inspector ran all this over in his mind--the vagueness of the evidence to prove that Margaret had been at the station--the unflinching, calm denial which she gave to such a supposition. She stood awaiting his next word with a composure that appeared supreme.

'Then, madam, I have your denial that you were the lady accompanying the gentleman who struck the blow, or gave the push, which caused the death of this poor man?'

A quick, sharp pain went through Margaret's brain. 'Oh God! that I knew Frederick were safe!' A deep observer of human countenances might have seen the momentary agony shoot out of her great gloomy eyes, like the torture of some creature brought to bay. But the inspector though a very keen, was not a very deep observer. He was a little struck, notwithstanding, by the form of the answer, which sounded like a mechanical repetition of her first reply--not changed and modified in shape so as to meet his last question.

'I was not there,' said she, slowly and heavily. And all this time she never closed her eyes, or ceased from that glassy, dream-like stare. His quick suspicions were aroused by this dull echo of her former denial. It was as if she had forced herself to one untruth, and had been stunned out of all power of varying it.

He put up his book of notes in a very deliberate manner. Then he looked up; she had not moved any more than if she had been some great Egyptian statue.

'I hope you will not think me impertinent when I say, that I may have to call on you again. I may have to summon you to appear on the inquest, and prove an alibi, if my witnesses' (it was but one who had recognised her) 'persist in deposing to your presence at the unfortunate event.' He looked at her sharply. She was still perfectly quiet--no change of colour, or darker shadow of guilt, on her proud face. He thought to have seen her wince: he did not know Margaret Hale. He was a little abashed by her regal composure. It must have been a mistake of identity. He went on:

'It is very unlikely, ma'am, that I shall have to do anything of the kind. I hope you will excuse me for doing what is only my duty, although it may appear impertinent.'

Margaret bowed her head as he went towards the door. Her lips were stiff and dry. She could not speak even the common words of farewell. But suddenly she walked forwards, and opened the study door, and preceded him to the door of the house, which she threw wide open for his exit. She kept her eyes upon him in the same dull, fixed manner, until he was fairly out of the house. She shut the door, and went half-way into the study; then turned back, as if moved by some passionate impulse, and locked the door inside.

Then she went into the study, paused--tottered forward--paused again--swayed for an instant where she stood, and fell prone on the floor in a dead swoon.

CHAPTER X

EXPIATION

'There's nought so finely spun

1.

But it cometh to the sun.'

Mr. Thornton sate on and on. He felt that his company gave pleasure to Mr. Hale; and was touched by the half-spoken wishful entreaty that he would remain a little longer--the plaintive 'Don't go yet,' which his poor friend put forth from time to time. He wondered Margaret did not return; but it was with no view of seeing her that he lingered. For the hour--and in the presence of one who was so thoroughly feeling the nothingness of earth--he was reasonable and self-controlled. He was deeply interested in all her father said

1. *'Of death, and of the heavy lull,*
2. *And of the brain that has grown dull.'*

It was curious how the presence of Mr. Thornton had power over Mr. Hale to make him unlock the secret thoughts which he kept shut up even from Margaret. Whether it was that her sympathy would be so keen, and show itself in so lively a manner, that he was afraid of the reaction upon himself, or whether it was that to his speculative mind all kinds of doubts presented themselves at such a time, pleading and crying aloud to be resolved into certainties, and that he knew she would have shrunk from the expression of any such doubts--nay, from him himself as capable of conceiving them--whatever was the reason, he could unburden himself better to Mr. Thornton than to her of all the thoughts and fancies and fears that had been frost-bound in his brain till now. Mr. Thornton said very little; but every sentence he uttered added to Mr. Hale's reliance and regard for him. Was it that he paused in the expression of some remembered agony, Mr. Thornton's two or three words would complete the sentence, and show how deeply its meaning was entered into. Was it a doubt--a fear--a wandering uncertainty seeking rest, but finding none--so tear-blinded were its eyes--Mr. Thornton, instead of being shocked, seemed to have passed through that very stage of thought himself, and could suggest where the exact ray of light was to be found, which should make the dark places plain. Man of action as he was, busy in the world's great battle, there was a deeper religion binding him to

God in his heart, in spite of his strong wilfulness, through all his mistakes, than Mr. Hale had ever dreamed. They never spoke of such things again, as it happened; but this one conversation made them peculiar people to each other; knit them together, in a way which no loose indiscriminate talking about sacred things can ever accomplish. When all are admitted, how can there be a Holy of Holies?

And all this while, Margaret lay as still and white as death on the study floor! She had sunk under her burden. It had been heavy in weight and long carried; and she had been very meek and patient, till all at once her faith had given way, and she had groped in vain for help! There was a pitiful contraction of suffering upon her beautiful brows, although there was no other sign of consciousness remaining. The mouth--a little while ago, so sullenly projected in defiance--was relaxed and livid.

1. *'E par che de la sua labbia si mova*
2. *Uno spirto soave e pien d'amore,*
3. *Chi va dicendo a l'anima: sospira!'*

The first symptom of returning life was a quivering about the lips--a little mute soundless attempt at speech; but the eyes were still closed; and the quivering sank into stillness. Then, feebly leaning on her arms for an instant to steady herself, Margaret gathered herself up, and rose. Her comb had fallen out of her hair; and with an intuitive desire to efface the traces of weakness, and bring herself into order again, she sought for it, although from time to time, in the course of the search, she had to sit down and recover strength. Her head drooped forwards--her hands meekly laid one upon the other--she tried to recall the force of her temptation, by endeavouring to remember the details which had thrown her into such deadly fright; but she could not. She only understood two facts--that Frederick had been in danger of being pursued and detected in London, as not only guilty of manslaughter, but as the more unpardonable leader of the mutiny, and that she had lied to save him. There was one comfort; her lie had saved him, if only by gaining some additional time. If the inspector came again to-morrow, after she had received the letter she longed for to assure her of her brother's safety, she would brave shame, and stand in her bitter penance--she, the lofty Margaret--acknowledging before a crowded justice-room, if need were, that she had been as 'a dog, and done this thing.' But if he came before she heard from Frederick; if he returned, as he had half threatened, in a few hours, why! she would tell that lie again; though how the words would come out, after all this terrible pause for reflection and self-reproach, without betraying her falsehood, she did not know, she could not tell. But her repetition of it would gain time--time for Frederick.

She was roused by Dixon's entrance into the room; she had just been letting out Mr. Thornton.

He had hardly gone ten steps in the street, before a passing omnibus stopped close by him, and a man got down, and came up to him, touching his hat as he did so. It was the police-inspector.

Mr. Thornton had obtained for him his first situation in the police, and had heard from time to time of the progress of his protege, but they had not often met, and at first Mr. Thornton did not remember him.

'My name is Watson--George Watson, sir, that you got----'

'Ah, yes! I recollect. Why you are getting on famously, I hear.'

'Yes, sir. I ought to thank you, sir. But it is on a little matter of business I made so bold as to speak to you now. I believe you were the magistrate who attended to take down the deposition of a poor man who died in the Infirmary last night.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Thornton. 'I went and heard some kind of a rambling statement, which the clerk said was of no great use. I'm afraid he was but a drunken fellow, though there is no doubt he came to his death by violence at last. One of my mother's servants was engaged to him, I believe, and she is in great distress to-day. What about him?'

'Why, sir, his death is oddly mixed up with somebody in the house I saw you coming out of just now; it was a Mr. Hale's, I believe.'

'Yes!' said Mr. Thornton, turning sharp round and looking into the inspector's face with sudden interest. 'What about it?'

'Why, sir, it seems to me that I have got a pretty distinct chain of evidence, inculpating a gentleman who was walking with Miss Hale that night at the Outwood station, as the man who struck or pushed Leonards off the platform and so caused his death. But the young lady denies that she was there at the time.'

'Miss Hale denies she was there!' repeated Mr. Thornton, in an altered voice. 'Tell me, what evening was it? What time?'

'About six o'clock, on the evening of Thursday, the twenty-sixth.'

They walked on, side by side, in silence for a minute or two. The inspector was the first to speak.

'You see, sir, there is like to be a coroner's inquest; and I've got a young man who is pretty positive,--at least he was at first;--since he has heard of the young lady's denial, he says he should not like to swear; but still he's pretty positive that he saw Miss Hale at the station, walking about with a gentleman, not five minutes before the time, when one of the porters saw a scuffle, which he set down to some of Leonards' impudence--but which led to the fall which caused his death. And seeing you come out of the very house, sir, I thought I might make bold to ask if--you see, it's always awkward having to do with cases of disputed identity, and one doesn't like to doubt the word of a respectable young woman unless one has strong proof to the contrary.'

'And she denied having been at the station that evening!' repeated Mr. Thornton, in a low, brooding tone.

'Yes, sir, twice over, as distinct as could be. I told her I should call again, but seeing you just as I was on my way back from questioning the young man who said it was her, I thought I would ask your advice, both as the magistrate who saw Leonards on his death-bed, and as the gentleman who got me my berth in the force.'

'You were quite right,' said Mr. Thornton. 'Don't take any steps till you have seen me again.'

'The young lady will expect me to call, from what I said.'

'I only want to delay you an hour. It's now three. Come to my warehouse at four.'

'Very well, sir!'

And they parted company. Mr. Thornton hurried to his warehouse, and, sternly forbidding his clerks to allow any one to interrupt him, he went his way to his own private room, and locked the door. Then he indulged himself in the torture of thinking it all over, and realising every detail. How could he have lulled himself into the unsuspicious calm in which her tearful image had mirrored itself not two hours before, till he had weakly pitied her and yearned towards her, and forgotten the savage, distrustful jealousy with which the sight of her--and that unknown to him--at such an hour--in such a place--had inspired him! How could one so pure have stooped from her decorous and noble manner of bearing! But was it decorous--was it? He hated himself for the idea that forced itself upon him, just for an instant--no more--and yet, while it was present, thrilled him with its old potency of attraction towards her image. And then this falsehood--how terrible must be some dread of shame to be revealed--for, after all, the provocation given by such a man as Leonards was, when excited by drinking, might, in all probability, be more than enough to justify any one who came forward to state the circumstances openly and without reserve! How creeping and deadly that fear which could bow down the truthful Margaret to falsehood! He could almost pity her. What would be the end of it? She could not have considered all she was entering upon; if there was an inquest and the young man came forward. Suddenly he started up. There should be no inquest. He would save Margaret. He would take the responsibility of preventing the inquest, the issue of which, from the uncertainty of the medical testimony (which he had vaguely heard the night before, from the surgeon in attendance), could be but doubtful; the doctors had discovered an internal disease far advanced, and sure to prove fatal; they had stated that death might have been accelerated by the fall, or by the subsequent drinking and exposure to cold. If he had but known how Margaret would have become involved in the affair--if he had but foreseen that she would have stained her whiteness by a falsehood, he could have saved her by a word; for the question, of inquest or no inquest, had hung trembling in the balance only the night before. Miss Hale might love another--was indifferent and contemptuous to him--but he would yet do her faithful acts of service of which she should never know. He might despise her, but the woman whom he had once loved should be kept from shame; and shame it would be to pledge herself to a lie in a public court, or otherwise to stand and acknowledge her reason for desiring darkness rather than light.

Very gray and stern did Mr. Thornton look, as he passed out through his wondering clerks. He was away about half an hour; and scarcely less stern did he look when he returned, although his errand had been successful.

He wrote two lines on a slip of paper, put it in an envelope, and sealed it up. This he gave to one of the clerks, saying:--

'I appointed Watson--he who was a packer in the warehouse, and who went into the police--to call on me at four o'clock. I have just met with a gentleman from Liverpool who wishes to see me before he leaves town. Take care to give this note to Watson he calls.'

The note contained these words:

'There will be no inquest. Medical evidence not sufficient to justify it. Take no further steps. I have not seen the corner; but I will take the responsibility.'

'Well,' thought Watson, 'it relieves me from an awkward job. None of my witnesses seemed certain of anything except the young woman. She was clear and distinct enough; the porter at the rail-road had seen a scuffle; or when he found it was likely to bring him in as a witness, then it might not have been a scuffle, only a little larking, and Leonards might have jumped off the platform himself;--he would not stick firm to anything. And Jennings, the grocer's shopman,--well, he was not quite so bad, but I doubt if I could have got him up to an oath after he heard that Miss Hale flatly denied it. It would have been a troublesome job and no satisfaction. And now I must go and tell them they won't be wanted.'

He accordingly presented himself again at Mr. Hale's that evening. Her father and Dixon would fain have persuaded Margaret to go to bed; but they, neither of them, knew the reason for her low continued refusals to do so. Dixon had learnt part of the truth-but only part. Margaret would not tell any human being of what she had said, and she did not reveal the fatal termination to Leonards' fall from the platform. So Dixon curiosity combined with her allegiance to urge Margaret to go to rest, which her appearance, as she lay on the sofa, showed but too clearly that she required. She did not speak except when spoken to; she tried to smile back in reply to her father's anxious looks and words of tender enquiry; but, instead of a smile, the wan lips resolved themselves into a sigh. He was so miserably uneasy that, at last, she consented to go into her own room, and prepare for going to bed. She was indeed inclined to give up the idea that the inspector would call again that night, as it was already past nine o'clock.

She stood by her father, holding on to the back of his chair.

'You will go to bed soon, papa, won't you? Don't sit up alone!'

What his answer was she did not hear; the words were lost in the far smaller point of sound that magnified itself to her fears, and filled her brain. There was a low ring at the door-bell.

She kissed her father and glided down stairs, with a rapidity of motion of which no one would have thought her capable, who had seen her the minute before. She put aside Dixon.

'Don't come; I will open the door. I know it is him--I can--I must manage it all myself.'

'As you please, miss!' said Dixon testily; but in a moment afterwards, she added, 'But you're not fit for it. You are more dead than alive.'

'Am I?' said Margaret, turning round and showing her eyes all aglow with strange fire, her cheeks flushed, though her lips were baked and livid still.

She opened the door to the Inspector, and preceded him into the study. She placed the candle on the table, and snuffed it carefully, before she turned round and faced him.

'You are late!' said she. 'Well?' She held her breath for the answer.

'I'm sorry to have given any unnecessary trouble, ma'am; for, after all, they've given up all thoughts of holding an inquest. I have had other work to do and other people to see, or I should have been here before now.'

'Then it is ended,' said Margaret. 'There is to be no further enquiry.'

'I believe I've got Mr. Thornton's note about me,' said the Inspector, fumbling in his pocket-book.

'Mr. Thornton's!' said Margaret.

'Yes! he's a magistrate--ah! here it is.' She could not see to read it--no, not although she was close to the candle. The words swam before her. But she held it in her hand, and looked at it as if she were intently studying it.

'I'm sure, ma'am, it's a great weight off my mind; for the evidence was so uncertain, you see, that the man had received any blow at all,--and if any question of identity came in, it so complicated the case, as I told Mr. Thornton--'

'Mr. Thornton!' said Margaret, again.

'I met him this morning, just as he was coming out of this house, and, as he's an old friend of mine, besides being the magistrate who saw Leonards last night, I made bold to tell him of my difficulty.'

Margaret sighed deeply. She did not want to hear any more; she was afraid alike of what she had heard, and of what she might hear. She wished that the man would go. She forced herself to speak.

'Thank you for calling. It is very late. I dare say it is past ten o'clock. Oh! here is the note!' she continued, suddenly interpreting the meaning of the hand held out to receive it. He was putting it up, when she said, 'I think it is a cramped, dazzling sort of writing. I could not read it; will you just read it to me?'

He read it aloud to her.

'Thank you. You told Mr. Thornton that I was not there?'

'Oh, of course, ma'am. I'm sorry now that I acted upon information, which seems to have been so erroneous. At first the young man was so positive; and now he says that he doubted all along, and hopes that his mistake won't have occasioned you such annoyance as to lose their shop your custom. Good night, ma'am.'

'Good night.' She rang the bell for Dixon to show him out. As Dixon returned up the passage Margaret passed her swiftly.

'It is all right!' said she, without looking at Dixon; and before the woman could follow her with further questions she had sped up-stairs, and entered her bed-chamber, and bolted her door.

She threw herself, dressed as she was, upon her bed. She was too much exhausted to think. Half an hour or more elapsed before the cramped nature of her position, and the chilliness, supervening upon great fatigue, had the power to rouse her numbed faculties. Then she began to recall, to combine, to wonder. The first idea that presented itself to her was, that all this sickening alarm on Frederick's behalf was over; that the strain was past. The next was a wish to remember every word of the Inspector's which related to Mr. Thornton. When had he seen him? What had he said? What had Mr. Thornton done? What were the exact words of his note? And until she could recollect, even to the placing or omitting an article, the very expressions which he had used in the note, her mind refused to go on with its progress. But the next conviction she came to was clear enough;--Mr. Thornton had seen her close to Outwood station on the fatal Thursday night, and had been told of her denial that she was there. She stood as a liar in his eyes. She was a liar. But she had no thought of penitence before God; nothing but chaos and night surrounded the one lurid fact that, in Mr. Thornton's eyes, she was degraded. She cared not to think, even to herself, of how much of excuse she might plead. That had nothing to do with Mr. Thornton; she never dreamed that he, or any one else, could find cause for suspicion in what was so natural as her accompanying her brother; but what was really false and wrong was known to him, and he had a right to judge her. 'Oh, Frederick! Frederick!' she cried, 'what have I not sacrificed for you!' Even when she fell asleep her thoughts were compelled to travel the same circle, only with exaggerated and monstrous circumstances of pain.

When she awoke a new idea flashed upon her with all the brightness of the morning. Mr. Thornton had learnt her falsehood before he went to the coroner; that suggested the thought, that he had possibly been influenced so to do with a view of sparing her the repetition of her denial. But she pushed this notion on one side with the sick wilfulness of a child. If it were so, she felt no gratitude to him, as it only showed her how keenly he must have seen that she was

disgraced already, before he took such unwonted pains to spare her any further trial of truthfulness, which had already failed so signally. She would have gone through the whole--she would have perjured herself to save Frederick, rather--far rather--than Mr. Thornton should have had the knowledge that prompted him to interfere to save her. What ill-fate brought him in contact with the Inspector? What made him be the very magistrate sent for to receive Leonards' deposition? What had Leonards said? How much of it was intelligible to Mr. Thornton, who might already, for aught she knew, be aware of the old accusation against Frederick, through their mutual friend, Mr. Bell? If so, he had striven to save the son, who came in defiance of the law to attend his mother's death-bed. And under this idea she could feel grateful--not yet, if ever she should, if his interference had been prompted by contempt. Oh! had any one such just cause to feel contempt for her? Mr. Thornton, above all people, on whom she had looked down from her imaginary heights till now! She suddenly found herself at his feet, and was strangely distressed at her fall. She shrank from following out the premises to their conclusion, and so acknowledging to herself how much she valued his respect and good opinion. Whenever this idea presented itself to her at the end of a long avenue of thoughts, she turned away from following that path--she would not believe in it.

It was later than she fancied, for in the agitation of the previous night, she had forgotten to wind up her watch; and Mr. Hale had given especial orders that she was not to be disturbed by the usual awakening. By and by the door opened cautiously, and Dixon put her head in. Perceiving that Margaret was awake, she came forwards with a letter.

'Here's something to do you good, miss. A letter from Master Frederick.'

'Thank you, Dixon. How late it is!'

She spoke very languidly, and suffered Dixon to lay it on the counterpane before her, without putting out a hand to lake it.

'You want your breakfast, I'm sure. I will bring it you in a minute. Master has got the tray all ready, I know.'

Margaret did not reply; she let her go; she felt that she must be alone before she could open that letter. She opened it at last. The first thing that caught her eye was the date two days earlier than she received it. He had then written when he had promised, and their alarm might have been spared. But she would read the letter and see. It was hasty enough, but perfectly satisfactory. He had seen Henry Lennox, who knew enough of the case to shake his head over it, in the first instance, and tell him he had done a very daring thing in returning to England, with such an accusation, backed by such powerful influence, hanging over him. But when they had come to talk it over, Mr. Lennox had acknowledged that there might be some chance of his acquittal, if he could but prove his statements by credible witnesses--that in such case it might be worth while to stand his trial, otherwise it would be a great risk. He would examine--he would take every pains. 'It struck me' said Frederick, 'that your introduction, little sister of mine, went a long way. Is it so? He made many inquiries, I can assure you. He seemed a sharp, intelligent fellow, and in good practice too, to judge from the signs of business and the number of clerks about him. But these may be only lawyer's dodges. I have just caught a packet on the point of

sailing--I am off in five minutes. I may have to come back to England again on this business, so keep my visit secret. I shall send my father some rare old sherry, such as you cannot buy in England,--(such stuff as I've got in the bottle before me)! He needs something of the kind--my dear love to him--God bless him. I'm sure--here's my cab. P.S.--What an escape that was! Take care you don't breathe of my having been--not even to the Shaws.'

Margaret turned to the envelope; it was marked 'Too late.' The letter had probably been trusted to some careless waiter, who had forgotten to post it. Oh! what slight cobwebs of chances stand between us and Temptation! Frederick had been safe, and out of England twenty, nay, thirty hours ago; and it was only about seventeen hours since she had told a falsehood to baffle pursuit, which even then would have been vain. How faithless she had been! Where now was her proud motto, 'Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra?' If she had but dared to bravely tell the truth as regarded herself, defying them to find out what she refused to tell concerning another, how light of heart she would now have felt! Not humbled before God, as having failed in trust towards Him; not degraded and abased in Mr. Thornton's sight. She caught herself up at this with a miserable tremor; here was she classing his low opinion of her alongside with the displeasure of God. How was it that he haunted her imagination so persistently? What could it be? Why did she care for what he thought, in spite of all her pride in spite of herself? She believed that she could have borne the sense of Almighty displeasure, because He knew all, and could read her penitence, and hear her. cries for help in time to come. But Mr. Thornton--why did she tremble, and hide her face in the pillow? What strong feeling had overtaken her at last?

She sprang out of bed and prayed long and earnestly. It soothed and comforted her so to open her heart. But as soon as she reviewed her position she found the sting was still there; that she was not good enough, nor pure enough to be indifferent to the lowered opinion of a fellow creature; that the thought of how he must be looking upon her with contempt, stood between her and her sense of wrong-doing. She took her letter in to her father as soon as she was drest. There was so slight an allusion to their alarm at the rail-road station, that Mr. Hale passed over it without paying any attention to it. Indeed, beyond the mere fact of Frederick having sailed undiscovered and unsuspected, he did not gather much from the letter at the time, he was so uneasy about Margaret's pallid looks. She seemed continually on the point of weeping.

'You are sadly overdone, Margaret. It is no wonder. But you must let me nurse you now.'

He made her lie down on the sofa, and went for a shawl to cover her with. His tenderness released her tears; and she cried bitterly.

'Poor child!--poor child!' said he, looking fondly at her, as she lay with her face to the wall, shaking with her sobs. After a while they ceased, and she began to wonder whether she durst give herself the relief of telling her father of all her trouble. But there were more reasons against it than for it. The only one for it was the relief to herself; and against it was the thought that it would add materially to her father's nervousness, if it were indeed necessary for Frederick to come to England again; that he would dwell on the circumstance of his son's having caused the death of a man, however unwittingly and unwillingly; that this knowledge would perpetually recur to trouble him, in various shapes of exaggeration and distortion from the simple truth. And about her own great fault--he would be distressed beyond measure at her want of courage and

faith, yet perpetually troubled to make excuses for her. Formerly Margaret would have come to him as priest as well as father, to tell him of her temptation and her sin; but latterly they had not spoken much on such subjects; and she knew not how, in his change of opinions, he would reply if the depth of her soul called unto his. No; she would keep her secret, and bear the burden alone. Alone she would go before God, and cry for His absolution. Alone she would endure her disgraced position in the opinion of Mr. Thornton. She was unspeakably touched by the tender efforts of her father to think of cheerful subjects on which to talk, and so to take her thoughts away from dwelling on all that had happened of late. It was some months since he had been so talkative as he was this day. He would not let her sit up, and offended Dixon desperately by insisting on waiting upon her himself.

At last she smiled; a poor, weak little smile; but it gave him the truest pleasure.

'It seems strange to think, that what gives us most hope for the future should be called Dolores,' said Margaret. The remark was more in character with her father than with her usual self; but to-day they seemed to have changed natures.

'Her mother was a Spaniard, I believe: that accounts for her religion. Her father was a stiff Presbyterian when I knew him. But it is a very soft and pretty name.'

'How young she is!--younger by fourteen months than I am. Just, the age that Edith was when she was engaged to Captain Lennox. Papa, we will go and see them in Spain.'

He shook his head. But he said, 'If you wish it, Margaret. Only let us come back here. It would seem unfair--unkind to your mother, who always, I'm afraid, disliked Milton so much, if we left it now she is lying here, and cannot go with us. No, dear; you shall go and see them, and bring me back a report of my Spanish daughter.'

'No, papa, I won't go without you. Who is to take care of you when I am gone?'

'I should like to know which of us is taking care of the other. But if you went, I should persuade Mr. Thornton to let me give him double lessons. We would work up the classics famously. That would be a perpetual interest. You might go on, and see Edith at Corfu, if you liked.'

Margaret did not speak all at once. Then she said rather gravely: 'Thank you, papa. But I don't want to go. We will hope that Mr. Lennox will manage so well, that Frederick may bring Dolores to see us when they are married. And as for Edith, the regiment won't remain much longer in Corfu. Perhaps we shall see both of them here before another year is out.'

Mr. Hale's cheerful subjects had come to an end. Some painful recollection had stolen across his mind, and driven him into silence. By-and-by Margaret said:

'Papa--did you see Nicholas Higgins at the funeral? He was there, and Mary too. Poor fellow! it was his way of showing sympathy. He has a good warm heart under his bluff abrupt ways.'

'I am sure of it,' replied Mr. Hale. 'I saw it all along, even while you tried to persuade me that he was all sorts of bad things. We will go and see them to-morrow, if you are strong enough to walk so far.'

'Oh yes. I want to see them. We did not pay Mary--or rather she refused to take it, Dixon says. We will go so as to catch him just after his dinner, and before he goes to his work.'

Towards evening Mr. Hale said:

'I half expected Mr. Thornton would have called. He spoke of a book yesterday which he had, and which I wanted to see. He said he would try and bring it to-day.'

Margaret sighed. She knew he would not come. He would be too delicate to run the chance of meeting her, while her shame must be so fresh in his memory. The very mention of his name renewed her trouble, and produced a relapse into the feeling of depressed, pre-occupied exhaustion. She gave way to listless languor. Suddenly it struck her that this was a strange manner to show her patience, or to reward her father for his watchful care of her all through the day. She sate up and offered to read aloud. His eyes were failing, and he gladly accepted her proposal. She read well: she gave the due emphasis; but had any one asked her, when she had ended, the meaning of what she had been reading, she could not have told. She was smitten with a feeling of ingratitude to Mr. Thornton, inasmuch as, in the morning, she had refused to accept the kindness he had shown her in making further inquiry from the medical men, so as to obviate any inquest being held. Oh! she was grateful! She had been cowardly and false, and had shown her cowardliness and falsehood in action that could not be recalled; but she was not ungrateful. It sent a glow to her heart, to know how she could feel towards one who had reason to despise her. His cause for contempt was so just, that she should have respected him less if she had thought he did not feel contempt. It was a pleasure to feel how thoroughly she respected him. He could not prevent her doing that; it was the one comfort in all this misery.

Late in the evening, the expected book arrived, 'with Mr. Thornton's kind regards, and wishes to know how Mr. Hale is.'

'Say that I am much better, Dixon, but that Miss Hale--'

'No, papa,' said Margaret, eagerly--'don't say anything about me. He does not ask.'

'My dear child, how you are shivering!' said her father, a few minutes afterwards. 'You must go to bed directly. You have turned quite pale!'

Margaret did not refuse to go, though she was loth to leave her father alone. She needed the relief of solitude after a day of busy thinking, and busier repenting.

But she seemed much as usual the next day; the lingering gravity and sadness, and the occasional absence of mind, were not unnatural symptoms in the early days of grief And almost in proportion to her re-establishment in health, was her father's relapse into his abstracted musing upon the wife he had lost, and the past era in his life that was closed to him for ever.

CHAPTER XI

UNION NOT ALWAYS STRENGTH

1.

'The steps of the bearers, heavy and slow,
- *The sobs of the mourners, deep and low.'*

SHELLEY.

At the time arranged the previous day, they set out on their walk to see Nicholas Higgins and his daughter. They both were reminded of their recent loss, by a strange kind of shyness in their new habiliments, and in the fact that it was the first time, for many weeks, that they had deliberately gone out together. They drew very close to each other in unspoken sympathy.

Nicholas was sitting by the fire-side in his accustomed corner: but he had not his accustomed pipe. He was leaning his head upon his hand, his arm resting on his knee. He did not get up when he saw them, though Margaret could read the welcome in his eye.

'Sit ye down, sit ye down. Fire's welly out,' said he, giving it a vigorous poke, as if to turn attention away from himself. He was rather disorderly, to be sure, with a black unshaven beard of several days' growth, making his pale face look yet paler, and a jacket which would have been all the better for patching.

'We thought we should have a good chance of finding you, just after dinner-time,' said Margaret.

'We have had our sorrow too, since we saw you,' said Mr. Hale.

'Ay, ay. Sorrows is more plentiful than dinners just now; I reckon, my dinner hour stretches all o'er the day; yo're pretty sure of finding me.'

'Are you out of work?' asked Margaret.

'Ay,' he replied shortly. Then, after a moment's silence, he added, looking up for the first time: 'I'm not wanting brass. Dunno yo' think it. Bess, poor lass, had a little stock under her pillow, ready to slip into my hand, last moment, and Mary is fustian-cutting. But I'm out o' work a' the same.'

'We owe Mary some money,' said Mr. Hale, before Margaret's sharp pressure on his arm could arrest the words.

'If hoo takes it, I'll turn her out o' doors. I'll bide inside these four walls, and she'll bide out. That's a'.'

'But we owe her many thanks for her kind service,' began Mr. Hale again.

'I ne'er thanked yo'r daughter theer for her deeds o' love to my poor wench. I ne'er could find th' words. I'se have to begin and try now, if yo' start making an ado about what little Mary could sarve yo'.'

'Is it because of the strike you're out of work?' asked Margaret gently.

'Strike's ended. It's o'er for this time. I'm out o' work because I ne'er asked for it. And I ne'er asked for it, because good words is scarce, and bad words is plentiful.'

He was in a mood to take a surly pleasure in giving answers that were like riddles. But Margaret saw that he would like to be asked for the explanation.

'And good words are--?'

'Asking for work. I reckon them's almost the best words that men can say. "Gi' me work" means "and I'll do it like a man. Them's good words.'

'And bad words are refusing you work when you ask for it.'

'Ay. Bad words is saying "Aha, my fine chap! Yo've been true to yo'r order, and I'll be true to mine. Yo' did the best yo' could for them as wanted help; that's yo'r way of being true to yo'r kind; and I'll be true to mine. Yo've been a poor fool, as knowed no better nor be a true faithful fool. So go and be d--d to yo'. There's no work for yo' here." Them's bad words. I'm not a fool; and if I was, folk ought to ha' taught me how to be wise after their fashion. I could mappen ha' learnt, if any one had tried to teach me.'

'Would it not be worth while,' said Mr. Hale, 'to ask your old master if he would take you back again? It might be a poor chance, but it would be a chance.'

He looked up again, with a sharp glance at the questioner; and then tittered a low and bitter laugh.

'Measter! if it's no offence, I'll ask yo' a question or two in my turn.'

'You're quite welcome,' said Mr. Hale.

'I reckon yo'n some way of earning your bread. Folk seldom lives i' Milton lust for pleasure, if they can live anywhere else.'

'You are quite right. I have some independent property, but my intention in settling in Milton was to become a private tutor.'

'To teach folk. Well! I reckon they pay yo' for teaching them, dunnot they?'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Hale, smiling. 'I teach in order to get paid.'

'And them that pays yo', dun they tell yo' whatten to do, or whatten not to do wi' the money they gives you in just payment for your pains--in fair exchange like?'

'No; to be sure not!'

'They dunnot say, "Yo' may have a brother, or a friend as dear as a brother, who wants this here brass for a purpose both yo' and he think right; but yo' mun promise not give it to him. Yo' may see a good use, as yo' think, to put yo'r money to; but we don't think it good, and so if yo' spend it a-thatens we'll just leave off dealing with yo'." They dunnot say that, dun they?'

'No: to be sure not!'

'Would yo' stand it if they did?'

'It would be some very hard pressure that would make me even think of submitting to such dictation.'

'There's not the pressure on all the broad earth that would make me, said Nicholas Higgins. 'Now yo've got it. Yo've hit the bull's eye. Hamper's--that's where I worked--makes their men pledge 'emselves they'll not give a penny to help th' Union or keep turnouts fro' clemming. They may pledge and make pledge,' continued he, scornfully; 'they nobbut make liars and hypocrites. And that's a less sin, to my mind, to making men's hearts so hard that they'll not do a kindness to them as needs it, or help on the right and just cause, though it goes again the strong hand. But I'll ne'er forswear mysel' for a' the work the king could gi'e me. I'm a member o' the Union; and I think it's the only thing to do the workman any good. And I've been a turn-out, and known what it were to clem; so if I get a shilling, sixpence shall go to them if they axe it from me. Consequence is, I dunnot see where I'm to get a shilling.'

'Is that rule about not contributing to the Union in force at all the mills?' asked Margaret.

'I cannot say. It's a new regulation at ourn; and I reckon they'll find that they cannot stick to it. But it's in force now. By-and-by they'll find out, tyrants makes liars.'

There was a little pause. Margaret was hesitating whether she should say what was in her mind; she was unwilling to irritate one who was already gloomy and despondent enough. At last out it came. But in her soft tones, and with her reluctant manner, showing that she was unwilling to say anything unpleasant, it did not seem to annoy Higgins, only to perplex him.

'Do you remember poor Boucher saying that the Union was a tyrant? I think he said it was the worst tyrant of all. And I remember at the time I agreed with him.'

It was a long while before he spoke. He was resting his head on his two hands, and looking down into the fire, so she could not read the expression on his face.

'I'll not deny but what th' Union finds it necessary to force a man into his own good. I'll speak truth. A man leads a dree life who's not i' th' Union. But once i' the' Union, his interests are taken care on better nor he could do it for himsel', or by himsel', for that matter. It's the only way working men can get their rights, by all joining together. More the members, more chance for each one separate man having justice done him. Government takes care o' fools and madmen; and if any man is inclined to do himsel' or his neighbour a hurt, it puts a bit of a check on him, whether he likes it or no. That's all we do i' th' Union. We can't clap folk into prison; but we can make a man's life so heavy to be borne, that he's obliged to come in, and be wise and helpful in spite of himself. Boucher were a fool all along, and ne'er a worse fool than at th' last.'

'He did you harm?' asked Margaret.

'Ay, that did he. We had public opinion on our side, till he and his sort began rioting and breaking laws. It were all o'er wi' the strike then.'

'Then would it not have been far better to have left him alone, and not forced him to join the Union? He did you no good; and you drove him mad.'

'Margaret,' said her father, in a low and warning tone, for he saw the cloud gathering on Higgins's face.

'I like her,' said Higgins, suddenly. 'Hoo speaks plain out what's in her mind. Hoo doesn't comprehend th' Union for all that. It's a great power: it's our only power. I ha' read a bit o' poetry about a plough going o'er a daisy, as made tears come into my eyes, afore I'd other cause for crying. But the chap ne'er stopped driving the plough, I'se warrant, for all he were pitiful about the daisy. He'd too much mother-wit for that. Th' Union's the plough, making ready the land for harvest-time. Such as Boucher--'twould be settin' him up too much to liken him to a daisy; he's liker a weed lounging over the ground--mun just make up their mind to be put out o'

the way. I'm sore vexed wi' him just now. So, mappen, I dunnot speak him fair. I could go o'er him wi' a plough mysel', wi' a' the pleasure in life.'

'Why? What has he been doing? Anything fresh?'

'Ay, to be sure. He's ne'er out o' mischief, that man. First of a' he must go raging like a mad fool, and kick up yon riot. Then he'd to go into hiding, where he'd a been yet, if Thornton had followed him out as I'd hoped he would ha' done. But Thornton, having got his own purpose, didn't care to go on wi' the prosecution for the riot. So Boucher slunk back again to his house. He ne'er showed himsel' abroad for a day or two. He had that grace. And then, where think ye that he went? Why, to Hamper's. Damn him! He went wi' his mealy-mouthed face, that turns me sick to look at, a-asking for work, though he knowed well enough the new rule, o' pledging themselves to give nought to th' Unions; nought to help the starving turn-out! Why he'd a clemmed to death, if th' Union had na helped him in his pinch. There he went, ossing to promise aught, and pledge himsel' to aught--to tell a' he know'd on our proceedings, the good-for-nothing Judas! But I'll say this for Hamper, and thank him for it at my dying day, he drove Boucher away, and would na listen to him--ne'er a word--though folk standing by, says the traitor cried like a babby!'

'Oh! how shocking! how pitiful!' exclaimed Margaret. 'Higgins, I don't know you to-day. Don't you see how you've made Boucher what he is, by driving him into the Union against his will--without his heart going with it. You have made him what he is!'

Made him what he is! What was he?

Gathering, gathering along the narrow street, came a hollow, measured sound; now forcing itself on their attention. Many voices were hushed and low: many steps were heard not moving onwards, at least not with any rapidity or steadiness of motion, but as if circling round one spot. Yes, there was one distinct, slow tramp of feet, which made itself a clear path through the air, and reached their ears; the measured laboured walk of men carrying a heavy burden. They were all drawn towards the house-door by some irresistible impulse; impelled thither--not by a poor curiosity, but as if by some solemn blast.

Six men walked in the middle of the road, three of them being policemen. They carried a door, taken off its hinges, upon their shoulders, on which lay some dead human creature; and from each side of the door there were constant droppings. All the street turned out to see, and, seeing, to accompany the procession, each one questioning the bearers, who answered almost reluctantly at last, so often had they told the tale.

'We found him i' th' brook in the field beyond there.'

'Th' brook!--why there's not water enough to drown him!'

'He was a determined chap. He lay with his face downwards. He was sick enough o' living, choose what cause he had for it.'

Higgins crept up to Margaret's side, and said in a weak piping kind of voice: 'It's not John Boucher? He had na spunk enough. Sure! It's not John Boucher! Why, they are a' looking this way! Listen! I've a singing in my head, and I cannot hear.'

They put the door down carefully upon the stones, and all might see the poor drowned wretch--his glassy eyes, one half-open, staring right upwards to the sky. Owing to the position in which he had been found lying, his face was swollen and discoloured besides, his skin was stained by the water in the brook, which had been used for dyeing purposes. The fore part of his head was bald; but the hair grew thin and long behind, and every separate lock was a conduit for water. Through all these disfigurements, Margaret recognised John Boucher. It seemed to her so sacrilegious to be peering into that poor distorted, agonised face, that, by a flash of instinct, she went forwards and softly covered the dead man's countenance with her handkerchief. The eyes that saw her do this followed her, as she turned away from her pious office, and were thus led to the place where Nicholas Higgins stood, like one rooted to the spot. The men spoke together, and then one of them came up to Higgins, who would have fain shrunk back into his house.

'Higgins, thou knowed him! Thou mun go tell the wife. Do it gently, man, but do it quick, for we canna leave him here long.'

'I canna go,' said Higgins. 'Dunnot ask me. I canna face her.'

'Thou knows her best,' said the man. 'We'n done a deal in bringing him here--thou take thy share.'

'I canna do it,' said Higgins. 'I'm welly felled wi' seeing him. We wasn't friends; and now he's dead.'

'Well, if thou wunnot thou wunnot. Some one mun, though. It's a dree task; but it's a chance, every minute, as she doesn't hear on it in some rougher way nor a person going to make her let on by degrees, as it were.'

'Papa, do you go,' said Margaret, in a low voice.

'If I could--if I had time to think of what I had better say; but all at once----' Margaret saw that her father was indeed unable. He was trembling from head to foot.

'I will go,' said she.

'Bless yo', miss, it will be a kind act; for she's been but a sickly sort of body, I hear, and few hereabouts know much on her.'

Margaret knocked at the closed door; but there was such a noise, as of many little ill-ordered children, that she could hear no reply; indeed, she doubted if she was heard, and as every moment of delay made her recoil from her task more and more, she opened the door and went in, shutting it after her, and even, unseen to the woman, fastening the bolt.

Mrs. Boucher was sitting in a rocking-chair, on the other side of the ill-redd-up fireplace; it looked as if the house had been untouched for days by any effort at cleanliness.

Margaret said something, she hardly knew what, her throat and mouth were so dry, and the children's noise completely prevented her from being heard. She tried again.

'How are you, Mrs. Boucher? But very poorly, I'm afraid.'

'I've no chance o' being well,' said she querulously. 'I'm left alone to manage these childer, and nought for to give 'em for to keep 'em quiet. John should na ha' left me, and me so poorly.'

'How long is it since he went away?'

'Four days sin'. No one would give him work here, and he'd to go on tramp toward Greenfield. But he might ha' been back afore this, or sent me some word if he'd getten work. He might----'

'Oh, don't blame him,' said Margaret. 'He felt it deeply, I'm sure----'

'Willto' hold thy din, and let me hear the lady speak!' addressing herself, in no very gentle voice, to a little urchin of about a year old. She apologetically continued to Margaret, 'He's always mithering me for "daddy" and "butty;" and I ha' no butties to give him, and daddy's away, and forgotten us a', I think. He's his father's darling, he is,' said she, with a sudden turn of mood, and, dragging the child up to her knee, she began kissing it fondly.

Margaret laid her hand on the woman's arm to arrest her attention. Their eyes met.

'Poor little fellow!' said Margaret, slowly; 'he was his father's darling.'

'He is his father's darling,' said the woman, rising hastily, and standing face to face with Margaret. Neither of them spoke for a moment or two. Then Mrs. Boucher began in a low, growling tone, gathering in wildness as she went on: He is his father's darling, I say. Poor folk can love their childer as well as rich. Why dunno yo' speak? Why dun yo' stare at me wi' your great pitiful eyes? Where's John?' Weak as she was, she shook Margaret to force out an answer. 'Oh, my God!' said she, understanding the meaning of that tearful look. She sank hack into the chair. Margaret took up the child and put him into her arms.

'He loved him,' said she.

'Ay,' said the woman, shaking her head, 'he loved us a'. We had some one to love us once. It's a long time ago; but when he were in life and with us, he did love us, he did. He loved this babby mappen the best on us; but he loved me and I loved him, though I was calling him five minutes agone. Are yo' sure he's dead?' said she, trying to get up. 'If it's only that he's ill and like to die, they may bring him round yet. I'm but an ailing creature mysel'--I've been ailing this long time.'

'But he is dead--he is drowned!'

'Folk are brought round after they're dead-drowned. Whatten was I thinking of, to sit still when I should be stirring mysel'? Here, whisth thee, child--whisth thee! tak' this, tak' aught to play wi', but dunnot cry while my heart's breaking! Oh, where is my strength gone to? Oh, John--husband!'

Margaret saved her from falling by catching her in her arms. She sate down in the rocking chair, and held the woman upon her knees, her head lying on Margaret's shoulder. The other children, clustered together in affright, began to understand the mystery of the scene; but the ideas came slowly, for their brains were dull and languid of perception. They set up such a cry of despair as they guessed the truth, that Margaret knew not how to bear it. Johnny's cry was loudest of them all, though he knew not why he cried, poor little fellow.

The mother quivered as she lay in Margaret's arms. Margaret heard a noise at the door.

'Open it. Open it quick,' said she to the eldest child. 'It's bolted; make no noise--be very still. Oh, papa, let them go upstairs very softly and carefully, and perhaps she will not hear them. She has fainted--that's all.'

'It's as well for her, poor creature,' said a woman following in the wake of the bearers of the dead. 'But yo're not fit to hold her. Stay, I'll run fetch a pillow and we'll let her down easy on the floor.'

This helpful neighbour was a great relief to Margaret; she was evidently a stranger to the house, a new-comer in the district, indeed; but she was so kind and thoughtful that Margaret felt she was no longer needed; and that it would be better, perhaps, to set an example of clearing the house, which was filled with idle, if sympathising gazers.

She looked round for Nicholas Higgins. He was not there. So she spoke to the woman who had taken the lead in placing Mrs. Boucher on the floor.

'Can you give all these people a hint that they had better leave in quietness? So that when she comes round, she should only find one or two that she knows about her. Papa, will you speak to the men, and get them to go away? She cannot breathe, poor thing, with this crowd about her.'

Margaret was kneeling down by Mrs. Boucher and bathing he face with vinegar; but in a few minutes she was surprised at the gush of fresh air. She looked round, and saw a smile pass between her father and the woman.

'What is it?' asked she.

'Only our good friend here,' replied her father, 'hit on a capital expedient for clearing the place.'

'I bid 'em begone, and each take a child with 'em, and to mind that they were orphans, and their mother a widow. It was who could do most, and the childer are sure of a bellyful to-day, and of kindness too. Does hoo know how he died?'

'No,' said Margaret; 'I could not tell her all at once.'

'Hoo mun be told because of th' Inquest. See! Hoo's coming round; shall you or I do it? or mappen your father would be best?'

'No; you, you,' said Margaret.

They awaited her perfect recovery in silence. Then the neighbour woman sat down on the floor, and took Mrs. Boucher's head and shoulders on her lap.

'Neighbour,' said she, 'your man is dead. Guess yo' how he died?'

'He were drowned,' said Mrs. Boucher, feebly, beginning to cry for the first time, at this rough probing of her sorrows.

'He were found drowned. He were coming home very hopeless o' aught on earth. He thought God could na be harder than men; mappen not so hard; mappen as tender as a mother; mappen tenderer. I'm not saying he did right, and I'm not saying he did wrong. All I say is, may neither me nor mine ever have his sore heart, or we may do like things.'

'He has left me alone wi' a' these children!' moaned the widow, less distressed at the manner of the death than Margaret expected; but it was of a piece with her helpless character to feel his loss as principally affecting herself and her children.

'Not alone,' said Mr. Hale, solemnly. 'Who is with you? Who will take up your cause?' The widow opened her eyes wide, and looked at the new speaker, of whose presence she had not been aware till then.

'Who has promised to be a father to the fatherless?' continued he.

'But I've getten six children, sir, and the eldest not eight years of age. I'm not meaning for to doubt His power, sir,--only it needs a deal o' trust;' and she began to cry afresh.

'Hoo'll be better able to talk to-morrow, sir,' said the neighbour. 'Best comfort now would be the feel of a child at her heart. I'm sorry they took the babby.'

'I'll go for it,' said Margaret. And in a few minutes she returned, carrying Johnnie, his face all smeared with eating, and his hands loaded with treasures in the shape of shells, and bits of crystal, and the head of a plaster figure. She placed him in his mother's arms.

'There!' said the woman, 'now you go. They'll cry together, and comfort together, better nor any one but a child can do. I'll stop with her as long as I'm needed, and if yo' come to-morrow, yo' can have a deal o' wise talk with her, that she's not up to to-day.'

As Margaret and her father went slowly up the street, she paused at Higgins's closed door.

'Shall we go in?' asked her father. 'I was thinking of him too.'

They knocked. There was no answer, so they tried the door. It was bolted, but they thought they heard him moving within.

'Nicholas!' said Margaret. There was no answer, and they might have gone away, believing the house to be empty, if there had not been some accidental fall, as of a book, within.

'Nicholas!' said Margaret again. 'It is only us. Won't you let us come in?'

'No,' said he. 'I spoke as plain as I could, 'bout using words, when I bolted th' door. Let me be, this day.'

Mr. Hale would have urged their desire, but Margaret placed her finger on his lips.

'I don't wonder at it,' said she. 'I myself long to be alone. It seems the only thing to do one good after a day like this.'

CHAPTER XII

LOOKING SOUTH

'A spade! a rake! a hoe!

1.

A pickaxe or a bill!

- *A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,*
- *A flail, or what ye will--*
- *And here's a ready hand*

- *To ply the needful tool,*
- *And skill'd enough, by lessons rough,*
- *In Labour's rugged school.'*

HOOD.

Higgins's door was locked the next day, when they went to pay their call on the widow Boucher: but they learnt this time from an officious neighbour, that he was really from home. He had, however, been in to see Mrs. Boucher, before starting on his day's business, whatever that was. It was but an unsatisfactory visit to Mrs. Boucher; she considered herself as an ill-used woman by her poor husband's suicide; and there was quite germ of truth enough in this idea to make it a very difficult one to refute. Still, it was unsatisfactory to see how completely her thoughts were turned upon herself and her own position, and this selfishness extended even to her relations with her children, whom she considered as incumbrances, even in the very midst of her somewhat animal affection for them. Margaret tried to make acquaintances with one or two of them, while her father strove to raise the widow's thoughts into some higher channel than that of mere helpless querulousness. She found that the children were truer and simpler mourners than the widow. Daddy had been a kind daddy to them; each could tell, in their eager stammering way, of some tenderness shown some indulgence granted by the lost father.

'Is yon thing upstairs really him? it doesna look like him. I'm feared on it, and I never was feared o' daddy.'

Margaret's heart bled to hear that the mother, in her selfish requirement of sympathy, had taken her children upstairs to see their disfigured father. It was intermingling the coarseness of horror with the profoundness of natural grief She tried to turn their thoughts in some other direction; on what they could do for mother; on what--for this was a more efficacious way of putting it--what father would have wished them to do. Margaret was more successful than Mr. Hale in her efforts. The children seeing their little duties lie in action close around them, began to try each one to do something that she suggested towards redding up the slatternly room. But her father set too high a standard, and too abstract a view, before the indolent invalid. She could not rouse her torpid mind into any vivid imagination of what her husband's misery might have been before he had resorted to the last terrible step; she could only look upon it as it affected herself; she could not enter into the enduring mercy of the God who had not specially interposed to prevent the water from drowning her prostrate husband; and although she was secretly blaming her husband for having fallen into such drear despair, and denying that he had any excuse for his last rash act, she was inveterate in her abuse of all who could by any possibility be supposed to have driven him to such desperation. The masters--Mr. Thornton in particular, whose mill had been attacked by Boucher, and who, after the warrant had been issued for his apprehension on the charge of rioting, had caused it to be withdrawn,--the Union, of which Higgins was the representative to the poor woman,--the children so numerous, so hungry, and so

noisy--all made up one great army of personal enemies, whose fault it was that she was now a helpless widow.

Margaret heard enough of this unreasonableness to dishearten her; and when they came away she found it impossible to cheer her father.

'It is the town life,' said she. 'Their nerves are quickened by the haste and bustle and speed of everything around them, to say nothing of the confinement in these pent-up houses, which of itself is enough to induce depression and worry of spirits. Now in the country, people live so much more out of doors, even children, and even in the winter.'

'But people must live in towns. And in the country some get such stagnant habits of mind that they are almost fatalists.'

'Yes; I acknowledge that. I suppose each mode of life produces its own trials and its own temptations. The dweller in towns must find it as difficult to be patient and calm, as the country-bred man must find it to be active, and equal to unwonted emergencies. Both must find it hard to realise a future of any kind; the one because the present is so living and hurrying and close around him; the other because his life tempts him to revel in the mere sense of animal existence, not knowing of, and consequently not caring for any pungency of pleasure for the attainment of which he can plan, and deny himself and look forward.'

'And thus both the necessity for engrossment, and the stupid content in the present, produce the same effects. But this poor Mrs. Boucher! how little we can do for her.'

'And yet we dare not leave her without our efforts, although they may seem so useless. Oh papa! it's a hard world to live in!'

'So it is, my child. We feel it so just now, at any rate; but we have been very happy, even in the midst of our sorrow. What a pleasure Frederick's visit was!'

'Yes, that it was,' said Margaret; brightly. 'It was such a charming, snatched, forbidden thing.' But she suddenly stopped speaking. She had spoiled the remembrance of Frederick's visit to herself by her own cowardice. Of all faults the one she most despised in others was the want of bravery; the meanness of heart which leads to untruth. And here had she been guilty of it! Then came the thought of Mr. Thornton's cognisance of her falsehood. She wondered if she should have minded detection half so much from any one else. She tried herself in imagination with her Aunt Shaw and Edith; with her father; with Captain and Mr. Lennox; with Frederick. The thought of the last knowing what she had done, even in his own behalf, was the most painful, for the brother and sister were in the first flush of their mutual regard and love; but even any fall in Frederick's opinion was as nothing to the shame, the shrinking shame she felt at the thought of meeting Mr. Thornton again. And yet she longed to see him, to get it over; to understand where she stood in his opinion. Her cheeks burnt as she recollected how proudly she had implied an objection to trade (in the early days of their acquaintance), because it too often led to the deceit of passing off inferior for superior goods, in the one branch; of assuming credit for wealth and resources not possessed, in the other. She remembered Mr. Thornton's look of calm disdain, as

in few words he gave her to understand that, in the great scheme of commerce, all dishonourable ways of acting were sure to prove injurious in the long run, and that, testing such actions simply according to the poor standard of success, there was folly and not wisdom in all such, and every kind of deceit in trade, as well as in other things. She remembered--she, then strong in her own untempted truth--asking him, if he did not think that buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market proved some want of the transparent justice which is so intimately connected with the idea of truth: and she had used the word chivalric--and her father had corrected her with the higher word, Christian; and so drawn the argument upon himself, while she sate silent by with a slight feeling of contempt.

No more contempt for her!--no more talk about the chivalric! Henceforward she must feel humiliated and disgraced in his sight. But when should she see him? Her heart leaped up in apprehension at every ring of the door-bell; and yet when it fell down to calmness, she felt strangely saddened and sick at heart at each disappointment. It was very evident that her father expected to see him, and was surprised that he did not come. The truth was, that there were points in their conversation the other night on which they had no time then to enlarge; but it had been understood that if possible on the succeeding evening--if not then, at least the very first evening that Mr. Thornton could command,--they should meet for further discussion. Mr. Hale had looked forward to this meeting ever since they had parted. He had not yet resumed the instruction to his pupils, which he had relinquished at the commencement of his wife's more serious illness, so he had fewer occupations than usual; and the great interest of the last day or so (Boucher's suicide) had driven him back with more eagerness than ever upon his speculations. He was restless all evening. He kept saying, 'I quite expected to have seen Mr. Thornton. I think the messenger who brought the book last night must have had some note, and forgot to deliver it. Do you think there has been any message left to-day?'

'I will go and inquire, papa,' said Margaret, after the changes on these sentences had been rung once or twice. 'Stay, there's a ring!' She sate down instantly, and bent her head attentively over her work. She heard a step on the stairs, but it was only one, and she knew it was Dixon's. She lifted up her head and sighed, and believed she felt glad.

'It's that Higgins, sir. He wants to see you, or else Miss Hale. Or it might be Miss Hale first, and then you, sir; for he's in a strange kind of way.

'He had better come up here, Dixon; and then he can see us both, and choose which he likes for his listener.'

'Oh! very well, sir. I've no wish to hear what he's got to say, I'm sure; only, if you could see his shoes, I'm sure you'd say the kitchen was the fitter place.

'He can wipe them, I suppose, said Mr. Hale. So Dixon flung off, to bid him walk up-stairs. She was a little mollified, however, when he looked at his feet with a hesitating air; and then, sitting down on the;bottom stair, he took off the offending shoes, and without a word walked up-stairs.

'Sarvant, sir!' said he, slicking his hair down when he came into the room. 'If hoo'l excuse me (looking at Margaret) for being i' my stockings; I'se been tramping a' day, and streets is none o' th' cleanest.'

Margaret thought that fatigue might account for the change in his manner, for he was unusually quiet and subdued; and he had evidently some difficulty in saying what he came to say.

Mr. Hale's ever-ready sympathy with anything of shyness or hesitation, or want of self-possession, made him come to his aid.

'We shall have tea up directly, and then you'll take a cup with us, Mr. Higgins. I am sure you are tired, if you've been out much this wet relaxing day. Margaret, my dear, can't you hasten tea?'

Margaret could only hasten tea by taking the preparation of it into her own hands, and so offending Dixon, who was emerging out of her sorrow for her late mistress into a very touchy, irritable state. But Martha, like all who came in contact with Margaret--even Dixon herself, in the long run--felt it a pleasure and an honour to forward any of her wishes; and her readiness, and Margaret's sweet forbearance, soon made Dixon ashamed of herself.

'Why master and you must always be asking the lower classes up-stairs, since we came to Milton, I cannot understand. Folk at Helstone were never brought higher than the kitchen; and I've let one or two of them know before now that they might think it an honour to be even there.'

Higgins found it easier to unburden himself to one than to two. After Margaret left the room, he went to the door and assured himself that it was shut. Then he came and stood close to Mr. Hale.

'Master,' said he, 'yo'd not guess easy what I've been tramping after to-day. Special if yo' remember my manner o' talk yesterday. I've been a seeking work. I have' said he. 'I said to mysel', I'd keep a civil tongue in my head, let who would say what 'em would. I'd set my teeth into my tongue sooner nor speak i' haste. For that man's sake--yo' understand,' jerking his thumb back in some unknown direction.

'No, I don't,' said Mr. Hale, seeing he waited for some kind of assent, and completely bewildered as to who 'that man' could be.

'That chap as lies theer,' said he, with another jerk. 'Him as went and drownded himself, poor chap! I did na' think he'd got it in him to lie still and let th' water creep o'er him till he died. Boucher, yo' know.'

'Yes, I know now,' said Mr. Hale. 'Go back to what you were saying: you'd not speak in haste----'

'For his sake. Yet not for his sake; for where'er he is, and whate'er, he'll ne'er know other clemming or cold again; but for the wife's sake, and the bits o' childer.'

'God bless you!' said Mr. Hale, starting up; then, calming down, he said breathlessly, 'What do you mean? Tell me out.'

'I have telled yo',' said Higgins, a little surprised at Mr. Hale's agitation. 'I would na ask for work for mysel'; but them's left as a charge on me. I reckon, I would ha guided Boucher to a better end; but I set him off o' th' road, and so I mun answer for him.'

Mr. Hale got hold of Higgins's hand and shook it heartily, without speaking. Higgins looked awkward and ashamed.

'Theer, theer, master! Theer's ne'er a man, to call a man, amongst us, but what would do th' same; ay, and better too; for, belie' me, I'se ne'er got a stroke o' work, nor yet a sight of any. For all I telled Hamper that, let alone his pledge--which I would not sign--no, I could na, not e'en for this--he'd ne'er ha' such a worker on his mill as I would be--he'd ha' none o' me--no more would none o' th' others. I'm a poor black feckless sheep--childer may clem for aught I can do, unless, parson, yo'd help me?'

'Help you! How? I would do anything,--but what can I do?'

'Miss there'--for Margaret had re-entered the room, and stood silent, listening--'has often talked grand o' the South, and the ways down there. Now I dunnot know how far off it is, but I've been thinking if I could get 'em down theer, where food is cheap and wages good, and all the folk, rich and poor, master and man, friendly like; yo' could, may be, help me to work. I'm not forty-five, and I've a deal o' strength in me, measter.'

'But what kind of work could you do, my man?'

'Well, I reckon I could spade a bit----'

'And for that,' said Margaret, stepping forwards, 'for anything you could do, Higgins, with the best will in the world, you would, may be, get nine shillings a week; may be ten, at the outside. Food is much the same as here, except that you might have a little garden----'

'The childer could work at that,' said he. 'I'm sick o' Milton anyways, and Milton is sick o' me.'

'You must not go to the South,' said Margaret, 'for all that. You could not stand it. You would have to be out all weathers. It would kill you with rheumatism. The mere bodily work at your time of life would break you down. The fare is far different to what you have been accustomed to.'

'I'se nought particular about my meat,' said he, as if offended.

'But you've reckoned on having butcher's meat once a day, if you're in work; pay for that out of your ten shillings, and keep those poor children if you can. I owe it to you--since it's my way of talking that has set you off on this idea--to put it all clear before you. You would not bear

the dulness of the life; you don't know what it is; it would eat you away like rust. Those that have lived there all their lives, are used to soaking in the stagnant waters. They labour on, from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields--never speaking or lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads. The hard spade-work robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination; they don't care to meet to talk over thoughts and speculations, even of the weakest, wildest kind, after their work is done; they go home brutishly tired, poor creatures! caring for nothing but food and rest. You could not stir them up into any companionship, which you get in a town as plentiful as the air you breathe, whether it be good or bad--and that I don't know; but I do know, that you of all men are not one to bear a life among such labourers. What would be peace to them would be eternal fretting to you. Think no more of it, Nicholas, I beg. Besides, you could never pay to get mother and children all there--that's one good thing.'

'I've reckoned for that. One house mun do for us a', and the furniture o' t'other would go a good way. And men theer mun have their families to keep--mappen six or seven childer. God help 'em!' said he, more convinced by his own presentation of the facts than by all Margaret had said, and suddenly renouncing the idea, which had but recently formed itself in a brain worn out by the day's fatigue and anxiety. 'God help 'em! North an' South have each getten their own troubles. If work's sure and steady theer, labour's paid at starvation prices; while here we'n rucks o' money coming in one quarter, and ne'er a farthing th' next. For sure, th' world is in a confusion that passes me or any other man to understand; it needs fettling, and who's to fettle it, if it's as yon folks say, and there's nought but what we see?'

Mr. Hale was busy cutting bread and butter; Margaret was glad of this, for she saw that Higgins was better left to himself: that if her father began to speak ever so mildly on the subject of Higgins's thoughts, the latter would consider himself challenged to an argument, and would feel himself bound to maintain his own ground. She and her father kept up an indifferent conversation until Higgins, scarcely aware whether he ate or not, had made a very substantial meal. Then he pushed his chair away from the table, and tried to take an interest in what they were saying; but it was of no use; and he fell back into dreamy gloom. Suddenly, Margaret said (she had been thinking of it for some time, but the words had stuck in her throat), 'Higgins, have you been to Marlborough Mills to seek for work?'

'Thornton's?' asked he. 'Ay, I've been at Thornton's.'

'And what did he say?'

'Such a chap as me is not like to see the measter. Th' o'erlooker bid me go and be d----d.'

'I wish you had seen Mr. Thornton,' said Mr. Hale. 'He might not have given you work, but he would not have used such language.'

'As to th' language, I'm welly used to it; it dunnot matter to me. I'm not nesh mysel' when I'm put out. It were th' fact that I were na wanted theer, no more nor ony other place, as I minded.'

'But I wish you had seen Mr. Thornton,' repeated Margaret. 'Would you go again--it's a good deal to ask, I know--but would you go to-morrow and try him? I should be so glad if you would.'

'I'm afraid it would be of no use,' said Mr. Hale, in a low voice. 'It would be better to let me speak to him.' Margaret still looked at Higgins for his answer. Those grave soft eyes of hers were difficult to resist. He gave a great sigh.

'It would tax my pride above a bit; if it were for mysel', I could stand a deal o' clemming first; I'd sooner knock him down than ask a favour from him. I'd a deal sooner be flogged mysel'; but yo're not a common wench, axing yo'r pardon, nor yet have yo' common ways about yo'. I'll e'en make a wry face, and go at it to-morrow. Dunna yo' think that he'll do it. That man has it in him to be burnt at the stake afore he'll give in. I do it for yo'r sake, Miss Hale, and it's first time in my life as e'er I give way to a woman. Neither my wife nor Bess could e'er say that much again me.'

'All the more do I thank you,' said Margaret, smiling. 'Though I don't believe you: I believe you have just given way to wife and daughter as much as most men.'

'And as to Mr. Thornton,' said Mr. Hale, 'I'll give you a note to him, which, I think I may venture to say, will ensure you a hearing.'

'I thank yo' kindly, sir, but I'd as lief stand on my own bottom. I dunnot stomach the notion of having favour curried for me, by one as doesn't know the ins and outs of the quarrel. Meddling 'twixt master and man is liker meddling 'twixt husband and wife than aught else: it takes a deal o' wisdom for to do ony good. I'll stand guard at the lodge door. I'll stand there fro' six in the morning till I get speech on him. But I'd liefer sweep th' streets, if paupers had na' got hold on that work. Dunna yo' hope, miss. There'll be more chance o' getting milk out of a flint. I wish yo' a very good night, and many thanks to yo'.'

'You'll find your shoe's by the kitchen fire; I took them there to dry,' said Margaret.

He turned round and looked at her steadily, and then he brushed his lean hand across his eyes and went his way.

'How proud that man is!' said her father, who was a little annoyed at the manner in which Higgins had declined his intercession with Mr. Thornton.

'He is,' said Margaret; 'but what grand makings of a man there are in him, pride and all.'

'It's amusing to see how he evidently respects the part in Mr. Thornton's character which is like his own.'

'There's granite in all these northern people, papa, is there not?'

'There was none in poor Boucher, I am afraid; none in his wife either.'

'I should guess from their tones that they had Irish blood in them. I wonder what success he'll have to-morrow. If he and Mr. Thornton would speak out together as man to man--if Higgins would forget that Mr. Thornton was a master, and speak to him as he does to us--and if Mr. Thornton would be patient enough to listen to him with his human heart, not with his master's ears--'

'You are getting to do Mr. Thornton justice at last, Margaret,' said her father, pinching her ear.

Margaret had a strange choking at her heart, which made her unable to answer. 'Oh!' thought she, 'I wish I were a man, that I could go and force him to express his disapprobation, and tell him honestly that I knew I deserved it. It seems hard to lose him as a friend just when I had begun to feel his value. How tender he was with dear mamma! If it were only for her sake, I wish he would come, and then at least I should know how much I was abased in his eyes.'

CHAPTER XIII

PROMISES FULFILLED

'Then proudly, proudly up she rose,

1.

Tho' the tear was in her e'e,

- *"Whate'er ye say, think what ye may,*
- *Ye's get na word frae me!"'*

SCOTCH BALLAD.

It was not merely that Margaret was known to Mr. Thornton to have spoken falsely,--though she imagined that for this reason only was she so turned in his opinion,--but that this falsehood of hers bore a distinct reference in his mind to some other lover. He could not forget the fond and earnest look that had passed between her and some other man--the attitude of

familiar confidence, if not of positive endearment. The thought of this perpetually stung him; it was a picture before his eyes, wherever he went and whatever he was doing. In addition to this (and he ground his teeth as he remembered it), was the hour, dusky twilight; the place, so far away from home, and comparatively unfrequented. His nobler self had said at first, that all this last might be accidental, innocent, justifiable; but once allow her right to love and be beloved (and had he any reason to deny her right?--had not her words been severely explicit when she cast his love away from her?), she might easily have been beguiled into a longer walk, on to a later hour than she had anticipated. But that falsehood! which showed a fatal consciousness of something wrong, and to be concealed, which was unlike her. He did her that justice, though all the time it would have been a relief to believe her utterly unworthy of his esteem. It was this that made the misery--that he passionately loved her, and thought her, even with all her faults, more lovely and more excellent than any other woman; yet he deemed her so attached to some other man, so led away by her affection for him as to violate her truthful nature. The very falsehood that stained her, was a proof how blindly she loved another--this dark, slight, elegant, handsome man--while he himself was rough, and stern, and strongly made. He lashed himself into an agony of fierce jealousy. He thought of that look, that attitude!--how he would have laid his life at her feet for such tender glances, such fond detention! He mocked at himself, for having valued the mechanical way in which she had protected him from the fury of the mob; now he had seen how soft and bewitching she looked when with a man she really loved. He remembered, point by point, the sharpness of her words--'There was not a man in all that crowd for whom she would not have done as much, far more readily than for him.' He shared with the mob, in her desire of averting bloodshed from them; but this man, this hidden lover, shared with nobody; he had looks, words, hand-cleavings, lies, concealment, all to himself.

Mr. Thornton was conscious that he had never been so irritable as he was now, m all his life long; he felt inclined to give a short abrupt answer, more like a bark than a speech, to every one that asked him a question; and this consciousness hurt his pride he had always piqued himself on his self-control, and control himself he would. So the manner was subdued to a quiet deliberation, but the matter was even harder and sterner than common. He was more than usually silent at home; employing his evenings in a continual pace backwards and forwards, which would have annoyed his mother exceedingly if it had been practised by any one else; and did not tend to promote any forbearance on her part even to this beloved son.

'Can you stop--can you sit down for a moment? I have something to say to you, if you would give up that everlasting walk, walk, walk.'

He sat down instantly, on a chair against the wall.

'I want to speak to you about Betsy. She says she must leave us; that her lover's death has so affected her spirits she can't give her heart to her work.'

'Very well. I suppose other cooks are to be met with.'

'That's so like a man. It's not merely the cooking, it is that she knows all the ways of the house. Besides, she tells me something about your friend Miss Hale.'

'Miss Hale is no friend of mine. Mr. Hale is my friend.'

'I am glad to hear you say so, for if she had been your friend, what Betsy says would have annoyed you.'

'Let me hear it,' said he, with the extreme quietness of manner he had been assuming for the last few days.

'Betsy says, that the night on which her lover--I forget his name--for she always calls him "he"----'

'Leonards.'

'The night on which Leonards was last seen at the station--when he was last seen on duty, in fact--Miss Hale was there, walking about with a young man who, Betsy believes, killed Leonards by some blow or push.'

'Leonards was not killed by any blow or push.'

'How do you know?'

'Because I distinctly put the question to the surgeon of the Infirmary. He told me there was an internal disease of long standing, caused by Leonards' habit of drinking to excess; that the fact of his becoming rapidly worse while in a state of intoxication, settled the question as to whether the last fatal attack was caused by excess of drinking, or the fall.'

'The fall! What fall?'

'Caused by the blow or push of which Betsy speaks.'

'Then there was a blow or push?'

'I believe so.'

'And who did it?'

'As there was no inquest, in consequence of the doctor's opinion, I cannot tell you.'

'But Miss Hale was there?'

No answer.

'And with a young man?'

Still no answer. At last he said: 'I tell you, mother, that there was no inquest--no inquiry. No judicial inquiry, I mean.'

'Betsy says that Woolmer (some man she knows, who is in a grocer's shop out at Crampton) can swear that Miss Hale was at the station at that hour, walking backwards and forwards with a young man.'

'I don't see what we have to do with that. Miss Hale is at liberty to please herself.'

'I'm glad to hear you say so,' said Mrs. Thornton, eagerly. 'It certainly signifies very little to us--not at all to you, after what has passed! but I--I made a promise to Mrs. Hale, that I would not allow her daughter to go wrong without advising and remonstrating with her. I shall certainly let her know my opinion of such conduct.'

'I do not see any harm in what she did that evening,' said Mr. Thornton, getting up, and coming near to his mother; he stood by the chimney-piece with his face turned away from the room.

'You would not have approved of Fanny's being seen out, after dark, in rather a lonely place, walking about with a young man. I say nothing of the taste which could choose the time, when her mother lay unburied, for such a promenade. Should you have liked your sister to have been noticed by a grocer's assistant for doing so?'

'In the first place, as it is not many years since I myself was a draper's assistant, the mere circumstance of a grocer's assistant noticing any act does not alter the character of the act to me. And in the next place, I see a great deal of difference between Miss Hale and Fanny. I can imagine that the one may have weighty reasons, which may and ought to make her overlook any seeming Impropriety in her conduct. I never knew Fanny have weighty reasons for anything. Other people must guard her. I believe Miss Hale is a guardian to herself'

'A pretty character of your sister, indeed! Really, John, one would have thought Miss Hale had done enough to make you clear-sighted. She drew you on to an offer, by a bold display of pretended regard for you,--to play you off against this very young man, I've no doubt. Her whole conduct is clear to me now. You believe he is her lover, I suppose--you agree to that.'

He turned round to his mother; his face was very gray and grim. 'Yes, mother. I do believe he is her lover.' When he had spoken, he turned round again; he writhed himself about, like one in bodily pain. He leant his face against his hand. Then before she could speak, he turned sharp again:

'Mother. He is her lover, whoever he is; but she may need help and womanly counsel;--there may be difficulties or temptations which I don't know. I fear there are. I don't want to know what they are; but as you have ever been a good--ay! and a tender mother to me, go to her, and gain her confidence, and tell her what is best to be done. I know that something is wrong; some dread, must be a terrible torture to her.'

'For God's sake, John!' said his mother, now really shocked, 'what do you mean? What do you mean? What do you know?'

He did not reply to her.

'John! I don't know what I shan't think unless you speak. You have no right to say what you have done against her.'

'Not against her, mother! I could not speak against her.'

'Well! you have no right to say what you have done, unless you say more. These half-expressions are what ruin a woman's character.'

'Her character! Mother, you do not dare--' he faced about, and looked into her face with his flaming eyes. Then, drawing himself up into determined composure and dignity, he said, 'I will not say any more than this, which is neither more nor less than the simple truth, and I am sure you believe me,--I have good reason to believe, that Miss Hale is in some strait and difficulty connected with an attachment which, of itself, from my knowledge of Miss Hale's character, is perfectly innocent and right. What my reason is, I refuse to tell. But never let me hear any one say a word against her, implying any more serious imputation than that she now needs the counsel of some kind and gentle woman. You promised Mrs. Hale to be that woman!'

No!' said Mrs. Thornton. 'I am happy to say, I did not promise kindness and gentleness, for I felt at the time that it might be out of my power to render these to one of Miss Hale's character and disposition. I promised counsel and advice, such as I would give to my own daughter; I shall speak to her as I would do to Fanny, if she had gone gallivanting with a young man in the dusk. I shall speak with relation to the circumstances I know, without being influenced either one way or another by the "strong reasons" which you will not confide to me. Then I shall have fulfilled my promise, and done my duty.'

'She will never bear it,' said he passionately.

'She will have to bear it, if I speak in her dead mother's name.'

'Well!' said he, breaking away, 'don't tell me any more about it. I cannot endure to think of it. It will be better that you should speak to her any way, than that she should not be spoken to at all.--Oh! that look of love!' continued he, between his teeth, as he bolted himself into his own private room. 'And that cursed lie; which showed some terrible shame in the background, to be kept from the light in which I thought she lived perpetually! Oh, Margaret, Margaret! Mother, how you have tortured me! Oh! Margaret, could you not have loved me? I am but uncouth and hard, but I would never have led you into any falsehood for me.'

The more Mrs. Thornton thought over what her son had said, in pleading for a merciful judgment for Margaret's indiscretion, the more bitterly she felt inclined towards her. She took a savage pleasure in the idea of 'speaking her mind' to her, in the guise of fulfilment of a duty. She enjoyed the thought of showing herself untouched by the 'glamour,' which she was well aware Margaret had the power of throwing over many people. She snorted scornfully over the picture of the beauty of her victim; her jet black hair, her clear smooth skin, her lucid eyes would not

help to save her one word of the just and stern reproach which Mrs. Thornton spent half the night in preparing to her mind.

'Is Miss Hale within?' She knew she was, for she had seen her at the window, and she had her feet inside the little hall before Martha had half answered her question.

Margaret was sitting alone, writing to Edith, and giving her many particulars of her mother's last days. It was a softening employment, and she had to brush away the unbidden tears as Mrs. Thornton was announced.

She was so gentle and ladylike in her mode of reception that her visitor was somewhat daunted; and it became impossible to utter the speech, so easy of arrangement with no one to address it to. Margaret's low rich voice was softer than usual; her manner more gracious, because in her heart she was feeling very grateful to Mrs. Thornton for the courteous attention of her call. She exerted herself to find subjects of interest for conversation; praised Martha, the servant whom Mrs. Thornton had found for them; had asked Edith for a little Greek air, about which she had spoken to Miss Thornton. Mrs. Thornton was fairly discomfited. Her sharp Damascus blade seemed out of place, and useless among rose-leaves. She was silent, because she was trying to task herself up to her duty At last, she stung herself into its performance by a suspicion which, in spite of all probability, she allowed to cross her mind, that all this sweetness was put on with a view of propitiating Mr. Thornton; that, somehow, the other attachment had fallen through, and that it suited Miss Hale's purpose to recall her rejected lover. Poor Margaret! there was perhaps so much truth in the suspicion as this: that Mrs. Thornton was the mother of one whose regard she valued, and feared to have lost; and this thought unconsciously added to her natural desire of pleasing one who was showing her kindness by her visit. Mrs. Thornton stood up to go, but yet she seemed to have something more to say. She cleared her throat and began:

'Miss Hale, I have a duty to perform. I promised your poor mother that, as far as my poor judgment went, I would not allow you to act in any way wrongly, or (she softened her speech down a little here) inadvertently, without remonstrating; at least, without offering advice, whether you took it or not.'

Margaret stood before her, blushing like any culprit, with her eyes dilating as she gazed at Mrs. Thornton. She thought she had come to speak to her about the falsehood she had told--that Mr. Thornton had employed her to explain the danger she had exposed herself to, of being confuted in full court! and although her heart sank to think he had not rather chosen to come himself, and upbraid her, and receive her penitence, and restore her again to his good opinion, yet she was too much humbled not to bear any blame on this subject patiently and meekly.

Mrs. Thornton went on:

'At first, when I heard from one of my servants, that you had been seen walking about with a gentleman, so far from home as the Outwood station, at such a time of the evening, I could hardly believe it. But my son, I am sorry to say, confirmed her story. It was indiscreet, to say the least; many a young woman has lost her character before now----'

Margaret's eyes flashed fire. This was a new idea--this was too insulting. If Mrs. Thornton had spoken to her about the lie she had told, well and good--she would have owned it, and humiliated herself But to interfere with her conduct--to speak of her character! she--Mrs. Thornton, a mere stranger--it was too impertinent! She would not answer her--not one word. Mrs. Thornton saw the battle-spirit in Margaret's eyes, and it called. up her combativeness also.

'For your mother's sake, I have thought it right to warn you against such improprieties; they must degrade you in the long run in the estimation of the world, even if in fact they do not lead you to positive harm.'

'For my mother's sake,' said Margaret, in a tearful voice, 'I will bear much; but I cannot bear everything. She never meant me to be exposed to insult, I am sure.'

'Insult, Miss Hale!'

'Yes, madam,' said Margaret more steadily, 'it is insult. What do you know of me that should lead you to suspect--Oh!' said she, breaking down, and covering her face with her hands--'I know now, Mr. Thornton has told you----'

'No, Miss Hale,' said Mrs. Thornton, her truthfulness causing her to arrest the confession Margaret was on the point of making, though her curiosity was itching to hear it. 'Stop. Mr. Thornton has told me nothing. You do not know my son. You are not worthy to know him. He said this. Listen, young lady, that you may understand, if you can, what sort of a man you rejected. This Milton manufacturer, his great tender heart scorned as it was scorned, said to me only last night, "Go to her. I have good reason to know that she is in some strait, arising out of some attachment; and she needs womanly counsel." I believe those were his very words. Farther than that--beyond admitting the fact of your being at the Outwood station with a gentleman, on the evening of the twenty-sixth--he has said nothing--not one word against you. If he has knowledge of anything which should make you sob so, he keeps it to himself.'

Margaret's face was still hidden in her hands, the fingers of which were wet with tears. Mrs. Thornton was a little mollified.

'Come, Miss Hale. There may be circumstances, I'll allow, that, if explained, may take off from the seeming impropriety.'

Still no answer. Margaret was considering what to say; she wished to stand well with Mrs. Thornton; and yet she could not, might not, give any explanation. Mrs. Thornton grew impatient.

'I shall be sorry to break off an acquaintance; but for Fanny's sake--as I told my son, if Fanny had done so we should consider it a great disgrace--and Fanny might be led away----'

'I can give you no explanation,' said Margaret, in a low voice. 'I have done wrong, but not in the way you think or know about. I think Mr. Thornton judges me more mercifully than

you;'--she had hard work to keep herself from choking with her tears--'but, I believe, madam, you mean to do rightly.'

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Thornton, drawing herself up; 'I was not aware that my meaning was doubted. It is the last time I shall interfere. I was unwilling to consent to do it, when your mother asked me. I had not approved of my son's attachment to you, while I only suspected it. You did not appear to me worthy of him. But when you compromised yourself as you did at the time of the riot, and exposed yourself to the comments of servants and workpeople, I felt it was no longer right to set myself against my son's wish of proposing to you--a wish, by the way, which he had always denied entertaining until the day of the riot.' Margaret winced, and drew in her breath with a long, hissing sound; of which, however, Mrs. Thornton took no notice. 'He came; you had apparently changed your mind. I told my son yesterday, that I thought it possible, short as was the interval, you might have heard or learnt something of this other lover----'

'What must you think of me, madam?' asked Margaret, throwing her head back with proud disdain, till her throat curved outwards like a swan's. 'You can say nothing more, Mrs. Thornton. I decline every attempt to justify myself for anything. You must allow me to leave the room.'

And she swept out of it with the noiseless grace of an offended princess. Mrs. Thornton had quite enough of natural humour to make her feel the ludicrousness of the position in which she was left. There was nothing for it but to show herself out. She was not particularly annoyed at Margaret's way of behaving. She did not care enough for her for that. She had taken Mrs. Thornton's remonstrance to the full as keenly to heart as that lady expected; and Margaret's passion at once mollified her visitor, far more than any silence or reserve could have done. It showed the effect of her words. 'My young lady,' thought Mrs. Thornton to herself; 'you've a pretty good temper of your own. If John and you had come together, he would have had to keep a tight hand over you, to make you know your place. But I don't think you will go a-walking again with your beau, at such an hour of the day, in a hurry. You've too much pride and spirit in you for that. I like to see a girl fly out at the notion of being talked about. It shows they're neither giddy, nor hold by nature. As for that girl, she might be hold, but she'd never be giddy. I'll do her that justice. Now as to Fanny, she'd be giddy, and not bold. She's no courage in her, poor thing!'

Mr. Thornton was not spending the morning so satisfactorily as his mother. She, at any rate, was fulfilling her determined purpose. He was trying to understand where he stood; what damage the strike had done him. A good deal of his capital was locked up in new and expensive machinery; and he had also bought cotton largely, with a view to some great orders which he had in hand. The strike had thrown him terribly behindhand, as to the completion of these orders. Even with his own accustomed and skilled workpeople, he would have had some difficulty in fulfilling his engagements; as it was, the incompetence of the Irish hands, who had to be trained to their work, at a time requiring unusual activity, was a daily annoyance.

It was not a favourable hour for Higgins to make his request. But he had promised Margaret to do it at any cost. So, though every moment added to his repugnance, his pride, and his sullenness of temper, he stood leaning against the dead wall, hour after hour, first on one leg, then on the other. At last the latch was sharply lifted, and out came Mr. Thornton.

'I want for to speak to yo', sir.'

'Can't stay now, my man. I'm too late as it is.'

'Well, sir, I reckon I can wait till yo' come back.'

Mr. Thornton was half way down the street. Higgins sighed. But it was no use. To catch him in the street was his only chance of seeing 'the measter;' if he had rung the lodge bell, or even gone up to the house to ask for him, he would have been referred to the overlooker. So he stood still again, vouchsafing no answer, but a short nod of recognition to the few men who knew and spoke to him, as the crowd drove out of the millyard at dinner-time, and scowling with all his might at the Irish 'knobsticks' who had just been imported. At last Mr. Thornton returned.

'What! you there still!'

'Ay, sir. I mun speak to yo'.'

'Come in here, then. Stay, we'll go across the yard; the men are not come back, and we shall have it to ourselves. These good people, I see, are at dinner;' said he, closing the door of the porter's lodge.

He stopped to speak to the overlooker. The latter said in a low tone:

'I suppose you know, sir, that that man is Higgins, one of the leaders of the Union; he that made that speech in Hurstfield.'

'No, I didn't,' said Mr. Thornton, looking round sharply at his follower. Higgins was known to him by name as a turbulent spirit.

'Come along,' said he, and his tone was rougher than before. 'It is men such as this,' thought he, 'who interrupt commerce and injure the very town they live in: mere demagogues, lovers of power, at whatever cost to others.'

'Well, sir! what do you want with me?' said Mr. Thornton, facing round at him, as soon as they were in the counting-house of the mill.

'My name is Higgins'--

'I know that,' broke in Mr. Thornton. 'What do you want, Mr. Higgins? That's the question.'

'I want work.'

'Work! You're a pretty chap to come asking me for work. You don't want impudence, that's very clear.'

'I've getten enemies and backbiters, like my betters; but I ne'er heerd o' ony of them calling me o'er-modest,' said Higgins. His blood was a little roused by Mr. Thornton's manner, more than by his words.

Mr. Thornton saw a letter addressed to himself on the table. He took it up and read it through. At the end, he looked up and said, 'What are you waiting for?'

'An answer to the question I axed.'

'I gave it you before. Don't waste any more of your time.'

'Yo' made a remark, sir, on my impudence: but I were taught that it was manners to say either "yes" or "no," when I were axed a civil question. I should be thankfu' to yo' if yo'd give me work. Hamper will speak to my being a good hand.'

'I've a notion you'd better not send me to Hamper to ask for a character, my man. I might hear more than you'd like.'

'I'd take th' risk. Worst they could say of me is, that I did what I thought best, even to my own wrong.'

'You'd better go and try them, then, and see whether they'll give you work. I've turned off upwards of a hundred of my best hands, for no other fault than following you and such as you; and d'ye think I'll take you on? I might as well put a firebrand into the midst of the cotton-waste.'

Higgins turned away; then the recollection of Boucher came over him, and he faced round with the greatest concession he could persuade himself to make.

'I'd promise yo', measter, I'd not speak a word as could do harm, if so be yo' did right by us; and I'd promise more: I'd promise that when I seed yo' going wrong, and acting unfair, I'd speak to yo' in private first; and that would be a fair warning. If yo' and I did na agree in our opinion o' your conduct, yo' might turn me off at an hour's notice.'

'Upon my word, you don't think small beer of yourself! Hamper has had a loss of you. How came he to let you and your wisdom go?'

'Well, we parted wi' mutual dissatisfaction. I wouldn't gi'e the pledge they were asking; and they wouldn't have me at no rate. So I'm free to make another engagement; and as I said before, though I should na' say it, I'm a good hand, measter, and a steady man--specially when I can keep fro' drink; and that I shall do now, if I ne'er did afore.'

'That you may have more money laid up for another strike, I suppose?'

'No! I'd be thankful if I was free to do that; it's for to keep th' widow and childer of a man who was drove mad by them knobsticks o' yourn; put out of his place by a Paddy that did na know weft fro' warp.'

'Well! you'd better turn to something else, if you've any such good intention in your head. I shouldn't advise you to stay in Milton: you're too well known here.'

'If it were summer,' said Higgins, 'I'd take to Paddy's work, and go as a navvy, or haymaking, or summut, and ne'er see Milton again. But it's winter, and th' childer will clem.'

'A pretty navvy you'd make! why, you couldn't do half a day's work at digging against an Irishman.'

'I'd only charge half-a-day for th' twelve hours, if I could only do half-a-day's work in th' time. Yo're not knowing of any place, where they could gi' me a trial, away fro' the mills, if I'm such a firebrand? I'd take any wage they thought I was worth, for the sake of those childer.'

'Don't you see what you would be? You'd be a knobstick. You'd be taking less wages than the other labourers--all for the sake of another man's children. Think how you'd abuse any poor fellow who was willing to take what he could get to keep his own children. You and your Union would soon be down upon him. No! no! if it's only for the recollection of the way in which you've used the poor knobsticks before now, I say No! to your question. I'll not give you work. I won't say, I don't believe your pretext for coming and asking for work; I know nothing about it. It may be true, or it may not. It's a very unlikely story, at any rate. Let me pass. I'll not give you work. There's your answer.'

'I hear, sir. I would na ha' troubled yo', but that I were bid to come, by one as seemed to think yo'd getten some soft place in, yo'r heart. Hoo were mistook, and I were misled. But I'm not the first man as is misled by a woman.'

'Tell her to mind her own business the next time, instead of taking up your time and mine too. I believe women are at the bottom of every plague in this world. Be off with you.'

'I'm obleeged to yo' for a' yo'r kindness, measter, and most of a' for yo'r civil way o' saying good-bye.'

Mr. Thornton did not deign a reply. But, looking out of the window a minute after, he was struck with the lean, bent figure going out of the yard: the heavy walk was in strange contrast with the resolute, clear determination of the man to speak to him. He crossed to the porter's lodge:

'How long has that man Higgins been waiting to speak to me?'

'He was outside the gate before eight o'clock, sir. I think he's been there ever since.'

'And it is now--?'

'Just one, sir.'

'Five hours,' thought Mr. Thornton; 'it's a long time for a man to wait, doing nothing but first hoping and then fearing.'

CHAPTER XIV

MAKING FRIENDS

'Nay, I have done; you get no more of me:

1.

And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
- *That thus so clearly I myself am free.'*

DRAYTON.

Margaret shut herself up in her own room, after she had quitted Mrs. Thornton. She began to walk backwards and forwards, in her old habitual way of showing agitation; but, then, remembering that in that slightly-built house every step was heard from one room to another, she sate down until she heard Mrs. Thornton go safely out of the house. She forced herself to recollect all the conversation that had passed between them; speech by speech, she compelled her memory to go through with it. At the end, she rose up, and said to herself, in a melancholy tone:

'At any rate, her words do not touch me; they fall off from me; for I am innocent of all the motives she attributes to me. But still, it is hard to think that any one--any woman--can believe all this of another so easily. It is hard and sad. Where I have done wrong, she does not accuse me--she does not know. He never told her: I might have known he would not!'

She lifted up her head, as if she took pride in any delicacy of feeling which Mr. Thornton had shown. Then, as a new thought came across her, she pressed her hands tightly together.

'He, too, must take poor Frederick for some lover.' (She blushed as the word passed through her mind.) 'I see it now. It is not merely that he knows of my falsehood, but he believes that some one else cares for me; and that I----Oh dear!--oh dear! What shall I do? What do I mean? Why do I care what he thinks, beyond the mere loss of his good opinion as regards my telling the truth or not? I cannot tell. But I am very miserable! Oh, how unhappy this last year has been! I have passed out of childhood into old age. I have had no youth--no womanhood; the hopes of womanhood have closed for me--for I shall never marry; and I anticipate cares and sorrows just as if I were an old woman, and with the same fearful spirit. I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength. I could bear up for papa; because that is a natural, pious duty. And I think I could bear up against--at any rate, I could have the energy to resent, Mrs. Thornton's unjust, impertinent suspicions. But it is hard to feel how completely he must misunderstand me. What has happened to make me so morbid to-day? I do not know. I only know I cannot help it. I must give way sometimes. No, I will not, though,' said she, springing to her feet. 'I will not--I will not think of myself and my own position. I won't examine into my own feelings. It would be of no use now. Some time, if I live to be an old woman, I may sit over the fire, and, looking into the embers, see the life that might have been.'

All this time, she was hastily putting on her things to go out, only stopping from time to time to wipe her eyes, with an impatience of gesture at the tears that would come, in spite of all her bravery.

'I dare say, there's many a woman makes as sad a mistake as I have done, and only finds it out too late. And how proudly and impertinently I spoke to him that day! But I did not know then. It has come upon me little by little, and I don't know where it began. Now I won't give way. I shall find it difficult to behave in the same way to him, with this miserable consciousness upon me; but I will be very calm and very quiet, and say very little. But, to be sure, I may not see him; he keeps out of our way evidently. That would be worse than all. And yet no wonder that he avoids me, believing what he must about me.'

She went out, going rapidly towards the country, and trying to drown reflection by swiftness of motion.

As she stood on the door-step, at her return, her father came up:

'Good girl!' said he. 'You've been to Mrs. Boucher's. I was just meaning to go there, if I had time, before dinner.'

'No, papa; I have not,' said Margaret, reddening. 'I never thought about her. But I will go directly after dinner; I will go while you are taking your nap.

Accordingly Margaret went. Mrs. Boucher was very ill; really ill--not merely ailing. The kind and sensible neighbour, who had come in the other day, seemed to have taken charge of everything. Some of the children were gone to the neighbours. Mary Higgins had come for the three youngest at dinner-time; and since then Nicholas had gone for the doctor. He had not come as yet; Mrs. Boucher was dying; and there was nothing to do but to wait. Margaret thought that she should like to know his opinion, and that she could not do better than go and see the

Higginses in the meantime. She might then possibly hear whether Nicholas had been able to make his application to Mr. Thornton.

She found Nicholas busily engaged in making a penny spin on the dresser, for the amusement of three little children, who were clinging to him in a fearless manner. He, as well as they, was smiling at a good long spin; and Margaret thought, that the happy look of interest in his occupation was a good sign. When the penny stopped spinning, 'lile Johnnie' began to cry.

'Come to me,' said Margaret, taking him off the dresser, and holding him in her arms; she held her watch to his ear, while she asked Nicholas if he had seen Mr. Thornton.

The look on his face changed instantly.

'Ay!' said he. 'I've seen and heerd too much on him.'

'He refused you, then?' said Margaret, sorrowfully.

'To be sure. I knew he'd do it all long. It's no good expecting marcy at the hands o' them measters. Yo're a stranger and a foreigner, and aren't likely to know their ways; but I knowed it.'

'I am sorry I asked you. Was he angry? He did not speak to you as Hamper did, did he?'

'He weren't o'er-civil!' said Nicholas, spinning the penny again, as much for his own amusement as for that of the children. 'Never yo' fret, I'm only where I was. I'll go on tramp to-morrow. I gave him as good as I got. I telled him, I'd not that good opinion on him that I'd ha' come a second time of mysel'; but yo'd advised me for to come, and I were beholden to yo'.'

'You told him I sent you?'

'I dunno' if I ca'd yo' by your name. I dunnot think I did. I said, a woman who knew no better had advised me for to come and see if there was a soft place in his heart.'

'And he--?' asked Margaret.

'Said I were to tell yo' to mind yo'r own business.--That's the longest spin yet, my lads.--And them's civil words to what he used to me. But ne'er mind. We're but where we was; and I'll break stones on th' road afore I let these little uns clem.'

Margaret put the struggling Johnnie out of her arms, back into his former place on the dresser.

'I am sorry I asked you to go to Mr. Thornton's. I am disappointed in him.'

There was a slight noise behind her. Both she and Nicholas turned round at the same moment, and there stood Mr. Thornton, with a look of displeased surprise upon his face. Obeying her swift impulse, Margaret passed out before him, saying not a word, only bowing low

to hide the sudden paleness that she felt had come over her face. He bent equally low in return, and then closed the door after her. As she hurried to Mrs. Boucher's, she heard the clang, and it seemed to fill up the measure of her mortification. He too was annoyed to find her there. He had tenderness in his heart--'a soft place,' as Nicholas Higgins called it; but he had some pride in concealing it; he kept it very sacred and safe, and was jealous of every circumstance that tried to gain admission. But if he dreaded exposure of his tenderness, he was equally desirous that all men should recognise his justice; and he felt that he had been unjust, in giving so scornful a hearing to any one who had waited, with humble patience, for five hours, to speak to him. That the man had spoken saucily to him when he had the opportunity, was nothing to Mr. Thornton. He rather liked him for it; and he was conscious of his own irritability of temper at the time, which probably made them both quits. It was the five hours of waiting that struck Mr. Thornton. He had not five hours to spare himself; but one hour--two hours, of his hard penetrating intellectual, as well as bodily labour, did he give up to going about collecting evidence as to the truth of Higgins's story, the nature of his character, the tenor of his life. He tried not to be, but was convinced that all that Higgins had said. was true. And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart; the patience of the man, the simple generosity of the motive (for he had learnt about the quarrel between Boucher and Higgins), made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overleap them by a diviner instinct. He came to tell Higgins he would give him work; and he was more annoyed to find Margaret there than by hearing her last words, for then he understood that she was the woman who had urged Higgins to come to him; and he dreaded the admission of any thought of her, as a motive to what he was doing solely because it was right.

'So that was the lady you spoke of as a woman?' said he indignantly to Higgins. 'You might have told me who she was.

'And then, maybe, yo'd ha' spoken of her more civil than yo' did; yo'd getten a mother who might ha' kept yo'r tongue in check when yo' were talking o' women being at the root o' all the plagues.'

'Of course you told that to Miss Hale?'

'In coorse I did. Leastways, I reckon I did. I telled her she weren't to meddle again in aught that concerned yo'.'

'Whose children are those--yours?' Mr. Thornton had a pretty good notion whose they were, from what he had heard; but he felt awkward in turning the conversation round from this unpromising beginning.

'They're not mine, and they are mine.'

'They are the children you spoke of to me this morning?'

'When yo' said,' replied Higgins, turning round, with ill-smothered fierceness, 'that my story might be true or might not, bur it were a very unlikely one. Measter, I've not forgetten.'

Mr. Thornton was silent for a moment; then he said: 'No more have I. I remember what I said. I spoke to you about those children in a way I had no business to do. I did not believe you. I could not have taken care of another man's children myself, if he had acted towards me as I hear Boucher did towards you. But I know now that you spoke truth. I beg your pardon.'

Higgins did not turn round, or immediately respond to this. But when he did speak, it was in a softened tone, although the words were gruff enough.

'Yo've no business to go prying into what happened between Boucher and me. He's dead, and I'm sorry. That's enough.'

'So it is. Will you take work with me? That's what I came to ask.'

Higgins's obstinacy wavered, recovered strength, and stood firm. He would not speak. Mr. Thornton would not ask again. Higgins's eye fell on the children.

'Yo've called me impudent, and a liar, and a mischief-maker, and yo' might ha' said wi' some truth, as I were now and then given to drink. An' I ha' called you a tyrant, an' an oud bull-dog, and a hard, cruel master; that's where it stands. But for th' childer. Measter, do yo' think we can e'er get on together?'

'Well!' said Mr. Thornton, half-laughing, 'it was not my proposal that we should go together. But there's one comfort, on your own showing. We neither of us can think much worse of the other than we do now.'

'That's true,' said Higgins, reflectively. 'I've been thinking, ever sin' I saw you, what a marcy it were yo' did na take me on, for that I ne'er saw a man whom I could less abide. But that's maybe been a hasty judgment; and work's work to such as me. So, measter, I'll come; and what's more, I thank yo'; and that's a deal fro' me,' said he, more frankly, suddenly turning round and facing Mr. Thornton fully for the first time.

'And this is a deal from me,' said Mr. Thornton, giving Higgins's hand a good grip. 'Now mind you come sharp to your time,' continued he, resuming the master. 'I'll have no laggards at my mill. What fines we have, we keep pretty sharply. And the first time I catch you making mischief, off you go. So now you know where you are.'

'Yo' spoke of my wisdom this morning. I reckon I may bring it wi' me; or would yo' rayther have me 'bout my brains?'

''Bout your brains if you use them for meddling with my business; with your brains if you can keep them to your own.'

'I shall need a deal o' brains to settle where my business ends and yo'rs begins.'

'Your business has not begun yet, and mine stands still for me. So good afternoon.'

Just before Mr. Thornton came up to Mrs. Boucher's door, Margaret came out of it. She did not see him; and he followed her for several yards, admiring her light and easy walk, and her tall and graceful figure. But, suddenly, this simple emotion of pleasure was tainted, poisoned by jealousy. He wished to overtake her, and speak to her, to see how she would receive him, now she must know he was aware of some other attachment. He wished too, but of this wish he was rather ashamed, that she should know that he had justified her wisdom in sending Higgins to him to ask for work; and had repented him of his morning's decision. He came up to her. She started.

'Allow me to say, Miss Hale, that you were rather premature in expressing your disappointment. I have taken Higgins on.'

'I am glad of it,' said she, coldly.

'He tells me, he repeated to you, what I said this morning about--' Mr. Thornton hesitated. Margaret took it up:

'About women not meddling. You had a perfect right to express your opinion, which was a very correct one, I have no doubt. But,' she went on a little more eagerly, 'Higgins did not quite tell you the exact truth.' The word 'truth,' reminded her of her own untruth, and she stopped short, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

Mr. Thornton at first was puzzled to account for her silence; and then he remembered the lie she had told, and all that was foregone. 'The exact truth!' said he. 'Very few people do speak the exact truth. I have given up hoping for it. Miss Hale, have you no explanation to give me? You must perceive what I cannot but think.'

Margaret was silent. She was wondering whether an explanation of any kind would be consistent with her loyalty to Frederick.

'Nay,' said he, 'I will ask no farther. I may be putting temptation in your way. At present, believe me, your secret is safe with me. But you run great risks, allow me to say, in being so indiscreet. I am now only speaking as a friend of your father's: if I had any other thought or hope, of course that is at an end. I am quite disinterested.'

'I am aware of that,' said Margaret, forcing herself to speak in an indifferent, careless way. 'I am aware of what I must appear to you, but the secret is another person's, and I cannot explain it without doing him harm.'

'I have not the slightest wish to pry into the gentleman's secrets,' he said, with growing anger. 'My own interest in you is--simply that of a friend. You may not believe me, Miss Hale, but it is--in spite of the persecution I'm afraid I threatened you with at one time--but that is all given up; all passed away. You believe me, Miss Hale?'

'Yes,' said Margaret, quietly and sadly.

'Then, really, I don't see any occasion for us to go on walking together. I thought, perhaps you might have had something to say, but I see we are nothing to each other. If you're quite convinced, that any foolish passion on my part is entirely over, I will wish you good afternoon.' He walked off very hastily.

'What can he mean?' thought Margaret,--'what could he mean by speaking so, as if I were always thinking that he cared for me, when I know he does not; he cannot. His mother will have said all those cruel things about me to him. But I won't care for him. I surely am mistress enough of myself to control this wild, strange, miserable feeling, which tempted me even to betray my own dear Frederick, so that I might but regain his good opinion--the good opinion of a man who takes such pains to tell me that I am nothing to him. Come poor little heart! be cheery and brave. We'll be a great deal to one another, if we are thrown off and left desolate.'

Her father was almost startled by her merriment this afternoon. She talked incessantly, and forced her natural humour to an unusual pitch; and if there was a tinge of bitterness in much of what she said; if her accounts of the old Harley Street set were a little sarcastic, her father could not bear to check her, as he would have done at another time--for he was glad to see her shake off her cares. In the middle of the evening, she was called down to speak to Mary Higgins; and when she came back, Mr. Hale imagined that he saw traces of tears on her cheeks. But that could not be, for she brought good news--that Higgins had got work at Mr. Thornton's mill. Her spirits were damped, at any rate, and she found it very difficult to go on talking at all, much more in the wild way that she had done. For some days her spirits varied strangely; and her father was beginning to be anxious about her, when news arrived from one or two quarters that promised some change and variety for her. Mr. Hale received a letter from Mr. Bell, in which that gentleman volunteered a visit to them; and Mr. Hale imagined that the promised society of his old Oxford friend would give as agreeable a turn to Margaret's ideas as it did to his own. Margaret tried to take an interest in what pleased her father; but she was too languid to care about any Mr. Bell, even though he were twenty times her godfather. She was more roused by a letter from Edith, full of sympathy about her aunt's death; full of details about herself, her husband, and child; and at the end saying, that as the climate did not suit, the baby, and as Mrs. Shaw was talking of returning to England, she thought it probable that Captain Lennox might sell out, and that they might all go and live again in the old Harley Street house; which, however, would seem very incomplete with-out Margaret. Margaret yearned after that old house, and the placid tranquillity of that old well-ordered, monotonous life. She had found it occasionally tiresome while it lasted; but since then she had been buffeted about, and felt so exhausted by this recent struggle with herself, that she thought that even stagnation would be a rest and a refreshment. So she began to look towards a long visit to the Lennoxes, on their return to England, as to a point--no, not of hope--but of leisure, in which she could regain her power and command over herself. At present it seemed to her as if all subjects tended towards Mr. Thornton; as if she could not for-get him with all her endeavours. If she went to see the Higginses, she heard of him there; her father had resumed their readings together, and quoted his opinions perpetually; even Mr. Bell's visit brought his tenant's name upon the tapis; for he wrote word that he believed he must be occupied some great part of his time with Mr. Thornton, as a new lease was in preparation, and the terms of it must be agreed upon.

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF TUNE

'I have no wrong, where I can claim no right,

1.

Naught ta'en me fro, where I have nothing had,
- *Yet of my woe I cannot so be quite;*
- *Namely, since that another may he glad*
- *With that, that thus in sorrow makes me sad.'*

WYATT.

Margaret had not expected much pleasure to herself from Mr. Bell's visit--she had only looked forward to it on her father's account, but when her godfather came, she at once fell into the most natural position of friendship in the world. He said she had no merit in being what she was, a girl so entirely after his own heart; it was an hereditary power which she had, to walk in and take possession of his regard; while she, in reply, gave him much credit for being so fresh and young under his Fellow's cap and gown.

'Fresh and young in warmth and kindness, I mean. I'm afraid I must own, that I think your opinions are the oldest and mustiest I have met with this long time.'

'Hear this daughter of yours, Hale Her residence in Milton has quite corrupted her. She's a democrat, a red republican, a member of the Peace Society, a socialist--'

'Papa, it's all because I'm standing up for the progress of commerce. Mr. Bell would have had it keep still at exchanging wild-beast skins for acorns.'

'No, no. I'd dig the ground and grow potatoes. And I'd shave the wild-beast skins and make the wool into broad cloth. Don't exaggerate, missy. But I'm tired of this bustle. Everybody rushing over everybody, in their hurry to get rich.'

'It is not every one who can sit comfortably in a set of college rooms, and let his riches grow without any exertion of his own. No doubt there is many a man here who would be thankful if his property would increase as yours has done, without his taking any trouble about it,' said Mr. Hale.

'I don't believe they would. It's the bustle and the struggle they like. As for sitting still, and learning from the past, or shaping out the future by faithful work done in a prophetic spirit--Why! Pooh! I don't believe there's a man in Milton who knows how to sit still; and it is a great art.'

'Milton people, I suspect, think Oxford men don't know how to move. It would be a very good thing if they mixed a little more.'

'It might be good for the Miltoners. Many things might be good for them which would be very disagreeable for other people.'

'Are you not a Milton man yourself?' asked Margaret. 'I should have thought you would have been proud of your town.'

'I confess, I don't see what there is to be proud of If you'll only come to Oxford, Margaret, I will show you a place to glory in.'

'Well!' said Mr. Hale, 'Mr. Thornton is coming to drink tea with us to-night, and he is as proud of Milton as you of Oxford. You two must try and make each other a little more liberal-minded.'

'I don't want to be more liberal-minded, thank you,' said Mr. Bell.

'Is Mr. Thornton coming to tea, papa?' asked Margaret in a low voice.

'Either to tea or soon after. He could not tell. He told us not to wait.'

Mr. Thornton had determined that he would make no inquiry of his mother as to how far she had put her project into execution of speaking to Margaret about the impropriety of her conduct. He felt pretty sure that, if this interview took place, his mother's account of what passed at it would only annoy and chagrin him, though he would all the time be aware of the colouring which it received by passing through her mind. He shrank from hearing Margaret's very name mentioned; he, while he blamed her--while he was jealous of her--while he renounced her--he loved her sorely, in spite of himself. He dreamt of her; he dreamt she came dancing towards him with outspread arms, and with a lightness and gaiety which made him loathe her, even while it allured him. But the impression of this figure of Margaret--with all Margaret's character taken out of it, as completely as if some evil spirit had got possession of her form--was so deeply stamped upon his imagination, that when he wakened he felt hardly able to separate the Una from the Duessa; and the dislike he had to the latter seemed to envelope and disfigure the former Yet he was too proud to acknowledge his weakness by avoiding the sight of her. He would neither seek an opportunity of being in her company nor avoid it. To convince himself of his

power of self-control, he lingered over every piece of business this afternoon; he forced every movement into unnatural slowness and deliberation; and it was consequently past eight o'clock before he reached Mr. Hale's. Then there were business arrangements to be transacted in the study with Mr. Bell; and the latter kept on, sitting over the fire, and talking wearily, long after all business was transacted, and when they might just as well have gone upstairs. But Mr. Thornton would not say a word about moving their quarters; he chafed and chafed, and thought Mr. Bell a most prosy companion; while Mr. Bell returned the compliment in secret, by considering Mr. Thornton about as brusque and curt a fellow as he had ever met with, and terribly gone off both in intelligence and manner. At last, some slight noise in the room above suggested the desirableness of moving there. They found Margaret with a letter open before her, eagerly discussing its contents with her father. On the entrance of the gentlemen, it was immediately put aside; but Mr. Thornton's eager senses caught some few words of Mr. Hale's to Mr. Bell.

'A letter from Henry Lennox. It makes Margaret very hopeful.'

Mr. Bell nodded. Margaret was red as a rose when Mr. Thornton looked at her. He had the greatest mind in the world to get up and go out of the room that very instant, and never set foot in the house again.

'We were thinking,' said Mr. Hale, 'that you and Mr. Thornton had taken Margaret's advice, and were each trying to convert the other, you were so long in the study.'

'And you thought there would be nothing left of us but an opinion, like the Kilkenny cat's tail. Pray whose opinion did you think would have the most obstinate vitality?'

Mr. Thornton had not a notion what they were talking about, and disdained to inquire. Mr. Hale politely enlightened him.

'Mr. Thornton, we were accusing Mr. Bell this morning of a kind of Oxonian mediaeval bigotry against his native town; and we--Margaret, I believe--suggested that it would do him good to associate a little with Milton manufacturers.'

'I beg your pardon. Margaret thought it would do the Milton manufacturers good to associate a little more with Oxford men. Now wasn't it so, Margaret?'

'I believe I thought it would do both good to see a little more of the other,--I did not know it was my idea any more than papa's.'

'And so you see, Mr. Thornton, we ought to have been improving each other down-stairs, instead of talking over vanished families of Smiths and Harrisons. However, I am willing to do my part now. I wonder when you Milton men intend to live. All your lives seem to be spent in gathering together the materials for life.'

'By living, I suppose you mean enjoyment.'

'Yes, enjoyment,--I don't specify of what, because I trust. we should both consider mere pleasure as very poor enjoyment.'

'I would rather have the nature of the enjoyment defined.'

'Well! enjoyment of leisure--enjoyment of the power and influence which money gives. You are all striving for money. What do you want it for?'

Mr. Thornton was silent. Then he said, 'I really don't know. But money is not what I strive for.'

'What then?'

'It is a home question. I shall have to lay myself open to such a catechist, and I am not sure that I am prepared to do it.'

'No!' said Mr. Hale; 'don't let us be personal in our catechism. You are neither of you representative men; you are each of you too individual for that.'

'I am not sure whether to consider that as a compliment or not. I should like to be the representative of Oxford, with its beauty and its learning, and its proud old history. What do you say, Margaret; ought I to be flattered?'

'I don't know Oxford. But there is a difference between being the representative of a city and the representative man of its inhabitants.'

'Very true, Miss Margaret. Now I remember, you were against me this morning, and were quite Miltonian and manufacturing in your preferences.' Margaret saw the quick glance of surprise that Mr. Thornton gave her, and she was annoyed at the construction which he might put on this speech of Mr. Bell's. Mr. Bell went on--

'Ah! I wish I could show you our High Street--our Radcliffe Square. I am leaving out our colleges, just as I give Mr. Thornton leave to omit his factories in speaking of the charms of Milton. I have a right to abuse my birth-place. Remember I am a Milton man.

Mr. Thornton was annoyed more than he ought to have been at all that Mr. Bell was saying. He was not in a mood for joking. At another time, he could have enjoyed Mr. Bell's half testy condemnation of a town where the life was so at variance with every habit he had formed; but now, he was galled enough to attempt to defend what was never meant to be seriously attacked.

'I don't set up Milton as a model of a town.'

'Not in architecture?' slyly asked Mr. Bell.

'No! We've been too busy to attend to mere outward appearances.'

'Don't say mere outward appearances,' said Mr. Hale, gently. 'They impress us all, from childhood upward--every day of our life.'

'Wait a little while,' said Mr. Thornton. 'Remember, we are of a different race from the Greeks, to whom beauty was everything, and to whom Mr. Bell might speak of a life of leisure and serene enjoyment, much of which entered in through their outward senses. I don't mean to despise them, any more than I would ape them. But I belong to Teutonic blood; it is little mingled in this part of England to what it is in others; we retain much of their language; we retain more of their spirit; we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion. Our glory and our beauty arise out of our inward strength, which makes us victorious over material resistance, and over greater difficulties still. We are Teutonic up here in Darkshire in another way. We hate to have laws made for us at a distance. We wish people would allow us to right ourselves, instead of continually meddling, with their imperfect legislation. We stand up for self-government, and oppose centralisation.'

'In short, you would like the Heptarchy back again. Well, at any rate, I revoke what I said this morning--that you Milton people did not reverence the past. You are regular worshippers of Thor.'

'If we do not reverence the past as you do in Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly. It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately; which is full of difficulties that must be encountered; and upon the mode in which they are met and conquered--not merely pushed aside for the time--depends our future. Out of the wisdom of the past, help us over the present. But no! People can speak of Utopia much more easily than of the next day's duty; and yet when that duty is all done by others, who so ready to cry, "Fie, for shame!"'

'And all this time I don't see what you are talking about. Would you Milton men condescend to send up your to-day's difficulty to Oxford? You have not tried us yet.'

Mr. Thornton laughed outright at this. 'I believe I was talking with reference to a good deal that has been troubling us of late; I was thinking of the strikes we have gone through, which are troublesome and injurious things enough, as I am finding to my cost. And yet this last strike, under which I am smarting, has been respectable.'

'A respectable strike!' said Mr. Bell. 'That sounds as if you were far gone in the worship of Thor.'

Margaret felt, rather than saw, that Mr. Thornton was chagrined by the repeated turning into jest of what he was feeling as very serious. She tried to change the conversation from a subject about which one party cared little, while, to the other, it was deeply, because personally, interesting. She forced herself to say something.

'Edith says she finds the printed calicoes in Corfu better and cheaper than in London.'

'Does she?' said her father. 'I think that must be one of Edith's exaggerations. Are you sure of it, Margaret?'

'I am sure she says so, papa.'

'Then I am sure of the fact,' said Mr. Bell. 'Margaret, I go so far in my idea of your truthfulness, that it shall cover your cousin's character. I don't believe a cousin of yours could exaggerate.'

'Is Miss Hale so remarkable for truth?' said Mr. Thornton, bitterly. The moment he had done so, he could have bitten his tongue out. What was he? And why should he stab her with her shame in this way? How evil he was to-night; possessed by ill-humour at being detained so long from her; irritated by the mention of some name, because he thought it belonged to a more successful lover; now ill-tempered because he had been unable to cope, with a light heart, against one who was trying, by gay and careless speeches, to make the evening pass pleasantly away,--the kind old friend to all parties, whose manner by this time might be well known to Mr. Thornton, who had been acquainted with him for many years. And then to speak to Margaret as he had done! She did not get up and leave the room, as she had done in former days, when his abruptness or his temper had annoyed her. She sat quite still, after the first momentary glance of grieved surprise, that made her eyes look like some child's who has met with an unexpected rebuff; they slowly dilated into mournful, reproachful sadness; and then they fell, and she bent over her work, and did not speak again. But he could not help looking at her, and he saw a sigh tremble over her body, as if she quivered in some unwonted chill. He felt as the mother would have done, in the midst of 'her rocking it, and rating it,' had she been called away before her slow confiding smile, implying perfect trust in mother's love, had proved the renewing of its love. He gave short sharp answers; he was uneasy and cross, unable to discern between jest and earnest; anxious only for a look, a word of hers, before which to prostrate himself in penitent humility. But she neither looked nor spoke. Her round taper fingers flew in and out of her sewing, as steadily and swiftly as if that were the business of her life. She could not care for him, he thought, or else the passionate fervour of his wish would have forced her to raise those eyes, if but for an instant, to read the late repentance in his. He could have struck her before he left, in order that by some strange overt act of rudeness, he might earn the privilege of telling her the remorse that gnawed at his heart. It was well that the long walk in the open air wound up this evening for him. It sobered him back into grave resolution, that henceforth he would see as little of her as possible,--since the very sight of that face arid form, the very sounds of that voice (like the soft winds of pure melody) had such power to move him from his balance. Well! He had known what love was--a sharp pang, a fierce experience, in the midst of whose flames he was struggling! but, through that furnace he would fight his way out into the serenity of middle age,--all the richer and more human for having known this great passion.

When he had somewhat abruptly left the room, Margaret rose from her seat, and began silently to fold up her work; The long seams were heavy, and had an unusual weight for her languid arms. The round lines in her face took a lengthened, straighter form, and her whole appearance was that of one who had gone through a day of great fatigue. As the three prepared for bed, Mr. Bell muttered forth a little condemnation of Mr. Thornton.

'I never saw a fellow so spoiled by success. He can't bear a word; a jest of any kind. Everything seems to touch on the soreness of his high dignity. Formerly, he was as simple and noble as the open day; you could not offend him, because he had no vanity.'

'He is not vain now,' said Margaret, turning round from the table, and speaking with quiet distinctness. 'To-night he has not been like himself Something must have annoyed him before he came here.'

Mr. Bell gave her one of his sharp glances from above his spectacles. She stood it quite calmly; but, after she had left the room, he suddenly asked,--

'Hale! did it ever strike you that Thornton and your daughter have what the French call a tendresse for each other?'

'Never!' said Mr. Hale, first startled and then flurried by the new idea. 'No, I am sure you are wrong. I am almost certain you are mistaken. If there is anything, it is all on Mr. Thornton's side. Poor fellow! I hope and trust he is not thinking of her, for I am sure she would not have him.'

'Well! I'm a bachelor, and have steered clear of love affairs all my life; so perhaps my opinion is not worth having. Or else I should say there were very pretty symptoms about her!'

'Then I am sure you are wrong,' said Mr. Hale. 'He may care for her, though she really has been almost rude to him at times. But she!--why, Margaret would never think of him, I'm sure! Such a thing has never entered her head.'

'Entering her heart would do. But I merely threw out a suggestion of what might be. I dare say I was wrong. And whether I was wrong or right, I'm very sleepy; so, having disturbed your night's rest (as I can see) with my untimely fancies, I'll betake myself with an easy mind to my own.'

But Mr. Hale resolved that he would not be disturbed by any such nonsensical idea; so he lay awake, determining not to think about it.

Mr. Bell took his leave the next day, bidding Margaret look to him as one who had a right to help and protect her in all her troubles, of whatever nature they might be. To Mr. Hale he said,--

'That Margaret of yours has gone deep into my heart. Take care of her, for she is a very precious creature,--a great deal too good for Milton,--only fit for Oxford, in fact. The town, I mean; not the men. I can't match her yet. When I can, I shall bring my young man to stand side by side with your young woman, just as the genie in the Arabian Nights brought Prince Caralmazan to match with the fairy's Princess Badoura.'

'I beg you'll do no such thing. Remember the misfortunes that ensued; and besides, I can't spare Margaret.'

'No; on second thoughts, we'll have her to nurse us ten years hence, when we shall be two cross old invalids. Seriously, Hale! I wish you'd leave Milton; which is a most unsuitable place for you, though it was my recommendation in the first instance. If you would; I'd swallow my shadows of doubts, and take a college living; and you and Margaret should come and live at the parsonage--you to be a sort of lay curate, and take the unwashed off my hands; and she to be our housekeeper--the village Lady Bountiful--by day; and read us to sleep in the evenings. I could be very happy in such a life. What do you think of it?'

'Never!' said Mr. Hale, decidedly. 'My one great change has been made and my price of suffering paid. Here I stay out my life; and here will I be buried, and lost in the crowd.'

'I don't give up my plan yet. Only I won't bait you with it any more just now. Where's the Pearl? Come, Margaret, give me a farewell kiss; and remember, my dear, where you may find a true friend, as far as his capability goes. You are my child, Margaret. Remember that, and 'God bless you!'

So they fell back into the monotony of the quiet life they would henceforth lead. There was no invalid to hope and fear about; even the Higginses--so long a vivid interest--seemed to have receded from any need of immediate thought. The Boucher children, left motherless orphans, claimed what of Margaret's care she could bestow; and she went pretty often to see Mary Higgins, who had charge of them. The two families were living in one house: the elder children were at humble schools, the younger ones were tended, in Mary's absence at her work, by the kind neighbour whose good sense had struck Margaret at the time of Boucher's death. Of course she was paid for her trouble; and indeed, in all his little plans and arrangements for these orphan children, Nicholas showed a sober judgment, and regulated method of thinking, which were at variance with his former more eccentric jerks of action. He was so steady at his work, that Margaret did not often see him during these winter months; but when she did, she saw that he winced away from any reference to the father of those children, whom he had so fully and heartily taken under his care. He did not speak easily of Mr. Thornton.

'To tell the truth,' said he, 'he fairly bamboozles me. He's two chaps. One chap I knowed of old as were measter all o'er. T'other chap hasn't an ounce of measter's flesh about him. How them two chaps is bound up in one body, is a craddy for me to find out. I'll not be beat by it, though. Meanwhile he comes here pretty often; that's how I know the chap that's a man, not a measter. And I reckon he's taken aback by me pretty much as I am by him; for he sits and listens and stares, as if I were some strange beast newly caught in some of the zones. But I'm none daunted. It would take a deal to daunt me in my own house, as he sees. And I tell him some of my mind that I reckon he'd ha' been the better of hearing when he were a younger man.'

'And does he not answer you?' asked Mr. Hale.

'Well! I'll not say th' advantage is all on his side, for all I take credit for improving him above a bit. Sometimes he says a rough thing or two, which is not agreeable to look at at first, but has a queer smack o' truth in it when yo' come to chew it. He'll be coming to-night, I reckon, about them childer's schooling. He's not satisfied wi' the make of it, and wants for t' examine 'em.'

'What are they'--began Mr. Hale; but Margaret, touching his arm, showed him her watch.

'It is nearly seven,' she said. 'The evenings are getting longer now. Come, papa.' She did not breathe freely till they were some distance from the house. Then, as she became more calm, she wished that she had not been in so great a hurry; for, somehow, they saw Mr. Thornton but very seldom now; and he might have come to see Higgins, and for the old friendship's sake she should like to have seen him to-night.

Yes! he came very seldom, even for the dull cold purpose of lessons. Mr. Hale was disappointed in his pupil's lukewarmness about Greek literature, which had but a short time ago so great an interest for him. And now it often happened that a hurried note from Mr. Thornton would arrive, just at the last moment, saying that he was so much engaged that he could not come to read with Mr. Hale that evening. And though other pupils had taken more than his place as to time, no one was like his first scholar in Mr. Hale's heart. He was depressed and sad at this partial cessation of an intercourse which had become dear to him; and he used to sit pondering over the reason that could have occasioned this change.

He startled Margaret, one evening as she sate at her work, by suddenly asking:

'Margaret! had you ever any reason for thinking that Mr. Thornton cared for you?'

He almost blushed as he put this question; but Mr. Bell's scouted idea recurred to him, and the words were out of his mouth before he well knew what he was about.

Margaret did not answer immediately; but by the bent drooping of her head, he guessed what her reply would be.

'Yes; I believe--oh papa, I should have told you.' And she dropped her work, and hid her face in her hands.

'No, dear; don't think that I am impertinently curious. I am sure you would have told me if you had felt that you could return his regard. Did he speak to you about it?'

No answer at first; but by-and-by a little gentle reluctant 'Yes.'

'And you refused him?'

A long sigh; a more helpless, nerveless attitude, and another 'Yes.' But before her father could speak, Margaret lifted up her face, rosy with some beautiful shame, and, fixing her eyes upon him, said:

'Now, papa, I have told you this, and I cannot tell you more; and then the whole thing is so painful to me; every word and action connected with it is so unspeakably bitter, that I cannot bear to think of it. Oh, papa, I am sorry to have lost you this friend, but I could not help it--but oh! I am very sorry.' She sate down on the ground, and laid her head on his knees.

'I too, am sorry, my dear. Mr. Bell quite startled me when he said, some idea of the kind--'

'Mr. Bell! Oh, did Mr. Bell see it?'

'A little; but he took it into his head that you--how shall I say it?--that you were not ungraciously disposed towards Mr. Thornton. I knew that could never be. I hoped the whole thing was but an imagination; but I knew too well what your real feelings were to suppose that you could ever like Mr. Thornton in that way. But I am very sorry.'

They were very quiet and still for some minutes. But, on stroking her cheek in a caressing way soon after, he was almost shocked to find her face wet with tears. As he touched her, she sprang up, and smiling with forced brightness, began to talk of the Lennoxes with such a vehement desire to turn the conversation, that Mr. Hale was too tender-hearted to try to force it back into the old channel.

'To-morrow--yes, to-morrow they will be back in Harley Street. Oh, how strange it will be! I wonder what room they will make into the nursery? Aunt Shaw will be happy with the baby. Fancy Edith a mamma! And Captain Lennox--I wonder what he will do with himself now he has sold out!'

'I'll tell you what,' said her father, anxious to indulge her in this fresh subject of interest, 'I think I must spare you for a fortnight just to run up to town and see the travellers. You could learn more, by half an hour's conversation with Mr. Henry Lennox, about Frederick's chances, than in a dozen of these letters of his; so it would, in fact, be uniting business with pleasure.'

'No, papa, you cannot spare me, and what's more, I won't be spared.' Then after a pause, she added: 'I am losing hope sadly about Frederick; he is letting us down gently, but I can see that Mr. Lennox himself has no hope of hunting up the witnesses under years and years of time. No,' said she, 'that bubble was very pretty, and very dear to our hearts; but it has burst like many another; and we must console ourselves with being glad that Frederick is so happy, and with being a great deal to each other. So don't offend me by talking of being able to spare me, papa, for I assure you you can't.'

But the idea of a change took root and germinated in Margaret's heart, although not in the way in which her father proposed it at first. She began to consider how desirable something of the kind would be to her father, whose spirits, always feeble, now became too frequently depressed, and whose health, though he never complained, had been seriously affected by his wife's illness and death. There were the regular hours of reading with his pupils, but that all giving and no receiving could no longer be called companion-ship, as in the old days when Mr. Thornton came to study under him. Margaret was conscious of the want under which he was suffering, unknown to himself; the want of a man's intercourse with men. At Helstone there had been perpetual occasions for an interchange of visits with neighbouring clergymen; and the poor labourers in the fields, or leisurely tramping home at eve, or tending their cattle in the forest, were always at liberty to speak or be spoken to. But in Milton every one was too busy for quiet speech, or any ripened intercourse of thought; what they said was about business, very present

and actual; and when the tension of mind relating to their daily affairs was over, they sunk into fallow rest until next morning. The workman was not to be found after the day's work was done; he had gone away to some lecture, or some club, or some beer-shop, according to his degree of character. Mr. Hale thought of trying to deliver a course of lectures at some of the institutions, but he contemplated doing this so much as an effort of duty, and with so little of the genial impulse of love towards his work and its end, that Margaret was sure that it would not be well done until he could look upon it with some kind of zest.

CHAPTER XVI

THE JOURNEY'S END

I see my way as birds their trackless way--

1.

I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,

- *I ask not: but unless God send his hail*
- *Or blinding fire-balls, sleet, or stifling snow,*
- *In some time--his good time--I shall arrive;*
- *He guides me and the bird. In His good time!*

BROWNING'S PARACELSUS.

So the winter was getting on, and the days were beginning to lengthen, without bringing with them any of the brightness of hope which usually accompanies the rays of a February sun. Mrs. Thornton had of course entirely ceased to come to the house. Mr. Thornton came occasionally, but his visits were addressed to her father, and were confined to the study. Mr. Hale spoke of him as always the same; indeed, the very rarity of their intercourse seemed to make Mr. Hale set only the higher value on it. And from what Margaret could gather of what Mr. Thornton had said, there was nothing in the cessation of his visits which could arise from any umbrage or vexation. His business affairs had become complicated during the strike, and required closer attention than he had given to them last winter. Nay, Margaret could even

discover that he spoke from time to time of her, and always, as far as she could learn, in the same calm friendly way, never avoiding and never seeking any mention of her name.

She was not in spirits to raise her father's tone of mind. The dreary peacefulness of the present time had been preceded by so long a period of anxiety and care--even intermixed with storms--that her mind had lost its elasticity. She tried to find herself occupation in teaching the two younger Boucher children, and worked hard at goodness; hard, I say most truly, for her heart seemed dead to the end of all her efforts; and though she made them punctually and painfully, yet she stood as far off as ever from any cheerfulness; her life seemed still bleak and dreary. The only thing she did well, was what she did out of unconscious piety, the silent comforting and consoling of her father. Not a mood of his but what found a ready sympathiser in Margaret; not a wish of his that she did not strive to forecast, and to fulfil. They were quiet wishes to be sure, and hardly named without hesitation and apology. All the more complete and beautiful was her meek spirit of obedience. March brought the news of Frederick's marriage. He and Dolores wrote; she in Spanish-English, as was but natural, and he with little turns and inversions of words which proved how far the idioms of his bride's country were infecting him.

On the receipt of Henry Lennox's letter, announcing how little hope there was of his ever clearing himself at a court-martial, in the absence of the missing witnesses, Frederick had written to Margaret a pretty vehement letter, containing his renunciation of England as his country; he wished he could unnative himself, and declared that he would not take his pardon if it were offered him, nor live in the country if he had permission to do so. All of which made Margaret cry sorely, so unnatural did it seem to her at the first opening; but on consideration, she saw rather in such expression the poignancy of the disappointment which had thus crushed his hopes; and she felt that there was nothing for it but patience. In the next letter, Frederick spoke so joyfully of the future that he had no thought for the past; and Margaret found a use in herself for the patience she had been craving for him. She would have to be patient. But the pretty, timid, girlish letters of Dolores were beginning to have a charm for both Margaret and her father. The young Spaniard was so evidently anxious to make a favourable impression upon her lover's English relations, that her feminine care peeped out at every erasure; and the letters announcing the marriage, were accompanied by a splendid black lace mantilla, chosen by Dolores herself for her unseen sister-in-law, whom Frederick had represented as a paragon of beauty, wisdom and virtue. Frederick's worldly position was raised by this marriage on to as high a level as they could desire. Barbour and Co. was one of the most extensive Spanish houses, and into it he was received as a junior partner. Margaret smiled a little, and then sighed as she remembered afresh her old tirades against trade. Here was her preux chevalier of a brother turned merchant, trader! But then she rebelled against herself, and protested silently against the confusion implied between a Spanish merchant and a Milton mill-owner. Well! trade or no trade, Frederick was very, very happy. Dolores must be charming, and the mantilla was exquisite! And then she returned to the present life.

Her father had occasionally experienced a difficulty in breathing this spring, which had for the time distressed him exceedingly. Margaret was less alarmed, as this difficulty went off completely in the intervals; but she still was so desirous of his shaking off the liability altogether, as to make her very urgent that he should accept Mr. Bell's invitation to visit him at Oxford this April. Mr. Bell's invitation included Margaret. Nay more, he wrote a special letter commanding

her to come; but she felt as if it would be a greater relief to her to remain quietly at home, entirely free from any responsibility whatever, and so to rest her mind and heart in a manner which she had not been able to do for more than two years past.

When her father had driven off on his way to the railroad, Margaret felt how great and long had been the pressure on her time and her spirits. It was astonishing, almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty; no one depending on her for cheering care, if not for positive happiness; no invalid to plan and think for; she might be idle, and silent, and forgetful,--and what seemed worth more than all the other privileges--she might be unhappy if she liked. For months past, all her own personal cares and troubles had had to be stuffed away into a dark cupboard; but now she had leisure to take them out, and mourn over them, and study their nature, and seek the true method of subduing them into the elements of peace. All these weeks she had been conscious of their existence in a dull kind of way, though they were hidden out of sight. Now, once for all she would consider them, and appoint to each of them its right work in her life. So she sat almost motionless for hours in the drawing-room, going over the bitterness of every remembrance with an unwincing resolution. Only once she cried aloud, at the stinging thought of the faithlessness which gave birth to that abasing falsehood.

She now would not even acknowledge the force of the temptation; her plans for Frederick had all failed, and the temptation lay there a dead mockery,--a mockery which had never had life in it; the lie had been so despicably foolish, seen by the light of the ensuing events, and faith in the power of truth so infinitely the greater wisdom!

In her nervous agitation, she unconsciously opened a book of her father's that lay upon the table,--the words that caught her eye in it, seemed almost made for her present state of acute self-abasement:--

'Je ne voudrois pas reprendre mon coeur en ceste sorte: meurs de honte, aveugle, impudent, traistre et desloyal a ton Dieu, et sembables choses; mais je voudrois le corriger par voye de compassion. Or sus, mon pauvre coeur, nous voila tombez dans la fosse, laquelle nous avions tant resolu d' eschapper. Ah! relevons-nous, et quittons-la pour jamais, reclamons la misericorde de Dieu, et esperons en elle qu'elle nous assistera pour desormais estre plus fermes; et remettons-nous au chemin de l'humilite. Courage, soyons meshuy sur nos gardes, Dieu nous aydera.'

'The way of humility. Ah,' thought Margaret, 'that is what I have missed! But courage, little heart. We will turn back, and by God's help we may find the lost path.'

So she rose up, and determined at once to set to on some work which should take her out of herself. To begin with, she called in Martha, as she passed the drawing-room door in going up-stairs, and tried to find out what was below the grave, respectful, servant-like manner, which crusted over her individual character with an obedience that was almost mechanical. She found it difficult to induce Martha to speak of any of her personal interests; but at last she touched the right chord, in naming Mrs. Thornton. Martha's whole face brightened, and, on a little encouragement, out came a long story, of how her father had been in early life connected with Mrs. Thornton's husband--nay, had even been in a position to show him some kindness; what,

Martha hardly knew, for it had happened when she was quite a little child; and circumstances had intervened to separate the two families until Martha was nearly grown up, when, her father having sunk lower and lower from his original occupation as clerk in a warehouse, and her mother being dead, she and her sister, to use Martha's own expression, would have been 'lost' but for Mrs. Thornton; who sought them out, and thought for them, and cared for them.

'I had had the fever, and was but delicate; and Mrs. Thornton, and Mr. Thornton too, they never rested till they had nursed me up in their own house, and sent me to the sea and all. The doctors said the fever was catching, but they cared none for that--only Miss Fanny, and she went a-visiting these folk that she is going to marry into. So, though she was afraid at the time, it has all ended well.'

'Miss Fanny going to be married!' exclaimed Margaret.

'Yes; and to a rich gentleman, too, only he's a deal older than she is. His name is Watson; and his milk are somewhere out beyond Hayleigh; it's a very good marriage, for all he's got such gray hair.'

At this piece of information, Margaret was silent long enough for Martha to recover her propriety, and, with it, her habitual shortness of answer. She swept up the hearth, asked at what time she should prepare tea, and quitted the room with the same wooden face with which she had entered it. Margaret had to pull herself up from indulging a bad trick, which she had lately fallen into, of trying to imagine how every event that she heard of in relation to Mr. Thornton would affect him: whether he would like it or dislike it.

The next day she had the little Boucher children for their lessons, and took a long walk, and ended by a visit to Mary Higgins. Somewhat to Margaret's surprise, she found Nicholas already come home from his work; the lengthening light had deceived her as to the lateness of the evening. He too seemed, by his manners, to have entered a little more on the way of humility; he was quieter, and less self-asserting.

'So th' oud gentleman's away on his travels, is he?' said he. 'Little 'uns telled me so. Eh! but they're sharp 'uns, they are; I a'most think they beat my own wenches for sharpness, though mappen it's wrong to say so, and one on 'em in her grave. There's summut in th' weather, I reckon, as sets folk a-wandering. My measter, him at th' shop yonder, is spinning about th' world somewhere.'

'Is that the reason you're so soon at home to-night?' asked Margaret innocently.

'Thou know'st nought about it, that's all,' said he, contemptuously. 'I'm not one wi' two faces--one for my measter, and t'other for his back. I counted a' th' clocks in the town striking afore I'd leave my work. No! yon Thornton's good enough for to fight wi', but too good for to be cheated. It were you as getten me the place, and I thank yo' for it. Thornton's is not a bad mill, as times go. Stand down, lad, and say yo'r pretty hymn to Miss Margaret. That's right; steady on thy legs, and right arm out as straight as a shewer. One to stop, two to stay, three mak' ready, and four away!'

The little fellow repeated a Methodist hymn, far above his comprehension in point of language, but of which the swinging rhythm had caught his ear, and which he repeated with all the developed cadence of a member of parliament. When Margaret had duly applauded, Nicholas called for another, and yet another, much to her surprise, as she found him thus oddly and unconsciously led to take an interest in the sacred things which he had formerly scouted.

It was past the usual tea-time when she reached home; but she had the comfort of feeling that no one had been kept waiting for her; and of thinking her own thoughts while she rested, instead of anxiously watching another person to learn whether to be grave or gay. After tea she resolved to examine a large packet of letters, and pick out those that were to be destroyed.

Among them she came to four or five of Mr. Henry Lennox's, relating to Frederick's affairs; and she carefully read them over again, with the sole intention, when she began, to ascertain exactly on how fine a chance the justification of her brother hung. But when she had finished the last, and weighed the pros and cons, the little personal revelation of character contained in them forced itself on her notice. It was evident enough, from the stiffness of the wording, that Mr. Lennox had never forgotten his relation to her in any interest he might feel in the subject of the correspondence. They were clever letters; Margaret saw that in a twinkling; but she missed out of them all hearty and genial atmosphere. They were to be preserved, however, as valuable; so she laid them carefully on one side. When this little piece of business was ended, she fell into a reverie; and the thought of her absent father ran strangely in Margaret's head this night. She almost blamed herself for having felt her solitude (and consequently his absence) as a relief; but these two days had set her up afresh, with new strength and brighter hope. Plans which had lately appeared to her in the guise of tasks, now appeared like pleasures. The morbid scales had fallen from her eyes, and she saw her position and her work more truly. If only Mr. Thornton would restore her the lost friendship,--nay, if he would only come from time to time to cheer her father as in former days,--though she should never see him, she felt as if the course of her future life, though not brilliant in prospect, might lie clear and even before her. She sighed as she rose up to go to bed. In spite of the 'One step's enough for me,'--in spite of the one plain duty of devotion to her father,--there lay at her heart an anxiety and a pang of sorrow.

And Mr. Hale thought of Margaret, that April evening, just as strangely and as persistently as she was thinking of him. He had been fatigued by going about among his old friends and old familiar places. He had had exaggerated ideas of the change which his altered opinions might make in his friends' reception of him; but although some of them might have felt shocked or grieved or indignant at his falling off in the abstract, as soon as they saw the face of the man whom they had once loved, they forgot his opinions in himself; or only remembered them enough to give an additional tender gravity to their manner. For Mr. Hale had not been known to many; he had belonged to one of the smaller colleges, and had always been shy and reserved; but those who in youth had cared to penetrate to the delicacy of thought and feeling that lay below his silence and indecision, took him to their hearts, with something of the protecting kindness which they would have shown to a woman. And the renewal of this kindliness, after the lapse of years, and an interval of so much change, overpowered him more than any roughness or expression of disapproval could have done.

'I'm afraid we've done too much,' said Mr. Bell. 'You're suffering now from having lived so long in that Milton air.

'I am tired,' said Mr. Hale. 'But it is not Milton air. I'm fifty-five years of age, and that little fact of itself accounts for any loss of strength.'

'Nonsense! I'm upwards of sixty, and feel no loss of strength, either bodily or mental. Don't let me hear you talking so. Fifty-five! why, you're quite a young man.'

Mr. Hale shook his head. 'These last few years!' said he. But after a minute's pause, he raised himself from his half recumbent position, in one of Mr. Bell's luxurious easy-chairs, and said with a kind of trembling earnestness:

'Bell! you're not to think, that if I could have foreseen all that would come of my change of opinion, and my resignation of my living--no! not even if I could have known how she would have suffered,--that I would undo it--the act of open acknowledgment that I no longer held the same faith as the church in which I was a priest. As I think now, even if I could have foreseen that cruellest martyrdom of suffering, through the sufferings of one whom I loved, I would have done just the same as far as that step of openly leaving the church went. I might have done differently, and acted more wisely, in all that I subsequently did for my family. But I don't think God endued me with over-much wisdom or strength,' he added, falling hack into his old position.

Mr. Bell blew his nose ostentatiously before answering. Then he said:

'He gave you strength to do what your conscience told you was right; and I don't see that we need any higher or holier strength than that; or wisdom either. I know I have not that much; and yet men set me down in their fool's books as a wise man; an independent character; strong-minded, and all that cant. The veriest idiot who obeys his own simple law of right, if it be but in wiping his shoes on a door-mat, is wiser and stronger than I. But what gulls men are!'

There was a pause. Mr. Hale spoke first, in continuation of his thought:

'About Margaret.'

'Well! about Margaret. What then?'

'If I die----'

'Nonsense!'

'What will become of her--I often think? I suppose the Lennoxes will ask her to live with them. I try to think they will. Her aunt Shaw loved her well in her own quiet way; but she forgets to love the absent.'

'A very common fault. What sort of people are the Lennoxes?'

'He, handsome, fluent, and agreeable. Edith, a sweet little spoiled beauty. Margaret loves her with all her heart, and Edith with as much of her heart as she can spare.'

'Now, Hale; you know that girl of yours has got pretty nearly all my heart. I told you that before. Of course, as your daughter, as my god-daughter, I took great interest in her before I saw her the last time. But this visit that I paid to you at Milton made me her slave. I went, a willing old victim, following the car of the conqueror. For, indeed, she looks as grand and serene as one who has struggled, and may be struggling, and yet has the victory secure in sight. Yes, in spite of all her present anxieties, that was the look on her face. And so, all I have is at her service, if she needs it; and will be hers, whether she will or no, when I die. Moreover, I myself, will be her preux chevalier, sixty and gouty though I be. Seriously, old friend, your daughter shall be my principal charge in life, and all the help that either my wit or my wisdom or my willing heart can give, shall be hers. I don't choose her out as a subject for fretting. Something, I know of old, you must have to worry yourself about, or you wouldn't be happy. But you're going to outlive me by many a long year. You spare, thin men are always tempting and always cheating Death! It's the stout, florid fellows like me, that always go off first.'

If Mr. Bell had had a prophetic eye he might have seen the torch all but inverted, and the angel with the grave and composed face standing very nigh, beckoning to his friend. That night Mr. Hale laid his head down on the pillow on which it never more should stir with life. The servant who entered his room in the morning, received no answer to his speech; drew near the bed, and saw the calm, beautiful face lying white and cold under the ineffaceable seal of death. The attitude was exquisitely easy; there had been no pain--no struggle. The action of the heart must have ceased as he lay down.

Mr. Bell was stunned by the shock; and only recovered when the time came for being angry at every suggestion of his man's.

'A coroner's inquest? Pooh. You don't think I poisoned him! Dr. Forbes says it is just the natural end of a heart complaint. Poor old Hale! You wore out that tender heart of yours before its time. Poor old friend! how he talked of his---- Wallis, pack up a carpet-bag for me in five minutes. Here have I been talking. Pack it up, I say. I must go to Milton by the next train.'

The bag was packed, the cab ordered, the railway reached, in twenty minutes from the moment of this decision. The London train whizzed by, drew back some yards, and in Mr. Bell was hurried by the impatient guard. He threw himself back in his seat, to try, with closed eyes, to understand how one in life yesterday could be dead to-day; and shortly tears stole out between his grizzled eye-lashes, at the feeling of which he opened his keen eyes, and looked as severely cheerful as his set determination could make him. He was not going to blubber before a set of strangers. Not he!

There was no set of strangers, only one sitting far from him on the same side. By and bye Mr. Bell peered at him, to discover what manner of man it was that might have been observing his emotion; and behind the great sheet of the outspread 'Times,' he recognised Mr. Thornton.

'Why, Thornton! is that you?' said he, removing hastily to a closer proximity. He shook Mr. Thornton vehemently by the hand, until the gripe ended in a sudden relaxation, for the hand was wanted to wipe away tears. He had last seen Mr. Thornton in his friend Hale's company.

'I'm going to Milton, bound on a melancholy errand. Going to break to Hale's daughter the news of his sudden death!'

'Death! Mr. Hale dead!'

'Ay; I keep saying it to myself, "Hale is dead!" but it doesn't make it any the more real. Hale is dead for all that. He went to bed well, to all appearance, last night, and was quite cold this morning when my servant went to call him.'

'Where? I don't understand!'

'At Oxford. He came to stay with me; hadn't been in Oxford this seventeen years--and this is the end of it.'

Not one word was spoken for above a quarter of an hour. Then Mr. Thornton said:

'And she!' and stopped full short.

'Margaret you mean. Yes! I am going to tell her. Poor fellow! how full his thoughts were of her all last night! Good God! Last night only. And how immeasurably distant he is now! But I take Margaret as my child for his sake. I said last night I would take her for her own sake. Well, I take her for both.'

Mr. Thornton made one or two fruitless attempts to speak, before he could get out the words:

'What will become of her!'

'I rather fancy there will be two people waiting for her: myself for one. I would take a live dragon into my house to live, if, by hiring such a chaperon, and setting up an establishment of my own, I could make my old age happy with having Margaret for a daughter. But there are those Lennoxes!'

'Who are they?' asked Mr. Thornton with trembling interest.

'Oh, smart London people, who very likely will think they've the best right to her. Captain Lennox married her cousin--the girl she was brought up with. Good enough people, I dare say. And there's her aunt, Mrs. Shaw. There might be a way open, perhaps, by my offering to marry that worthy lady! but that would be quite a pis aller. And then there's that brother!'

'What brother? A brother of her aunt's?'

'No, no; a clever Lennox, (the captain's a fool, you must understand) a young barrister, who will be setting his cap at Margaret. I know he has had her in his mind this five years or more: one of his chums told me as much; and he was only kept back by her want of fortune. Now that will be done away with.'

'How?' asked Mr. Thornton, too earnestly curious to be aware of the impertinence of his question.

'Why, she'll have my money at my death. And if this Henry Lennox is half good enough for her, and she likes him--well! I might find another way of getting a home through a marriage. I'm dreadfully afraid of being tempted, at an unguarded moment, by the aunt.'

Neither Mr. Bell nor Mr. Thornton was in a laughing humour; so the oddity of any of the speeches which the former made was unnoticed by them. Mr. Bell whistled, without emitting any sound beyond a long hissing breath; changed his seat, without finding comfort or rest while Mr. Thornton sat immoveably still, his eyes fixed on one spot in the newspaper, which he had taken up in order to give himself leisure to think.

'Where have you been?' asked Mr. Bell, at length.

'To Havre. Trying to detect the secret of the great rise in the price of cotton.'

'Ugh! Cotton, and speculations, and smoke, well-cleansed and well-cared-for machinery, and unwashed and neglected hands. Poor old Hale! Poor old Hale! If you could have known the change which it was to him from Helstone. Do you know the New Forest at all?'

'Yes.' (Very shortly).

'Then you can fancy the difference between it and Milton. What part were you in? Were you ever at Helstone? a little picturesque village, like some in the Odenwald? You know Helstone?'

'I have seen it. It was a great change to leave it and come to Milton.'

He took up his newspaper with a determined air, as if resolved to avoid further conversation; and Mr. Bell was fain to resort to his former occupation of trying to find out how he could best break the news to Margaret.

She was at an up-stairs window; she saw him alight; she guessed the truth with an instinctive flash. She stood in the middle of the drawing-room, as if arrested in her first impulse to rush downstairs, and as if by the same restraining thought she had been turned to stone; so white and immoveable was she.

'Oh! don't tell me! I know it from your face! You would have sent--you would not have left him--if he were alive! Oh papa, papa!'

CHAPTER XVII

ALONE! ALONE!

'When some beloved voice that was to you

1.

Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
- *And silence, against which you dare not cry,*
- *Aches round you like a strong disease and new--*
- *What hope? what help? what music will undo*
- *That silence to your sense?'*

MRS. BROWNING.

The shock had been great. Margaret fell into a state of prostration, which did not show itself in sobs and tears, or even find the relief of words. She lay on the sofa, with her eyes shut, never speaking but when spoken to, and then replying in whispers. Mr. Bell was perplexed. He dared not leave her; he dared not ask her to accompany him back to Oxford, which had been one of the plans he had formed on the journey to Milton, her physical exhaustion was evidently too complete for her to undertake any such fatigue--putting the sight that she would have to encounter out of the question. Mr. Bell sate over the fire, considering what he had better do. Margaret lay motionless, and almost breathless by him. He would not leave her, even for the dinner which Dixon had prepared for him down-stairs, and, with sobbing hospitality, would fain have tempted him to eat. He had a plateful of something brought up to him. In general, he was particular and dainty enough, and knew well each shade of flavour in his food, but now the devilled chicken tasted like sawdust. He minced up some of the fowl for Margaret, and peppered and salted it well; but when Dixon, following his directions, tried to feed her, the languid shake of head proved that in such a state as Margaret was in, food would only choke, not nourish her.

Mr. Bell gave a great sigh; lifted up his stout old limbs (stiff with travelling) from their easy position, and followed Dixon out of the room.

'I can't leave her. I must write to them at Oxford, to see that the preparations are made: they can he getting on with these till I arrive. Can't Mrs. Lennox come to her? I'll write and tell her she must. The girl must have some woman-friend about her, if only to talk her into a good fit of crying.'

Dixon was crying--enough for two; but, after wiping her eyes and steadying her voice, she managed to tell Mr. Bell, that Mrs. Lennox was too near her confinement to be able to undertake any journey at present.

'Well! I suppose we must have Mrs. Shaw; she's come back to England, isn't she?'

'Yes, sir, she's come back; but I don't think she will like to leave Mrs. Lennox at such an interesting time,' said Dixon, who did not much approve of a stranger entering the household, to share with her in her ruling care of Margaret.

'Interesting time be--' Mr. Bell restricted himself to coughing over the end of his sentence. 'She could be content to he at Venice or Naples, or some of those Popish places, at the last "interesting time," which took place in Corfu, I think. And what does that little prosperous woman's "interesting time" signify, in comparison with that poor creature there,--that helpless, homeless, friendless Margaret--lying as still on that sofa as if it were an altar-tomb, and she the stone statue on it. I tell you, Mrs. Shaw shall come. See that a room, or whatever she wants, is got ready for her by to-morrow night. I'll take care she comes.'

Accordingly Mr. Bell wrote a letter, which Mrs. Shaw declared, with many tears, to he so like one of the dear general's when he was going to have a fit of the gout, that she should always value and preserve it. If he had given her the option, by requesting or urging her, as if a refusal were possible, she might not have come--true and sincere as was her sympathy with Margaret. It needed the sharp uncourteous command to make her conquer her vis inertiae, and allow herself to be packed by her maid, after the latter had completed the boxes. Edith, all cap, shawls, and tears, came out to the top of the stairs, as Captain Lennox was taking her mother down to the carriage:

'Don't forget, mamma; Margaret must come and live with us. Sholto will go to Oxford on Wednesday, and you must send word by Mr. Bell to him when we're to expect you. And if you want Sholto, he can go on from Oxford to Milton. Don't forget, mamma; you are to bring back Margaret.'

Edith re-entered the drawing-room. Mr. Henry Lennox was there, cutting open the pages of a new Review. Without lifting his head, he said, 'If you don't like Sholto to be so long absent from you, Edith, I hope you will let me go down to Milton, and give what assistance I can.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Edith, 'I dare say old Mr. Bell will do everything he can, and more help may not be needed. Only one does not look for much savoir-faire from a resident Fellow. Dear, darling Margaret! won't it be nice to have her here, again? You were both great allies, years ago.'

'Were we?' asked he indifferently, with an appearance of being interested in a passage in the Review.

'Well, perhaps not--I forget. I was so full of Sholto. But doesn't it fall out well, that if my uncle was to die, it should be just now, when we are come home, and settled in the old house, and quite ready to receive Margaret? Poor thing! what a change it will be to her from Milton! I'll have new chintz for her bedroom, and make it look new and bright, and cheer her up a little.'

In the same spirit of kindness, Mrs. Shaw journeyed to Milton, occasionally dreading the first meeting, and wondering how it would be got over; but more frequently planning how soon she could get Margaret away from 'that horrid place,' and back into the pleasant comforts of Harley Street.

'Oh dear!' she said to her maid; 'look at those chimneys! My poor sister Hale! I don't think I could have rested at Naples, if I had known what it was! I must have come and fetched her and Margaret away.' And to herself she acknowledged, that she had always thought her brother-in-law rather a weak man, but never so weak as now, when she saw for what a place he had exchanged the lovely Helstone home.

Margaret had remained in the same state; white, motionless, speechless, tearless. They had told her that her aunt Shaw was coming; but she had not expressed either surprise or pleasure, or dislike to the idea. Mr. Bell, whose appetite had returned, and who appreciated Dixon's endeavours to gratify it, in vain urged upon her to taste some sweetbreads stewed with oysters; she shook her head with the same quiet obstinacy as on the previous day; and he was obliged to console himself for her rejection, by eating them all himself But Margaret was the first to hear the stopping of the cab that brought her aunt from the railway station. Her eyelids quivered, her lips coloured and trembled. Mr. Bell went down to meet Mrs. Shaw; and when they came up, Margaret was standing, trying to steady her dizzy self; and when she saw her aunt, she went forward to the arms open to receive her, and first found the passionate relief of tears on her aunt's shoulder. All thoughts of quiet habitual love, of tenderness for years, of relationship to the dead,--all that inexplicable likeness in look, tone, and gesture, that seem to belong to one family, and which reminded Margaret so forcibly at this moment of her mother,--came in to melt and soften her numbed heart into the overflow of warm tears.

Mr. Bell stole out of the room, and went down into the study, where he ordered a fire, and tried to divert his thoughts by taking down and examining the different books. Each volume brought a remembrance or a suggestion of his dead friend. It might be a change of employment from his two days' work of watching Margaret, but it was no change of thought. He was glad to catch the sound of Mr. Thornton's voice, making enquiry at the door. Dixon was rather cavalierly dismissing him; for with the appearance of Mrs. Shaw's maid, came visions of former grandeur, of the Beresford blood, of the 'station' (so she was pleased to term it) from which her young lady had been ousted, and to which she was now, please God, to be restored. These visions, which she had been dwelling on with complacency in her conversation with Mrs. Shaw's maid (skilfully eliciting meanwhile all the circumstances of state and consequence connected with the Harley Street establishment, for the edification of the listening Martha), made Dixon rather inclined to be supercilious in her treatment of any inhabitant of Milton; so, though she

always stood rather in awe of Mr. Thornton, she was as curt as she durst be in telling him that he could see none of the inmates of the house that night. It was rather uncomfortable to he contradicted in her statement by Mr. Bell's opening the study-door, and calling out:

'Thornton! is that you? Come in for a minute or two; I want to speak to you.' So Mr. Thornton went into the study, and Dixon had to retreat into the kitchen, and reinstate herself in her own esteem by a prodigious story of Sir John Beresford's coach and six, when he was high sheriff.

'I don't know what I wanted to say to you after all. Only it's dull enough to sit in a room where everything speaks to you of a dead friend. Yet Margaret and her aunt must have the drawing-room to themselves!'

'Is Mrs.--is her aunt come?' asked Mr. Thornton.

'Come? Yes! maid and all. One would have thought she might have come by herself at such a time! And now I shall have to turn out and find my way to the Clarendon.'

'You must not go to the Clarendon. We have five or six empty bed-rooms at home.'

'Well aired?'

'I think you may trust my mother for that.'

'Then I'll only run up-stairs and wish that wan girl good-night, and make my bow to her aunt, and go off with you straight.'

Mr. Bell was some time up-stairs. Mr. Thornton began to think it long, for he was full of business, and had hardly been able to spare the time for running up to Crampton, and enquiring how Miss Hale was.

When they had set out upon their walk, Mr. Bell said:

'I was kept by those women in the drawing-room. Mrs. Shaw is anxious to get home--on account of her daughter, she says--and wants Margaret to go off with her at once. Now she is no more fit for travelling than I am for flying. Besides, she says, and very justly, that she has friends she must see--that she must wish good-bye to several people; and then her aunt worried her about old claims, and was she forgetful of old friends? And she said, with a great burst of crying, she should be glad enough to go from a place where she had suffered so much. Now I must return to Oxford to-morrow, and I don't know on which side of the scale to throw in my voice.'

He paused, as if asking a question; but he received no answer from his companion, the echo of whose thoughts kept repeating--

'Where she had suffered so much.' Alas! and that was the way in which this eighteen months in Milton--to him so unspeakably precious, down to its very bitterness, which was worth

all the rest of life's sweetness--would be remembered. Neither loss of father, nor loss of mother, dear as she was to Mr. Thornton, could have poisoned the remembrance of the weeks, the days, the hours, when a walk of two miles, every step of which was pleasant, as it brought him nearer and nearer to her, took him to her sweet presence--every step of which was rich, as each recurring moment that bore him away from her made him recall some fresh grace in her demeanour, or pleasant pungency in her character. Yes! whatever had happened to him, external to his relation to her, he could never have spoken of that time, when he could have seen her every day--when he had her within his grasp, as it were--as a time of suffering. It had been a royal time of luxury to him, with all its stings and contumelies, compared to the poverty that crept round and clipped the anticipation of the future down to sordid fact, and life without an atmosphere of either hope or fear.

Mrs. Thornton and Fanny were in the dining-room; the latter in a flutter of small exultation, as the maid held up one glossy material after another, to try the effect of the wedding-dresses by candlelight. Her mother really tried to sympathise with her, but could not. Neither taste nor dress were in her line of subjects, and she heartily wished that Fanny had accepted her brother's offer of having the wedding clothes provided by some first-rate London dressmaker, without the endless troublesome discussions, and unsettled wavering, that arose out of Fanny's desire to choose and superintend everything herself. Mr. Thornton was only too glad to mark his grateful approbation of any sensible man, who could be captivated by Fanny's second-rate airs and graces, by giving her ample means for providing herself with the finery, which certainly rivalled, if it did not exceed, the lover in her estimation. When her brother and Mr. Bell came in, Fanny blushed and simpered, and fluttered over the signs of her employment, in a way which could not have failed to draw attention from any one else but Mr. Bell. If he thought about her and her silks and satins at all, it was to compare her and them with the pale sorrow he had left behind him, sitting motionless, with bent head and folded hands, in a room where the stillness was so great that you might almost fancy the rush in your straining ears was occasioned by the spirits of the dead, yet hovering round their beloved. For, when Mr. Bell had first gone up-stairs, Mrs. Shaw lay asleep on the sofa; and no sound broke the silence.

Mrs. Thornton gave Mr. Bell her formal, hospitable welcome. She was never so gracious as when receiving her Son's friends in her son's house; and the more unexpected they were, the more honour to her admirable housekeeping preparations for comfort.

'How is Miss Hale?' she asked.

'About as broken down by this last stroke as she can be.'

'I am sure it is very well for her that she has such a friend as you.'

'I wish I were her only friend, madam. I daresay it sounds very brutal; but here have I been displaced, and turned out of my post of comforter and adviser by a fine lady aunt; and there are cousins and what not claiming her in London, as if she were a lap-dog belonging to them. And she is too weak and miserable to have a will of her own.'

'She must indeed be weak,' said Mrs. Thornton, with an implied meaning which her son understood well. 'But where,' continued Mrs. Thornton, 'have these relations been all this time that Miss Hale has appeared almost friendless, and has certainly had a good deal of anxiety to bear?' But she did not feel interest enough in the answer to her question to wait for it. She left the room to make her household arrangements.

'They have been living abroad. They have some kind of claim upon her. I will do them that justice. The aunt brought her up, and she and the cousin have been like sisters. The thing vexing me, you see, is that I wanted to take her for a child of my own; and I am jealous of these people, who don't seem to value the privilege of their right. Now it would be different if Frederick claimed her.'

'Frederick!' exclaimed Mr. Thornton. 'Who is he? What right--?' Me stopped short in his vehement question.

'Frederick,' said Mr. Bell in surprise. 'Why don't you know? He's her brother. Have you not heard--'

'I never heard his name before. Where is he? Who is he?'

'Surely I told you about him, when the family first came to Milton--the son who was concerned in that mutiny.'

'I never heard of him till this moment. Where does he live?'

'In Spain. He's liable to be arrested the moment he sets foot on English ground. Poor fellow! he will grieve at not being able to attend his father's funeral. We must be content with Captain Lennox; for I don't know of any other relation to summon.'

'I hope I may be allowed to go?'

'Certainly; thankfully. You're a good fellow, after all, Thornton. Hale liked you. He spoke to me, only the other day, about you at Oxford. He regretted he had seen so little of you lately. I am obliged to you for wishing to show him respect.'

'But about Frederick. Does he never come to England?'

'Never.'

'He was not over here about the time of Mrs. Hale's death?'

'No. Why, I was here then. I hadn't seen Hale for years and years and, if you remember, I came-- No, it was some time after that that I came. But poor Frederick Hale was not here then. What made you think he was?'

'I saw a young man walking with Miss Hale one day,' replied Mr. Thornton, 'and I think it was about that time.'

'Oh, that would be this young Lennox, the Captain's brother. He's a lawyer, and they were in pretty constant correspondence with him; and I remember Mr. Hale told me he thought he would come down. Do you know,' said Mr. Bell, wheeling round, and shutting one eye, the better to bring the forces of the other to bear with keen scrutiny on Mr. Thornton's face, 'that I once fancied you had a little tenderness for Margaret?'

No answer. No change of countenance.

'And so did poor Hale. Not at first, and not till I had put it into his head.'

'I admired Miss Hale. Every one must do so. She is a beautiful creature,' said Mr. Thornton, driven to bay by Mr. Bell's pertinacious questioning.

'Is that all! You can speak of her in that measured way, as simply a beautiful creature"--only something to catch the eye. I did hope you had had nobleness enough in you to make you pay her the homage of the heart. Though I believe--in fact I know, she would have rejected you, still to have loved her without return would have lifted you higher than all those, be they who they may, that have never known her to love. "Beautiful creature" indeed! Do you speak of her as you would of a horse or a dog?'

Mr. Thornton's eyes glowed like red embers.

'Mr. Bell,' said he, 'before you speak so, you should remember that all men are not as free to express what they feel as you are. Let us talk of something else.' For though his heart leaped up, as at a trumpet-call, to every word that Mr. Bell had said, and though he knew that what he had said would henceforward bind the thought of the old Oxford Fellow closely up with the most precious things of his heart, yet he would not be forced into any expression of what he felt towards Margaret. He was no mocking-bird of praise, to try because another extolled what he reverenced and passionately loved, to outdo him in laudation. So he turned to some of the dry matters of business that lay between Mr. Bell and him, as landlord and tenant.

'What is that heap of brick and mortar we came against in the yard? Any repairs wanted?'

'No, none, thank you.'

'Are you building on your own account? If you are, I'm very much obliged to you.'

'I'm building a dining-room--for the men I mean--the hands.'

'I thought you were hard to please, if this room wasn't good enough to satisfy you, a bachelor.'

'I've got acquainted with a strange kind of chap, and I put one or two children in whom he is interested to school. So, as I happened to be passing near his house one day, I just went there about some trifling payment to be made; and I saw such a miserable black frizzle of a dinner--a greasy cinder of meat, as first set me a-thinking. But it was not till provisions grew so high this winter that I bethought me how, by buying things wholesale, and cooking a good quantity of provisions together, much money might be saved, and much comfort gained. So I spoke to my friend--or my enemy--the man I told you of--and he found fault with every detail of my plan; and in consequence I laid it aside, both as impracticable, and also because if I forced it into operation I should be interfering with the independence of my men; when, suddenly, this Higgins came to me and graciously signified his approval of a scheme so nearly the same as mine, that I might fairly have claimed it; and, moreover, the approval of several of his fellow-workmen, to whom he had spoken. I was a little "riled," I confess, by his manner, and thought of throwing the whole thing overboard to sink or swim. But it seemed childish to relinquish a plan which I had once thought wise and well-laid, just because I myself did not receive all the honour and consequence due to the originator. So I coolly took the part assigned to me, which is something like that of steward to a club. I buy in the provisions wholesale, and provide a fitting matron or cook.'

'I hope you give satisfaction in your new capacity. Are you a good judge of potatoes and onions? But I suppose Mrs. Thornton assists you in your marketing.'

'Not a bit,' replied Mr. Thornton. 'She disapproves of the whole plan, and now we never mention it to each other. But I manage pretty well, getting in great stocks from Liverpool, and being served in butcher's meat by our own family butcher. I can assure you, the hot dinners the matron turns out are by no means to be despised.'

'Do you taste each dish as it goes in, in virtue of your office? I hope you have a white wand.'

'I was very scrupulous, at first, in confining myself to the mere purchasing part, and even in that I rather obeyed the men's orders conveyed through the housekeeper, than went by my own judgment. At one time, the beef was too large, at another the mutton was not fat enough. I think they saw how careful I was to leave them free, and not to intrude my own ideas upon them; so, one day, two or three of the men--my friend Higgins among them--asked me if I would not come in and take a snack. It was a very busy day, but I saw that the men would be hurt if, after making the advance, I didn't meet them half-way, so I went in, and I never made a better dinner in my life. I told them (my next neighbours I mean, for I'm no speech-maker) how much I'd enjoyed it; and for some time, whenever that especial dinner recurred in their dietary, I was sure to be met by these men, with a "Master, there's hot-pot for dinner to-day, win yo' come?" If they had not asked me, I would no more have intruded on them than I'd have gone to the mess at the barracks without invitation.'

'I should think you were rather a restraint on your hosts' conversation. They can't abuse the masters while you're there. I suspect they take it out on non-hot-pot days.'

'Well! hitherto we've steered clear of all vexed questions. But if any of the old disputes came up again, I would certainly speak out my mind next hot-pot day. But you are hardly acquainted with our Darkshire fellows, for all you're a Darkshire man yourself They have such a sense of humour, and such a racy mode of expression! I am getting really to know some of them now, and they talk pretty freely before me.'

'Nothing like the act of eating for equalising men. Dying is nothing to it. The philosopher dies sententiously--the pharisee ostentatiously--the simple-hearted humbly--the poor idiot blindly, as the sparrow falls to the ground; the philosopher and idiot, publican and pharisee, all eat after the same fashion--given an equally good digestion. There's theory for theory for you!'

'Indeed I have no theory; I hate theories.'

'I beg your pardon. To show my penitence, will you accept a ten pound note towards your marketing, and give the poor fellows a feast?'

'Thank you; but I'd rather not. They pay me rent for the oven and cooking-places at the back of the mill: and will have to pay more for the new dining-room. I don't want it to fall into a charity. I don't want donations. Once let in the principle, and I should have people going, and talking, and spoiling the simplicity of the whole thing.'

'People will talk about any new plan. You can't help that.'

'My enemies, if I have any, may make a philanthropic fuss about this dinner-scheme; but you are a friend, and I expect you will pay my experiment the respect of silence. It is but a new broom at present, and sweeps clean enough. But by-and-by we shall meet with plenty of stumbling-blocks, no doubt.'

CHAPTER XVIII

MARGARET'S FLITTIN'

'The meanest thing to which we bid adieu,

1.

Loses its meanness in the parting hour.'

Mrs. Shaw took as vehement a dislike as it was possible for one of her gentle nature to do, against Milton. It was noisy, and smoky, and the poor people whom she saw in the streets were dirty, and the rich ladies over-dressed, and not a man that she saw, high or low, had his clothes made to fit him. She was sure Margaret would never regain her lost strength while she stayed in Milton; and she herself was afraid of one of her old attacks of the nerves. Margaret must return with her, and that quickly. This, if not the exact force of her words, was at any rate the spirit of what she urged on Margaret, till the latter, weak, weary, and broken-spirited, yielded a reluctant promise that, as soon as Wednesday was over she would prepare to accompany her aunt back to town, leaving Dixon in charge of all the arrangements for paying bills, disposing of furniture, and shutting up the house. Before that Wednesday--that mournful Wednesday, when Mr. Hale was to be interred, far away from either of the homes he had known in life, and far away from the wife who lay lonely among strangers (and this last was Margaret's great trouble, for she thought that if she had not given way to that overwhelming stupor during the first sad days, she could have arranged things otherwise)--before that Wednesday, Margaret received a letter from Mr. Bell.

'MY DEAR MARGARET:--I did mean to have returned to Milton on Thursday, but unluckily it turns out to be one of the rare occasions when we, Plymouth Fellows, are called upon to perform any kind of duty, and I must not be absent from my post. Captain Lennox and Mr. Thornton are here. The former seems a smart, well-meaning man; and has proposed to go over to Milton, and assist you in any search for the will; of course there is none, or you would have found it by this time, if you followed my directions. Then the Captain declares he must take you and his mother-in-law home; and, in his wife's present state, I don't see how you can expect him to remain away longer than Friday. However, that Dixon of yours is trusty; and can hold her, or your own, till I come. I will put matters into the hands of my Milton attorney if there is no will; for I doubt this smart captain is no great man of business. Nevertheless, his moustachios are splendid. There will have to be a sale, so select what things you wish reserved. Or you can send a list afterwards. Now two things more, and I have done. You know, or if you don't, your poor father did, that you are to have my money and goods when I die. Not that I mean to die yet; but I name this lust to explain what is coming. These Lennoxes seem very fond of you now; and perhaps may continue to be; perhaps not. So it is best to start with a formal agreement; namely, that you are to pay them two hundred and fifty pounds a year, as long as you and they find it pleasant to live together. (This, of course, includes Dixon; mind you don't be cajoled into paying any more for her.) Then you won't be thrown adrift, if some day the captain wishes to have his house to himself, but you can carry yourself and your two hundred and fifty pounds off somewhere else; if, indeed, I have not claimed you to come and keep house for me first. Then as to dress, and Dixon, and personal expenses, and confectionery (all young ladies eat confectionery till wisdom comes by age), I shall consult some lady of my acquaintance, and see how much you will have from your father before fixing this. Now, Margaret, have you flown out before you have read this far, and wondered what right the old man has to settle your affairs for

you so cavalierly? I make no doubt you have. Yet the old man has a right. He has loved your father for five and thirty years; he stood beside him on his wedding-day; he closed his eyes in death. Moreover, he is your godfather; and as he cannot do you much good spiritually, having a hidden consciousness of your superiority in such things, he would fain do you the poor good of endowing you materially. And the old man has not a known relation on earth; "who is there to mourn for Adam Bell?" and his whole heart is set and bent upon this one thing, and Margaret Hale is not the girl to say him nay. Write by return, if only two lines, to tell me your answer. But no thanks.'

Margaret took up a pen and scrawled with trembling hand, 'Margaret Hale is not the girl to say him nay.' In her weak state she could not think of any other words, and yet she was vexed to use these. But she was so much fatigued even by this slight exertion, that if she could have thought of another form of acceptance, she could not have sate up to write a syllable of it. She was obliged to lie down again, and try not to think.

'My dearest child! Has that letter vexed or troubled you?'

'No!' said Margaret feebly. 'I shall be better when to-morrow is over.'

'I feel sure, darling, you won't be better till I get you out of this horrid air. How you can have borne it this two years I can't imagine.'

'Where could I go to? I could not leave papa and mamma.'

'Well! don't distress yourself, my dear. I dare say it was all for the best, only I had no conception of how you were living. Our butler's wife lives in a better house than this.'

'It is sometimes very pretty--in summer; you can't judge by what it is now. I have been very happy here,' and Margaret closed her eyes by way of stopping the conversation.

The house teemed with comfort now, compared to what it had done. The evenings were chilly, and by Mrs. Shaw's directions fires were lighted in every bedroom. She petted Margaret in every possible way, and bought every delicacy, or soft luxury in which she herself would have burrowed and sought comfort. But Margaret was indifferent to all these things; or, if they forced themselves upon her attention, it was simply as causes for gratitude to her aunt, who was putting herself so much out of her way to think of her. She was restless, though so weak. All the day long, she kept herself from thinking of the ceremony which was going on at Oxford, by wandering from room to room, and languidly setting aside such articles as she wished to retain. Dixon followed her by Mrs. Shaw's desire, ostensibly to receive instructions, but with a private injunction to soothe her into repose as soon as might be.

'These books, Dixon, I will keep. All the rest will you send to Mr. Bell? They are of a kind that he will value for themselves, as well as for papa's sake. This----I should like you to take this to Mr. Thornton, after I am gone. Stay; I will write a note with it.' And she sate down hastily, as if afraid of thinking, and wrote:

'DEAR SIR,--The accompanying book I am sure will be valued by you for the sake of my father, to whom it belonged.
'Yours sincerely,
'MARGARET HALE.'She set out again upon her travels through the house, turning over articles, known to her from her childhood, with a sort of caressing reluctance to leave them--old-fashioned, worn and shabby, as they might be. But she hardly spoke again; and Dixon's report to Mrs. Shaw was, that 'she doubted whether Miss Hale heard a word of what she said, though she talked the whole time, in order to divert her attention.' The consequence of being on her feet all day was excessive bodily weariness in the evening, and a better night's rest than she had had since she had heard of Mr. Hale's death.

At breakfast time the next day, she expressed her wish to go and bid one or two friends good-bye. Mrs. Shaw objected:

'I am sure, my dear, you can have no friends here with whom you are sufficiently intimate to justify you in calling upon them so soon; before you have been at church.'

'But to-day is my only day; if Captain Lennox comes this afternoon, and if we must--if I must really go to-morrow----'

'Oh, yes; we shall go to-morrow. I am more and more convinced that this air is bad for you, and makes you look so pale and ill; besides, Edith expects us; and she may be waiting me; and you cannot be left alone, my dear, at your age. No; if you must pay these calls, I will go with you. Dixon can get us a coach, I suppose?'

So Mrs. Shaw went to take care of Margaret, and took her maid with her to, take care of the shawls and air-cushions. Margaret's face was too sad to lighten up into a smile at all this preparation for paying two visits, that she had often made by herself at all hours of the day. She was half afraid of owning that one place to which she was going was Nicholas Higgins'; all she could do was to hope her aunt would be indisposed to get out of the coach, and walk up the court, and at every breath of wind have her face slapped by wet clothes, hanging out to dry on ropes stretched from house to house.

There was a little battle in Mrs. Shaw's mind between ease and a sense of matronly propriety; but the former gained the day; and with many an injunction to Margaret to be careful of herself, and not to catch any fever, such as was always lurking in such places, her aunt permitted her to go where she had often been before without taking any precaution or requiring any permission.

Nicholas was out; only Mary and one or two of the Boucher children at home. Margaret was vexed with herself for not having timed her visit better. Mary had a very blunt intellect, although her feelings were warm and kind; and the instant she understood what Margaret's purpose was in coming to see them, she began to cry and sob with so little restraint that Margaret found it useless to say any of the thousand little things which had suggested themselves to her as she was coming along in the coach. She could only try to comfort her a little by suggesting the vague chance of their meeting again, at some possible time, in some possible

place, and bid her tell her father how much she wished, if he could manage it, that he should come to see her when he had done his work in the evening.

As she was leaving the place, she stopped and looked round; then hesitated a little before she said:

'I should like to have some little thing to remind me of Bessy.'

Instantly Mary's generosity was keenly alive. What could they give? And on Margaret's singling out a little common drinking-cup, which she remembered as the one always standing by Bessy's side with drink for her feverish lips, Mary said:

'Oh, take summut better; that only cost fourpence!'

'That will do, thank you,' said Margaret; and she went quickly away, while the light caused by the pleasure of having something to give yet lingered on Mary's face.

'Now to Mrs. Thornton's,' thought she to herself. 'It must be done.' But she looked rather rigid and pale at the thought of it, and had hard work to find the exact words in which to explain to her aunt who Mrs. Thornton was, and why she should go to bid her farewell.

They (for Mrs. Shaw alighted here) were shown into the drawing-room, in which a fire had only just been kindled. Mrs. Shaw huddled herself up in her shawl, and shivered.

'What an icy room!' she said.

They had to wait for some time before Mrs. Thornton entered. There was some softening in her heart towards Margaret, now that she was going away out of her sight. She remembered her spirit, as shown at various times and places even more than the patience with which she had endured long and wearing cares. Her countenance was blander than usual, as she greeted her; there was even a shade of tenderness in her manner, as she noticed the white, tear-swollen face, and the quiver in the voice which Margaret tried to make so steady.

'Allow me to introduce my aunt, Mrs. Shaw. I am going away from Milton to-morrow; I do not know if you are aware of it; but I wanted to see you once again, Mrs. Thornton, to--to apologise for my manner the last time I saw you; and to say that I am sure you meant kindly--however much we may have misunderstood each other.'

Mrs. Shaw looked extremely perplexed by what Margaret had said. Thanks for kindness! and apologies for failure in good manners! But Mrs. Thornton replied:

'Miss Hale, I am glad you do me justice. I did no more than I believed to be my duty in remonstrating with you as I did. I have always desired to act the part of a friend to you. I am glad you do me justice.'

'And,' said Margaret, blushing excessively as she spoke, 'will you do me justice, and believe that though I cannot--I do not choose--to give explanations of my conduct, I have not acted in the unbecoming way you apprehended?'

Margaret's voice was so soft, and her eyes so pleading, that Mrs. Thornton was for once affected by the charm of manner to which she had hitherto proved herself invulnerable.

'Yes, I do believe you. Let us say no more about it. Where are you going to reside, Miss Hale? I understood from Mr. Bell that you were going to leave Milton. You never liked Milton, you know,' said Mrs. Thornton, with a sort of grim smile; 'but for all that, you must not expect me to congratulate you on quitting it. Where shall you live?'

'With my aunt,' replied Margaret, turning towards Mrs. Shaw.

'My niece will reside with me in Harley Street. She is almost like a daughter to me,' said Mrs. Shaw, looking fondly at Margaret; 'and I am glad to acknowledge my own obligation for any kindness that has been shown to her. If you and your husband ever come to town, my son and daughter, Captain and Mrs. Lennox, will, I am sure, join with me in wishing to do anything in our power to show you attention.'

Mrs. Thornton thought in her own mind, that Margaret had not taken much care to enlighten her aunt as to the relationship between the Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, towards whom the fine-lady aunt was extending her soft patronage; so she answered shortly,

'My husband is dead. Mr. Thornton is my son. I never go to London; so I am not likely to be able to avail myself of your polite offers.'

At this instant Mr. Thornton entered the room; he had only just returned from Oxford. His mourning suit spoke of the reason that had called him there.

'John,' said his mother, 'this lady is Mrs. Shaw, Miss Hale's aunt. I am sorry to say, that Miss Hale's call is to wish us good-bye.'

'You are going then!' said he, in a low voice.

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'We leave to-morrow.'

'My son-in-law comes this evening to escort us,' said Mrs. Shaw.

Mr. Thornton turned away. He had not sat down, and now he seemed to be examining something on the table, almost as if he had discovered an unopened letter, which had made him forget the present company. He did not even seem to be aware when they got up to take leave. He started forwards, however, to hand Mrs. Shaw down to the carriage. As it drove up, he and Margaret stood close together on the door-step, and it was impossible but that the recollection of the day of the riot should force itself into both their minds. Into his it came associated with the speeches of the following day; her passionate declaration that there was not a man in all that

violent and desperate crowd, for whom she did not care as much as for him. And at the remembrance of her taunting words, his brow grew stern, though his heart beat thick with longing love. 'No!' said he, 'I put it to the touch once, and I lost it all. Let her go,--with her stony heart, and her beauty;--how set and terrible her look is now, for all her loveliness of feature! She is afraid I shall speak what will require some stern repression. Let her go. Beauty and heiress as she may be, she will find it hard to meet with a truer heart than mine. Let her go!'

And there was no tone of regret, or emotion of any kind in the voice with which he said good-bye; and the offered hand was taken with a resolute calmness, and dropped as carelessly as if it had been a dead and withered flower. But none in his household saw Mr. Thornton again that day. He was busily engaged; or so he said.

Margaret's strength was so utterly exhausted by these visits, that she had to submit to much watching, and petting, and sighing 'I-told-you-so's,' from her aunt. Dixon said she was quite as bad as she had been on the first day she heard of her father's death; and she and Mrs. Shaw consulted as to the desirableness of delaying the morrow's journey. But when her aunt reluctantly proposed a few days' delay to Margaret, the latter writhed her body as if in acute suffering, and said:

'Oh! let us go. I cannot be patient here. I shall not get well here. I want to forget.'

So the arrangements went on; and Captain Lennox came, and with him news of Edith and the little boy; and Margaret found that the indifferent, careless conversation of one who, however kind, was not too warm and anxious a sympathiser, did her good. She roused up; and by the time that she knew she might expect Higgins, she was able to leave the room quietly, and await in her own chamber the expected summons.

'Eh!' said he, as she came in, 'to think of th' oud gentleman dropping off as he did! Yo' might ha' knocked me down wi' a straw when they telled me. "Mr. Hale?" said I; "him as was th' parson?" "Ay," said they. "Then," said I, "there's as good a man gone as ever lived on this earth, let who will be t' other!" And I came to see yo', and tell yo' how grieved I were, but them women in th' kitchen wouldn't tell yo' I were there. They said yo' were ill,--and butter me, but yo' dunnot look like th' same wench. And yo're going to be a grand lady up i' Lunnon, aren't yo'?'

'Not a grand lady,' said Margaret, half smiling.

'Well! Thornton said--says he, a day or two ago, "Higgins, have yo' seen Miss Hale?" "No," says I; "there's a pack o' women who won't let me at her. But I can bide my time, if she's ill. She and I knows each other pretty well; and hoo'l not go doubting that I'm main sorry for th' oud gentleman's death, just because I can't get at her and tell her so." And says he, "Yo'll not have much time for to try and see her, my fine chap. She's not for staying with us a day longer nor she can help. She's got grand relations, and they're carrying her off; and we sha'n't see her no more." "Measter," said I, "if I dunnot see her afore hoo goes, I'll strive to get up to Lunnun next Whissuntide, that I will. I'll not be baulked of saying her good-bye by any relations whatsomdever." But, bless yo', I knowed yo'd come. It were only for to humour the measter, I let on as if I thought yo'd mappen leave Milton without seeing me.'

'You're quite right,' said Margaret. 'You only do me justice. And you'll not forget me, I'm sure. If no one else in Milton remembers me, I'm certain you will; and papa too. You know how good and how tender he was. Look, Higgins! here is his bible. I have kept it for you. I can ill spare it; but I know he would have liked you to have it. I'm sure you'll care for it, and study what is In it, for his sake.'

'Yo' may say that. If it were the deuce's own scribble, and yo' axed me to read in it for yo'r sake, and th' oud gentleman's, I'd do it. Whatten's this, wench? I'm not going for to take yo'r brass, so dunnot think it. We've been great friends, 'bout the sound o' money passing between us,'

'For the children--for Boucher's children,' said Margaret, hurriedly. 'They may need it. You've no right to refuse it for them. I would not give you a penny,' she said, smiling; 'don't think there's any of it for you.'

'Well, wench! I can nobbut say, Bless yo'! and bless yo'!--and amen.'

CHAPTER XIX

EASE NOT PEACE

'A dull rotation, never at a stay,

1.

Yesterday's face twin image of to-day.'

COWPER.

1. *'Of what each one should be, he sees the form and rule,*
2. *And till he reach to that, his joy can ne'er be full.'*

RUCKERT.

It was very well for Margaret that the extreme quiet of the Harley Street house, during Edith's recovery from her confinement, gave her the natural rest which she needed. It gave her time to comprehend the sudden change which had taken place in her circumstances within the last two months. She found herself at once an inmate of a luxurious house, where the bare knowledge of the existence of every trouble or care seemed scarcely to have penetrated. The wheels of the machinery of daily life were well oiled, and went along with delicious smoothness. Mrs. Shaw and Edith could hardly make enough of Margaret, on her return to what they persisted in calling her home. And she felt that it was almost ungrateful in her to have a secret feeling that the Helstone vicarage--nay, even the poor little house at Milton, with her anxious father and her invalid mother, and all the small household cares of comparative poverty, composed her idea of home. Edith was impatient to get well, in order to fill Margaret's bed-room with all the soft comforts, and pretty nick-knacks, with which her own abounded. Mrs. Shaw and her maid found plenty of occupation in restoring Margaret's wardrobe to a state of elegant variety. Captain Lennox was easy, kind, and gentlemanly; sate with his wife in her dressing-room an hour or two every day; played with his little boy for another hour, and lounged away the rest of his time at his club, when he was not engaged out to dinner. Just before Margaret had recovered from her necessity for quiet and repose--before she had begun to feel her life wanting and dull--Edith came down-stairs and resumed her usual part in the household; and Margaret fell into the old habit of watching, and admiring, and ministering to her cousin. She gladly took all charge of the semblances of duties off Edith's hands; answered notes, reminded her of engagements, tended her when no gaiety was in prospect, and she was consequently rather inclined to fancy herself ill. But all the rest of the family were in the full business of the London season, and Margaret was often left alone. Then her thoughts went back to Milton, with a strange sense of the contrast between the life there, and here. She was getting surfeited of the eventless ease in which no struggle or endeavour was required. She was afraid lest she should even become sleepily deadened into forgetfulness of anything beyond the life which was lapping her round with luxury. There might be toilers and moilers there in London, but she never saw them; the very servants lived in an underground world of their own, of which she knew neither the hopes nor the fears; they only seemed to start into existence when some want or whim of their master and mistress needed them. There was a strange unsatisfied vacuum in Margaret's heart and mode of life; and, once when she had dimly hinted this to Edith, the latter, wearied with dancing the night before, languidly stroked Margaret's cheek as she sat by her in the old attitude,--she on a footstool by the sofa where Edith lay.

'Poor child!' said Edith. 'It is a little sad for you to be left, night after night, just at this time when all the world is so gay. But we shall be having our dinner-parties soon--as soon as Henry comes back from circuit--and then there will be a little pleasant variety for you. No wonder it is moped, poor darling!'

Margaret did not feel as if the dinner-parties would be a panacea. But Edith piqued herself on her dinner-parties; 'so different,' as she said, 'from the old dowager dinners under mamma's regime;' and Mrs. Shaw herself seemed to take exactly the same kind of pleasure in the very different arrangements and circle of acquaintances which were to Captain and Mrs. Lennox's taste, as she did in the more formal and ponderous entertainments which she herself used to give. Captain Lennox was always extremely kind and brotherly to Margaret. She was really very fond of him, excepting when he was anxiously attentive to Edith's dress and

appearance, with a view to her beauty making a sufficient impression on the world. Then all the latent Vashti in Margaret was roused, and she could hardly keep herself from expressing her feelings.

The course of Margaret's day was this; a quiet hour or two before a late breakfast; an unpunctual meal, lazily eaten by weary and half-awake people, but yet at which, in all its dragged-out length, she was expected to be present, because, directly afterwards, came a discussion of plans, at which, although they none of them concerned her, she was expected to give her sympathy, if she could not assist with her advice; an endless number of notes to write, which Edith invariably left to her, with many caressing compliments as to her eloquence du billet; a little play with Sholto as he returned from his morning's walk; besides the care of the children during the servants' dinner; a drive or callers; and some dinner or morning engagement for her aunt and cousins, which left Margaret free, it is true, but rather wearied with the inactivity of the day, coming upon depressed spirits and delicate health.

She looked forward with longing, though unspoken interest to the homely object of Dixon's return from Milton; where, until now, the old servant had been busily engaged in winding up all the affairs of the Hale family. It had appeared a sudden famine to her heart, this entire cessation of any news respecting the people amongst whom she had lived so long. It was true, that Dixon, in her business-letters, quoted, every now and then, an opinion of Mr. Thornton's as to what she had better do about the furniture, or how act in regard to the landlord of the Crampton Terrace house. But it was only here and there that the name came in, or any Milton name, indeed; and Margaret was sitting one evening, all alone in the Lennoxes's drawing-room, not reading Dixon's letters, which yet she held in her hand, but thinking over them, and recalling the days which had been, and picturing the busy life out of which her own had been taken and never missed; wondering if all went on in that whirl just as if she and her father had never been; questioning within herself, if no one in all the crowd missed her, (not Higgins, she was not thinking of him,) when, suddenly, Mr. Bell was announced; and Margaret hurried the letters into her work-basket, and started up, blushing as if she had been doing some guilty thing.

'Oh, Mr. Bell! I never thought of seeing you!'

'But you give me a welcome, I hope, as well as that very pretty start of surprise.'

'Have you dined? How did you come? Let me order you some dinner.'

'If you're going to have any. Otherwise, you know, there is no one who cares less for eating than I do. But where are the others? Gone out to dinner? Left you alone?'

'Oh yes! and it is such a rest. I was just thinking--But will you run the risk of dinner? I don't know if there is anything in the house.'

'Why, to tell you the truth, I dined at my club. Only they don't cook as well as they did, so I thought, if you were going to dine, I might try and make out my dinner. But never mind, never mind! There aren't ten cooks in England to be trusted at impromptu dinners. If their skill and

their fires will stand it, their tempers won't. You shall make me some tea, Margaret. And now, what were you thinking of? you were going to tell me. Whose letters were those, god-daughter, that you hid away so speedily?'

'Only Dixon's,' replied Margaret, growing very red.

'Whew! is that all? Who do you think came up in the train with me?'

'I don't know,' said Margaret, resolved against making a guess.

'Your what d'ye call him? What's the right name for a cousin-in-law's brother?'

'Mr. Henry Lennox?' asked Margaret.

'Yes,' replied Mr. Bell. 'You knew him formerly, didn't you? What sort of a person is he, Margaret?'

'I liked him long ago,' said Margaret, glancing down for a moment. And then she looked straight up and went on in her natural manner. 'You know we have been corresponding about Frederick since; but I have not seen him for nearly three years, and he may be changed. What did you think of him?'

'I don't know. He was so busy trying to find out who I was, in the first instance, and what I was in the second, that he never let out what he was; unless indeed that veiled curiosity of his as to what manner of man he had to talk to was not a good piece, and a fair indication of his character. Do you call him good looking, Margaret?'

'No! certainly not. Do you?'

'Not I. But I thought, perhaps, you might. Is he a great deal here?'

'I fancy he is when he is in town. He has been on circuit now since I came. But--Mr. Bell--have you come from Oxford or from Milton?'

'From Milton. Don't you see I'm smoke-dried?'

'Certainly. But I thought that it might be the effect of the antiquities of Oxford.'

'Come now, be a sensible woman! In Oxford, I could have managed all the landlords in the place, and had my own way, with half the trouble your Milton landlord has given me, and defeated me after all. He won't take the house off our hands till next June twelvemonth. Luckily, Mr. Thornton found a tenant for it. Why don't you ask after Mr. Thornton, Margaret? He has proved himself a very active friend of yours, I can tell you. Taken more than half the trouble off my hands.'

'And how is he? How is Mrs. Thornton?' asked Margaret hurriedly and below her breath, though she tried to speak out.

'I suppose they're well. I've been staying at their house till I was driven out of it by the perpetual clack about that Thornton girl's marriage. It was too much for Thornton himself, though she was his sister. He used to go and sit in his own room perpetually. He's getting past the age for caring for such things, either as principal or accessory. I was surprised to find the old lady falling into the current, and carried away by her daughter's enthusiasm for orange-blossoms and lace. I thought Mrs. Thornton had been made of sterner stuff.'

'She would put on any assumption of feeling to veil her daughter's weakness,' said Margaret in a low voice.

'Perhaps so. You've studied her, have you? She doesn't seem over fond of you, Margaret.'

'I know it,' said Margaret. 'Oh, here is tea at last!' exclaimed she, as if relieved. And with tea came Mr. Henry Lennox, who had walked up to Harley Street after a late dinner, and had evidently expected to find his brother and sister-in-law at home. Margaret suspected him of being as thankful as she was at the presence of a third party, on this their first meeting since the memorable day of his offer, and her refusal at Helstone. She could hardly tell what to say at first, and was thankful for all the tea-table occupations, which gave her an excuse for keeping silence, and him an opportunity of recovering himself. For, to tell the truth, he had rather forced himself up to Harley Street this evening, with a view of getting over an awkward meeting, awkward even in the presence of Captain Lennox and Edith, and doubly awkward now that he found her the only lady there, and the person to whom he must naturally and perforce address a great part of his conversation. She was the first to recover her self-possession. She began to talk on the subject which came uppermost in her mind, after the first flush of awkward shyness.

'Mr. Lennox, I have been so much obliged to you for all you have done about Frederick.'

'I am only sorry it has been so unsuccessful,' replied he, with a quick glance towards Mr. Bell, as if reconnoitring how much he might say before him. Margaret, as if she read his thought, addressed herself to Mr. Bell, both including him in the conversation, and implying that he was perfectly aware of the endeavours that had been made to clear Frederick.

'That Horrocks--that very last witness of all, has proved as unavailing as all the others. Mr. Lennox has discovered that he sailed for Australia only last August; only two months before Frederick was in England, and gave us the names of----'

'Frederick in England! you never told me that!' exclaimed Mr. Bell in surprise.

'I thought you knew. I never doubted you had been told. Of course, it was a great secret, and perhaps I should not have named it now,' said Margaret, a little dismayed.

'I have never named it to either my brother or your cousin,' said Mr. Lennox, with a little professional dryness of implied reproach.

'Never mind, Margaret. I am not living in a talking, babbling world, nor yet among people who are trying to worm facts out of me; you needn't look so frightened because you have let the cat out of the bag to a faithful old hermit like me. I shall never name his having been in England; I shall be out of temptation, for no one will ask me. Stay!' (interrupting himself rather abruptly) 'was it at your mother's funeral?'

'He was with mamma when she died,' said Margaret, softly.

'To be sure! To be sure! Why, some one asked me if he had not been over then, and I denied it stoutly--not many weeks ago--who could it have been? Oh! I recollect!'

But he did not say the name; and although Margaret would have given much to know if her suspicions were right, and it had been Mr. Thornton who had made the enquiry, she could not ask the question of Mr. Bell, much as she longed to do so.

There was a pause for a moment or two. Then Mr. Lennox said, addressing himself to Margaret, 'I suppose as Mr. Bell is now acquainted with all the circumstances attending your brother's unfortunate dilemma, I cannot do better than inform him exactly how the research into the evidence we once hoped to produce in his favour stands at present. So, if he will do me the honour to breakfast with me to-morrow, we will go over the names of these missing gentry.'

'I should like to hear all the particulars, if I may. Cannot you come here? I dare not ask you both to breakfast, though I am sure you would be welcome. But let me know all I can about Frederick, even though there may be no hope at present.'

'I have an engagement at half-past eleven. But I will certainly come if you wish it,' replied Mr. Lennox, with a little afterthought of extreme willingness, which made Margaret shrink into herself, and almost wish that she had not proposed her natural request. Mr. Bell got up and looked around him for his hat, which had been removed to make room for tea.

'Well!' said he, 'I don't know what Mr. Lennox is inclined to do, but I'm disposed to be moving off homewards. I've been a journey to-day, and journeys begin to tell upon my sixty and odd years.'

'I believe I shall stay and see my brother and sister,' said Mr. Lennox, making no movement of departure. Margaret was seized with a shy awkward dread of being left alone with him. The scene on the little terrace in the Helstone garden was so present to her, that she could hardly help believing it was so with him.

'Don't go yet, please, Mr. Bell,' said she, hastily. 'I want you to see Edith; and I want Edith to know you. Please!' said she, laying a light but determined hand on his arm. He looked at her, and saw the confusion stirring in her countenance; he sate down again, as if her little touch had been possessed of resistless strength.

'You see how she overpowers me, Mr. Lennox,' said he. 'And I hope you noticed the happy choice of her expressions; she wants me to "see" this cousin Edith, who, I am told, is a

great beauty; but she has the honesty to change her word when she comes to me--Mrs. Lennox is to "know" me. I suppose I am not much to "see," eh, Margaret?'

He joked, to give her time to recover from the slight flutter which he had detected in her manner on his proposal to leave; and she caught the tone, and threw the ball back. Mr. Lennox wondered how his brother, the Captain, could have reported her as having lost all her good looks. To be sure, in her quiet black dress, she was a contrast to Edith, dancing in her white crape mourning, and long floating golden hair, all softness and glitter. She dimpled and blushed most becomingly when introduced to Mr. Bell, conscious that she had her reputation as a beauty to keep up, and that it would not do to have a Mordecai refusing to worship and admire, even in the shape of an old Fellow of a College, which nobody had ever heard of. Mrs. Shaw and Captain Lennox, each in their separate way, gave Mr. Bell a kind and sincere welcome, winning him over to like them almost in spite of himself, especially when he saw how naturally Margaret took her place as sister and daughter of the house.

'What a shame that we were not at home to receive you,' said Edith. 'You, too, Henry! though I don't know that we should have stayed at home for you. And for Mr. Bell! for Margaret's Mr. Bell----'

'There is no knowing what sacrifices you would not have made,' said her brother-in-law. 'Even a dinner-party! and the delight of wearing this very becoming dress.'

Edith did not know whether to frown or to smile. But it did not suit Mr. Lennox to drive her to the first of these alternatives; so he went on.

'Will you show your readiness to make sacrifices to-morrow morning, first by asking me to breakfast, to meet Mr. Bell, and secondly, by being so kind as to order it at half-past nine, instead of ten o'clock? I have some letters and papers that I want to show to Miss Hale and Mr. Bell.'

'I hope Mr. Bell will make our house his own during his stay in London,' said Captain Lennox. 'I am only so sorry we cannot offer him a bed-room.'

'Thank you. I am much obliged to you. You would only think me a churl if you had, for I should decline it, I believe, in spite of all the temptations of such agreeable company,' said Mr. Bell, bowing all round, and secretly congratulating himself on the neat turn he had given to his sentence, which, if put into plain language, would have been more to this effect: 'I couldn't stand the restraints of such a proper-behaved and civil-spoken set of people as these are: it would be like meat without salt. I'm thankful they haven't a bed. And how well I rounded my sentence! I am absolutely catching the trick of good manners'

His self-satisfaction lasted him till he was fairly out in the streets, walking side by side with Henry Lennox. Here he suddenly remembered Margaret's little look of entreaty as she urged him to stay longer, and he also recollected a few hints given him long ago by an acquaintance of Mr. Lennox's, as to his admiration of Margaret. It gave a new direction to his

thoughts. 'You have known Miss Hale for a long time, I believe. How do you think her looking? She strikes me as pale and ill.'

'I thought her looking remarkably well. Perhaps not when I first came in--now I think of it. But certainly, when she grew animated, she looked as well as ever I saw her do.'

'She has had a great deal to go through,' said Mr. Bell.

'Yes! I have been sorry to hear of all she has had to bear; not merely the common and universal sorrow arising from death, but all the annoyance which her father's conduct must have caused her, and then----'

'Her father's conduct!' said Mr. Bell, in an accent of surprise. 'You must have heard some wrong statement. He behaved in the most conscientious manner. He showed more resolute strength than I should ever have given him credit for formerly.'

'Perhaps I have been wrongly informed. But I have been told, by his successor in the living--a clever, sensible man, and a thoroughly active clergyman--that there was no call upon Mr. Hale to do what he did, relinquish the living, and throw himself and his family on the tender mercies of private teaching in a manufacturing town; the bishop had offered him another living, it is true, but if he had come to entertain certain doubts, he could have remained where he was, and so had no occasion to resign. But the truth is, these country clergymen live such isolated lives--isolated, I mean, from all intercourse with men of equal cultivation with themselves, by whose minds they might regulate their own, and discover when they were going either too fast or too slow--that they are very apt to disturb themselves with imaginary doubts as to the articles of faith, and throw up certain opportunities of doing good for very uncertain fancies of their own.'

'I differ from you. I do not think they are very apt to do as my poor friend Hale did.' Mr. Bell was inwardly chafing.

'Perhaps I used too general an expression, in saying "very apt." But certainly, their lives are such as very often to produce either inordinate self-sufficiency, or a morbid state of conscience,' replied Mr. Lennox with perfect coolness.

'You don't meet with any self-sufficiency among the lawyers, for instance?' asked Mr. Bell. 'And seldom, I imagine, any cases of morbid conscience.' He was becoming more and more vexed, and forgetting his lately-caught trick of good manners. Mr. Lennox saw now that he had annoyed his companion; and as he had talked pretty much for the sake of saying something, and so passing the time while their road lay together, he was very indifferent as to the exact side he took upon the question, and quietly came round by saying: 'To be sure, there is something fine in a man of Mr. Hale's age leaving his home of twenty years, and giving up all settled habits, for an idea which was probably erroneous--but that does not matter--an untangible thought. One cannot help admiring him, with a mixture of pity in one's admiration, something like what one feels for Don Quixote. Such a gentleman as he was too! I shall never forget the refined and simple hospitality he showed to me that last day at Helstone.'

Only half mollified, and yet anxious, in order to lull certain qualms of his own conscience, to believe that Mr. Hale's conduct had a tinge of Quixotism in it, Mr. Bell growled out--'Aye! And you don't know Milton. Such a change from Helstone! It is years since I have been at Helstone--but I'll answer for it, it is standing there yet--every stick and every stone as it has done for the last century, while Milton! I go there every four or five years--and I was born there--yet I do assure you, I often lose my way--aye, among the very piles of warehouses that are built upon my father's orchard. Do we part here? Well, good night, sir; I suppose we shall meet in Harley Street to-morrow morning.'

CHAPTER XX

NOT ALL A DREAM

'Where are the sounds that swam along

1.

The buoyant air when I was young?

- *The last vibration now is o'er,*
- *And they who listened are no more;*
- *Ah! let me close my eyes and dream.'*

W. S. LANDOR.

The idea of Helstone had been suggested to Mr. Bell's waking mind by his conversation with Mr. Lennox, and all night long it ran riot through his dreams. He was again the tutor in the college where he now held the rank of Fellow; it was again a long vacation, and he was staying with his newly married friend, the proud husband, and happy Vicar of Helstone. Over babbling brooks they took impossible leaps, which seemed to keep them whole days suspended in the air. Time and space were not, though all other things seemed real. Every event was measured by the emotions of the mind, not by its actual existence, for existence it had none. But the trees were gorgeous in their autumnal leafiness--the warm odours of flower and herb came sweet upon the sense--the young wife moved about her house with just that mixture of annoyance at her position,

as regarded wealth, with pride in her handsome and devoted husband, which Mr. Bell had noticed in real life a quarter of a century ago. The dream was so like life that, when he awoke, his present life seemed like a dream. Where was he? In the close, handsomely furnished room of a London hotel! Where were those who spoke to him, moved around him, touched him, not an instant ago? Dead! buried! lost for evermore, as far as earth's for evermore would extend. He was an old man, so lately exultant in the full strength of manhood. The utter loneliness of his life was insupportable to think about. He got up hastily, and tried to forget what never more might be, in a hurried dressing for the breakfast in Harley Street.

He could not attend to all the lawyer's details, which, as he saw, made Margaret's eyes dilate, and her lips grow pale, as one by one fate decreed, or so it seemed, every morsel of evidence which would exonerate Frederick, should fall from beneath her feet and disappear. Even Mr. Lennox's well-regulated professional voice took a softer, tenderer tone, as he drew near to the extinction of the last hope. It was not that Margaret had not been perfectly aware of the result before. It was only that the details of each successive disappointment came with such relentless minuteness to quench all hope, that she at last fairly gave way to tears. Mr. Lennox stopped reading.

'I had better not go on,' said he, in a concerned voice. 'It was a foolish proposal of mine. Lieutenant Hale,' and even this giving him the title of the service from which he had so harshly been expelled, was soothing to Margaret, 'Lieutenant Hale is happy now; more secure in fortune and future prospects than he could ever have been in the navy; and has, doubtless, adopted his wife's country as his own.'

'That is it,' said Margaret. 'It seems so selfish in me to regret it,' trying to smile, 'and yet he is lost to me, and I am so lonely.' Mr. Lennox turned over his papers, and wished that he were as rich and prosperous as he believed he should be some day. Mr. Bell blew his nose, but, otherwise, he also kept silence; and Margaret, in a minute or two, had apparently recovered her usual composure. She thanked Mr. Lennox very courteously for his trouble; all the more courteously and graciously because she was conscious that, by her behaviour, he might have probably been led to imagine that he had given her needless pain. Yet it was pain she would not have been without.

Mr. Bell came up to wish her good-bye.

'Margaret!' said he, as he fumbled with his gloves. 'I am going down to Helstone to-morrow, to look at the old place. Would you like to come with me? Or would it give you too much pain? Speak out, don't be afraid.'

'Oh, Mr. Bell,' said she--and could say no more. But she took his old gouty hand, and kissed it.

'Come, come; that's enough,' said he, reddening with awkwardness. 'I suppose your aunt Shaw will trust you with me. We'll go to-morrow morning, and we shall get there about two o'clock, I fancy. We'll take a snack, and order dinner at the little inn--the Lennard Arms, it used to be,--and go and get an appetite in the forest. Can you stand it, Margaret? It will be a trial, I

know, to both of us, but it will be a pleasure to me, at least. And there we'll dine--it will be but doe-venison, if we can get it at all--and then I'll take my nap while you go out and see old friends. I'll give you back safe and sound, barring railway accidents, and I'll insure your life for a thousand pounds before starting, which may be some comfort to your relations; but otherwise, I'll bring you back to Mrs. Shaw by lunch-time on Friday. So, if you say yes, I'll just go up-stairs and propose it.'

'It's no use my trying to say how much I shall like it,' said Margaret, through her tears.

'Well, then, prove your gratitude by keeping those fountains of yours dry for the next two days. If you don't, I shall feel queer myself about the lachrymal ducts, and I don't like that.'

'I won't cry a drop,' said Margaret, winking her eyes to shake the tears off her eye-lashes, and forcing a smile.

'There's my good girl. Then we'll go up-stairs and settle it all.' Margaret was in a state of almost trembling eagerness, while Mr. Bell discussed his plan with her aunt Shaw, who was first startled, then doubtful and perplexed, and in the end, yielding rather to the rough force of Mr. Bell's words than to her own conviction; for to the last, whether it was right or wrong, proper or improper, she could not settle to her own satisfaction, till Margaret's safe return, the happy fulfilment of the project, gave her decision enough to say, 'she was sure it had been a very kind thought of Mr. Bell's, and just what she herself had been wishing for Margaret, as giving her the very change which she required, after all the anxious time she had had.'

CHAPTER XXI

ONCE AND NOW

'So on those happy days of yore

1.

Oft as I dare to dwell once more,

- *Still must I miss the friends so tried,*
- *Whom Death has severed from my side.*

- *But ever when true friendship binds,*

- *Spirit it is that spirit finds;*
- *In spirit then our bliss we found,*
- *In spirit yet to them I'm bound.'*

UHLAND.

Margaret was ready long before the appointed time, and had leisure enough to cry a little, quietly, when unobserved, and to smile brightly when any one looked at her. Her last alarm was lest they should be too late and miss the train; but no! they were all in time; and she breathed freely and happily at length, seated in the carriage opposite to Mr. Bell, and whirling away past the well-known stations; seeing the old south country-towns and hamlets sleeping in the warm light of the pure sun, which gave a yet ruddier colour to their tiled roofs, so different to the cold slates of the north. Broods of pigeons hovered around these peaked quaint gables, slowly settling here and there, and ruffling their soft, shiny feathers, as if exposing every fibre to the delicious warmth. There were few people about at the stations, it almost seemed as if they were too lazily content to wish to travel; none of the bustle and stir that Margaret had noticed in her two journeys on the London and North-Western line. Later on in the year, this line of railway should be stirring and alive with rich pleasure-seekers; but as to the constant going to and fro of busy trades-people it would always be widely different from the northern lines. Here a spectator or two stood lounging at nearly every station, with his hands in his pockets, so absorbed in the simple act of watching, that it made the travellers wonder what he could find to do when the train whirled away, and only the blank of a railway, some sheds, and a distant field or two were left for him to gaze upon. The hot air danced over the golden stillness of the land, farm after farm was left behind, each reminding Margaret of German Idyls--of Herman and Dorothea--of Evangeline. From this waking dream she was roused. It was the place to leave the train and take the fly to Helstone. And now sharper feelings came shooting through her heart, whether pain or pleasure she could hardly tell. Every mile was redolent of associations, which she would not have missed for the world, but each of which made her cry upon 'the days that are no more,' with ineffable longing. The last time she had passed along this road was when she had left it with her father and mother--the day, the season, had been gloomy, and she herself hopeless, but they were there with her. Now she was alone, an orphan, and they, strangely, had gone away from her, and vanished from the face of the earth. It hurt her to see the Helstone road so flooded in the sun-light, and every turn and every familiar tree so precisely the same in its summer glory as it had been in former years. Nature felt no change, and was ever young.

Mr. Bell knew something of what would be passing through her mind, and wisely and kindly held his tongue. They drove up to the Lennard Arms; half farm-house, half-inn, standing a little apart from the road, as much as to say, that the host did not so depend on the custom of travellers, as to have to court it by any obtrusiveness; they, rather, must seek him out. The house fronted the village green; and right before it stood an immemorial lime-tree benched all round, in some hidden recesses of whose leafy wealth hung the grim escutcheon of the Lennards. The door of the inn stood wide open, but there was no hospitable hurry to receive the travellers.

When the landlady did appear--and they might have abstracted many an article first--she gave them a kind welcome, almost as if they had been invited guests, and apologised for her coming having been so delayed, by saying, that it was hay-time, and the provisions for the men had to be sent a-field, and she had been too busy packing up the baskets to hear the noise of wheels over the road, which, since they had left the highway, ran over soft short turf.

'Why, bless me!' exclaimed she, as at the end of her apology, a glint of sunlight showed her Margaret's face, hitherto unobserved in that shady parlour. 'It's Miss Hale, Jenny,' said she, running to the door, and calling to her daughter. 'Come here, come directly, it's Miss Hale!' And then she went up to Margaret, and shook her hands with motherly fondness.

'And how are you all? How's the Vicar and Miss Dixon? The Vicar above all! God bless him! We've never ceased to be sorry that he left.'

Margaret tried to speak and tell her of her father's death; of her mother's it was evident that Mrs. Purkis was aware, from her omission of her name. But she choked in the effort, and could only touch her deep mourning, and say the one word, 'Papa.'

'Surely, sir, it's never so!' said Mrs. Purkis, turning to Mr. Bell for confirmation of the sad suspicion that now entered her mind. 'There was a gentleman here in the spring--it might have been as long ago as last winter--who told us a deal of Mr. Hale and Miss Margaret; and he said Mrs. Hale was gone, poor lady. But never a word of the Vicar's being ailing!'

'It is so, however,' said Mr. Bell. 'He died quite suddenly, when on a visit to me at Oxford. He was a good man, Mrs. Purkis, and there's many of us that might be thankful to have as calm an end as his. Come Margaret, my dear! Her father was my oldest friend, and she's my god-daughter, so I thought we would just come down together and see the old place; and I know of old you can give us comfortable rooms and a capital dinner. You don't remember me I see, but my name is Bell, and once or twice when the parsonage has been full, I've slept here, and tasted your good ale.'

'To be sure; I ask your pardon; but you see I was taken up with Miss Hale. Let me show you to a room, Miss Margaret, where you can take off your bonnet, and wash your face. It's only this very morning I plunged some fresh-gathered roses head downward in the water-jug, for, thought I, perhaps some one will be coming, and there's nothing so sweet as spring-water scented by a musk rose or two. To think of the Vicar being dead! Well, to be sure, we must all die; only that gentleman said, he was quite picking up after his trouble about Mrs. Hale's death.'

'Come down to me, Mrs. Purkis, after you have attended to Miss Hale. I want to have a consultation with you about dinner.'

The little casement window in Margaret's bed-chamber was almost filled up with rose and vine branches; but pushing them aside, and stretching a little out, she could see the tops of the parsonage chimneys above the trees; and distinguish many a well-known line through the leaves.

'Aye!' said Mrs. Purkis, smoothing down the bed, and despatching Jenny for an armful of lavender-scented towels, 'times is changed, miss; our new Vicar has seven children, and is building a nursery ready for more, just out where the arbour and tool-house used to be in old times. And he has had new grates put in, and a plate-glass window in the drawing-room. He and his wife are stirring people, and have done a deal of good; at least they say it's doing good; if it were not, I should call it turning things upside down for very little purpose. The new Vicar is a teetotaller, miss, and a magistrate, and his wife has a deal of receipts for economical cooking, and is for making bread without yeast; and they both talk so much, and both at a time, that they knock one down as it were, and it's not till they're gone, and one's a little at peace, that one can think that there were things one might have said on one's own side of the question. He'll be after the men's cans in the hay-field, and peeping in; and then there'll be an ado because it's not ginger beer, but I can't help it. My mother and my grandmother before me sent good malt liquor to haymakers; and took salts and senna when anything ailed them; and I must e'en go on in their ways, though Mrs. Hepworth does want to give me comfits instead of medicine, which, as she says, is a deal pleasanter, only I've no faith in it. But I must go, miss, though I'm wanting to hear many a thing; I'll come back to you before long.

Mr. Bell had strawberries and cream, a loaf of brown bread, and a jug of milk, (together with a Stilton cheese and a bottle of port for his own private refreshment,) ready for Margaret on her coming down stairs; and after this rustic luncheon they set out to walk, hardly knowing in what direction to turn, so many old familiar inducements were there in each.

'Shall we go past the vicarage?' asked Mr. Bell.

'No, not yet. We will go this way, and make a round so as to come back by it,' replied Margaret.

Here and there old trees had been felled the autumn before; or a squatter's roughly-built and decaying cottage had disappeared. Margaret missed them each and all, and grieved over them like old friends. They came past the spot where she and Mr. Lennox had sketched. The white, lightning-scarred trunk of the venerable beech, among whose roots they had sate down was there no more; the old man, the inhabitant of the ruinous cottage, was dead; the cottage had been pulled down, and a new one, tidy and respectable, had been built in its stead. There was a small garden on the place where the beech-tree had been.

'I did not think I had been so old,' said Margaret after a pause of silence; and she turned away sighing.

'Yes!' said Mr. Bell. 'It is the first changes among familiar things that make such a mystery of time to the young, afterwards we lose the sense of the mysterious. I take changes in all I see as a matter of course. The instability of all human things is familiar to me, to you it is new and oppressive.'

'Let us go on to see little Susan,' said Margaret, drawing her companion up a grassy road-way, leading under the shadow of a forest glade.

'With all my heart, though I have not an idea who little Susan may be. But I have a kindness for all Susans, for simple Susan's sake.'

'My little Susan was disappointed when I left without wishing her goodbye; and it has been on my conscience ever since, that I gave her pain which a little more exertion on my part might have prevented. But it is a long way. Are you sure you will not be tired?'

'Quite sure. That is, if you don't walk so fast. You see, here there are no views that can give one an excuse for stopping to take breath. You would think it romantic to be walking with a person "fat and scant o' breath" if I were Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Have compassion on my infirmities for his sake.'

'I will walk slower for your own sake. I like you twenty times better than Hamlet.'

'On the principle that a living ass is better than a dead lion?'

'Perhaps so. I don't analyse my feelings.'

'I am content to take your liking me, without examining too curiously into the materials it is made of. Only we need not walk at a snail's' pace.'

'Very well. Walk at your own pace, and I will follow. Or stop still and meditate, like the Hamlet you compare yourself to, if I go too fast.'

'Thank you. But as my mother has not murdered my father, and afterwards married my uncle, I shouldn't know what to think about, unless it were balancing the chances of our having a well-cooked dinner or not. What do you think?'

'I am in good hopes. She used to be considered a famous cook as far as Helstone opinion went.'

'But have you considered the distraction of mind produced by all this haymaking?'

Margaret felt all Mr. Bell's kindness in trying to make cheerful talk about nothing, to endeavour to prevent her from thinking too curiously about the past. But she would rather have gone over these dear-loved walks in silence, if indeed she were not ungrateful enough to wish that she might have been alone.

They reached the cottage where Susan's widowed mother lived. Susan was not there. She was gone to the parochial school. Margaret was disappointed, and the poor woman saw it, and began to make a kind of apology.

'Oh! it is quite right,' said Margaret. 'I am very glad to hear it. I might have thought of it. Only she used to stop at home with you.'

'Yes, she did; and I miss her sadly. I used to teach her what little I knew at nights. It were not much to be sure. But she were getting such a handy girl, that I miss her sore. But she's a deal above me in learning now.' And the mother sighed.

'I'm all wrong,' growled Mr. Bell. 'Don't mind what I say. I'm a hundred years behind the world. But I should say, that the child was getting a better and simpler, and more natural education stopping at home, and helping her mother, and learning to read a chapter in the New Testament every night by her side, than from all the schooling under the sun.'

Margaret did not want to encourage him to go on by replying to him, and so prolonging the discussion before the mother. So she turned to her and asked,

'How is old Betty Barnes?'

'I don't know,' said the woman rather shortly. 'We'se not friends.'

'Why not?' asked Margaret, who had formerly been the peacemaker of the village.

'She stole my cat.'

'Did she know it was yours?'

'I don't know. I reckon not.'

'Well! could not you get it back again when you told her it was yours?'

'No! for she'd burnt it.'

'Burnt it!' exclaimed both Margaret and Mr. Bell.

'Roasted it!' explained the woman.

It was no explanation. By dint of questioning, Margaret extracted from her the horrible fact that Betty Barnes, having been induced by a gypsy fortune-teller to lend the latter her husband's Sunday clothes, on promise of having them faithfully returned on the Saturday night before Goodman Barnes should have missed them, became alarmed by their non-appearance, and her consequent dread of her husband's anger, and as, according to one of the savage country superstitions, the cries of a cat, in the agonies of being boiled or roasted alive, compelled (as it were) the powers of darkness to fulfil the wishes of the executioner, resort had been had to the charm. The poor woman evidently believed in its efficacy; her only feeling was indignation that her cat had been chosen out from all others for a sacrifice. Margaret listened in horror; and endeavoured in vain to enlighten the woman's mind; but she was obliged to give it up in despair. Step by step she got the woman to admit certain facts, of which the logical connexion and sequence was perfectly clear to Margaret; but at the end, the bewildered woman simply repeated her first assertion, namely, that 'it were very cruel for sure, and she should not like to do it; but that there were nothing like it for giving a person what they wished for; she had

heard it all her life; but it were very cruel for all that.' Margaret gave it up in despair, and walked away sick at heart.

'You are a good girl not to triumph over me,' said Mr. Bell.

'How? What do you mean?'

'I own, I am wrong about schooling. Anything rather than have that child brought up in such practical paganism.'

'Oh! I remember. Poor little Susan! I must go and see her; would you mind calling at the school?'

'Not a bit. I am curious to see something of the teaching she is to receive.'

They did not speak much more, but thridded their way through many a bosky dell, whose soft green influence could not charm away the shock and the pain in Margaret's heart, caused by the recital of such cruelty; a recital too, the manner of which betrayed such utter want of imagination, and therefore of any sympathy with the suffering animal.

The buzz of voices, like the murmur of a hive of busy human bees, made itself heard as soon as they emerged from the forest on the more open village-green on which the school was situated. The door was wide open, and they entered. A brisk lady in black, here, there, and everywhere, perceived them, and bade them welcome with somewhat of the hostess-air which, Margaret remembered, her mother was wont to assume, only in a more soft and languid manner, when any rare visitors strayed in to inspect the school. She knew at once it was the present Vicar's wife, her mother's successor; and she would have drawn back from the interview had it been possible; but in an instant she had conquered this feeling, and modestly advanced, meeting many a bright glance of recognition, and hearing many a half-suppressed murmur of 'It's Miss Hale.' The Vicar's lady heard the name, and her manner at once became more kindly. Margaret wished she could have helped feeling that it also became more patronising. The lady held out a hand to Mr. Bell, with--

'Your father, I presume, Miss Hale. I see it by the likeness. I am sure I am very glad to see you, sir, and so will the Vicar be.'

Margaret explained that it was not her father, and stammered out the fact of his death; wondering all the time how Mr. Hale could have borne coming to revisit Helstone, if it had been as the Vicar's lady supposed. She did not hear what Mrs. Hepworth was saying, and left it to Mr. Bell to reply, looking round, meanwhile, for her old acquaintances.

'Ah! I see you would like to take a class, Miss Hale. I know it by myself. First class stand up for a parsing lesson with Miss Hale.'

Poor Margaret, whose visit was sentimental, not in any degree inspective, felt herself taken in; but as in some way bringing her in contact with little eager faces, once well-known,

and who had received the solemn rite of baptism from her father, she sate down, half losing herself in tracing out the changing features of the girls, and holding Susan's hand for a minute or two, unobserved by all, while the first class sought for their books, and the Vicar's lady went as near as a lady could towards holding Mr. Bell by the button, while she explained the Phonetic system to him, and gave him a conversation she had had with the Inspector about it.

Margaret bent over her book, and seeing nothing but that--hearing the buzz of children's voices, old times rose up, and she thought of them, and her eyes filled with tears, till all at once there was a pause--one of the girls was stumbling over the apparently simple word 'a,' uncertain what to call it.

'A, an indefinite article,' said Margaret, mildly.

'I beg your pardon,' said the Vicar's wife, all eyes and ears; 'but we are taught by Mr. Milsome to call "a" an--who can remember?'

'An adjective absolute,' said half-a-dozen voices at once. And Margaret sate abashed. The children knew more than she did. Mr. Bell turned away, and smiled.

Margaret spoke no more during the lesson. But after it was over, she went quietly round to one or two old favourites, and talked to them a little. They were growing out of children into great girls; passing out of her recollection in their rapid development, as she, by her three years' absence, was vanishing from theirs. Still she was glad to have seen them all again, though a tinge of sadness mixed itself with her pleasure. When school was over for the day, it was yet early in the summer afternoon; and Mrs. Hepworth proposed to Margaret that she and Mr. Bell should accompany her to the parsonage, and see the--the word 'improvements' had half slipped out of her mouth, but she substituted the more cautious term 'alterations' which the present Vicar was making. Margaret did not care a straw about seeing the alterations, which jarred upon her fond recollection of what her home had been; but she longed to see the old place once more, even though she shivered away from the pain which she knew she should feel.

The parsonage was so altered, both inside and out, that the real pain was less than she had anticipated. It was not like the same place. The garden, the grass-plat, formerly so daintily trim that even a stray rose-leaf seemed like a fleck on its exquisite arrangement and propriety, was strewed with children's things; a bag of marbles here, a hoop there; a straw-hat forced down upon a rose-tree as on a peg, to the destruction of a long beautiful tender branch laden with flowers, which in former days would have been trained up tenderly, as if beloved. The little square matted hall was equally filled with signs of merry healthy rough childhood.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Hepworth, 'you must excuse this untidiness, Miss Hale. When the nursery is finished, I shall insist upon a little order. We are building a nursery out of your room, I believe. How did you manage, Miss Hale, without a nursery?'

'We were but two,' said Margaret. 'You have many children, I presume?'

'Seven. Look here! we are throwing out a window to the road on this side. Mr. Hepworth is spending an immense deal of money on this house; but really it was scarcely habitable when we came--for so large a family as ours I mean, of course.' Every room in the house was changed, besides the one of which Mrs. Hepworth spoke, which had been Mr. Hale's study formerly; and where the green gloom and delicious quiet of the place had conduced, as he had said, to a habit of meditation, but, perhaps, in some degree to the formation of a character more fitted for thought than action. The new window gave a view of the road, and had many advantages, as Mrs. Hepworth pointed out. From it the wandering sheep of her husband's flock might be seen, who straggled to the tempting beer-house, unobserved as they might hope, but not unobserved in reality; for the active Vicar kept his eye on the road, even during the composition of his most orthodox sermons, and had a hat and stick hanging ready at hand to seize, before sallying out after his parishioners, who had need of quick legs if they could take refuge in the 'Jolly Forester' before the teetotal Vicar had arrested them. The whole family were quick, brisk, loud-talking, kind-hearted, and not troubled with much delicacy of perception. Margaret feared that Mrs. Hepworth would find out that Mr. Bell was playing upon her, in the admiration he thought fit to express for everything that especially grated on his taste. But no! she took it all literally, and with such good faith, that Margaret could not help remonstrating with him as they walked slowly away from the parsonage back to their inn.

'Don't scold, Margaret. It was all because of you. If she had not shown you every change with such evident exultation in their superior sense, in perceiving what an improvement this and that would be, I could have behaved well. But if you must go on preaching, keep it till after dinner, when it will send me to sleep, and help my digestion.'

They were both of them tired, and Margaret herself so much so, that she was unwilling to go out as she had proposed to do, and have another ramble among the woods and fields so close to the home of her childhood. And, somehow, this visit to Helstone had not been all--had not been exactly what she had expected. There was change everywhere; slight, yet pervading all. Households were changed by absence, or death, or marriage, or the natural mutations brought by days and months and years, which carry us on imperceptibly from childhood to youth, and thence through manhood to age, whence we drop like fruit, fully ripe, into the quiet mother earth. Places were changed--a tree gone here, a bough there, bringing in a long ray of light where no light was before--a road was trimmed and narrowed, and the green straggling pathway by its side enclosed and cultivated. A great improvement it was called; but Margaret sighed over the old picturesqueness, the old gloom, and the grassy wayside of former days. She sate by the window on the little settle, sadly gazing out upon the gathering shades of night, which harmonised well with her pensive thought. Mr. Bell slept soundly, after his unusual exercise through the day. At last he was roused by the entrance of the tea-tray, brought in by a flushed-looking country-girl, who had evidently been finding some variety from her usual occupation of waiter, in assisting this day in the hayfield.

'Hallo! Who's there! Where are we? Who's that,--Margaret? Oh, now I remember all. I could not imagine what woman was sitting there in such a doleful attitude, with her hands clasped straight out upon her knees, and her face looking so steadfastly before her. What were you looking at?' asked Mr. Bell, coming to the window, and standing behind Margaret.

'Nothing,' said she, rising up quickly, and speaking as cheerfully as she could at a moment's notice.

'Nothing indeed! A bleak back-ground of trees, some white linen hung out on the sweet-briar hedge, and a great waft of damp air. Shut the window, and come in and make tea.'

Margaret was silent for some time. She played with her teaspoon, and did not attend particularly to what Mr. Bell said. He contradicted her, and she took the same sort of smiling notice of his opinion as if he had agreed with her. Then she sighed, and putting down her spoon, she began, apropos of nothing at all, and in the high-pitched voice which usually shows that the speaker has been thinking for some time on the subject that they wish to introduce--'Mr. Bell, you remember what we were saying about Frederick last night, don't you?'

'Last night. Where was I? Oh, I remember! Why it seems a week ago. Yes, to be sure, I recollect we talked about him, poor fellow.'

'Yes--and do you not remember that Mr. Lennox spoke about his having been in England about the time of dear mamma's death?' asked Margaret, her voice now lower than usual.

'I recollect. I hadn't heard of it before.'

'And I thought--I always thought that papa had told you about it.'

'No! he never did. But what about it, Margaret?'

'I want to tell you of something I did that was very wrong, about that time,' said Margaret, suddenly looking up at him with her clear honest eyes. 'I told a lie;' and her face became scarlet.

'True, that was bad I own; not but what I have told a pretty round number in my life, not all in downright words, as I suppose you did, but in actions, or in some shabby circumlocutory way, leading people either to disbelieve the truth, or believe a falsehood. You know who is the father of lies, Margaret? Well! a great number of folk, thinking themselves very good, have odd sorts of connexion with lies, left-hand marriages, and second cousins-once-removed. The tainting blood of falsehood runs through us all. I should have guessed you as far from it as most people. What! crying, child? Nay, now we'll not talk of it, if it ends in this way. I dare say you have been sorry for it, and that you won't do it again, and it's long ago now, and in short I want you to be very cheerful, and not very sad, this evening.'

Margaret wiped her eyes, and tried to talk about something else, but suddenly she burst out afresh.

'Please, Mr. Bell, let me tell you about it--you could perhaps help me a little; no, not help me, but if you knew the truth, perhaps you could put me to rights--that is not it, after all,' said she, in despair at not being able to express herself more exactly as she wished.

Mr. Bell's whole manner changed. 'Tell me all about it, child,' said he.

'It's a long story; but when Fred came, mamma was very ill, and I was undone with anxiety, and afraid, too, that I might have drawn him into danger; and we had an alarm just after her death, for Dixon met some one in Milton--a man called Leonards--who had known Fred, and who seemed to owe him a grudge, or at any rate to be tempted by the recollection of the reward offered for hisapprehension; and with this new fright, I thought I had better hurry off Fred to London, where, as you would understand from what we said the other night, he was to go to consult Mr. Lennox as to his chances if he stood the trial. So we--that is, he and I,--went to the railway station; it was one evening, and it was just getting rather dusk, but still light enough to recognise and be recognised, and we were too early, and went out to walk in a field just close by; I was always in a panic about this Leonards, who was, I knew, somewhere in the neighbourhood; and then, when we were in the field, the low red sunlight just in my face, some one came by on horseback in the road just below the field-style by which we stood. I saw him look at me, but I did not know who it was at first, the sun was so in my eyes, but in an instant the dazzle went off, and I saw it was Mr. Thornton, and we bowed,'----

'And he saw Frederick of course,' said Mr. Bell, helping her on with her story, as he thought.

'Yes; and then at the station a man came up--tipsy and reeling--and he tried to collar Fred, and over-balanced himself as Fred wrenched himself away, and fell over the edge of the platform; not far, not deep; not above three feet; but oh! Mr. Bell, somehow that fall killed him!'

'How awkward. It was this Leonards, I suppose. And how did Fred get off?'

'Oh! he went off immediately after the fall, which we never thought could have done the poor fellow any harm, it seemed so slight an injury.'

'Then he did not die directly?'

'No! not for two or three days. And then--oh, Mr. Bell! now comes the bad part,' said she, nervously twining her fingers together. 'A police inspector came and taxed me with having been the companion of the young man, whose push or blow had occasioned Leonards' death; that was a false accusation, you know, but we had not heard that Fred had sailed, he might still be in London and liable to be arrested on this false charge, and his identity with the Lieutenant Hale, accused of causing that mutiny, discovered, he might be shot; all this flashed through my mind, and I said it was not me. I was not at the railway station that night. I knew nothing about it. I had no conscience or thought but to save Frederick.'

'I say it was right. I should have done the same. You forgot yourself in thought for another. I hope I should have done the same.'

'No, you would not. It was wrong, disobedient, faithless. At that very time Fred was safely out of England, and in my blindness I forgot that there was another witness who could testify to my being there.'

'Who?'

'Mr. Thornton. You know he had seen me close to the station; we had bowed to each other.'

'Well! he would know nothing of this riot about the drunken fellow's death. I suppose the inquiry never came to anything.'

'No! the proceedings they had begun to talk about on the inquest were stopped. Mr. Thornton did know all about it. He was a magistrate, and he found out that it was not the fall that had caused the death. But not before he knew what I had said. Oh, Mr. Bell!' She suddenly covered her face with her hands, as if wishing to hide herself from the presence of the recollection.

'Did you have any explanation with him? Did you ever tell him the strong, instinctive motive?'

'The instinctive want of faith, and clutching at a sin to keep myself from sinking,' said she bitterly. 'No! How could I? He knew nothing of Frederick. To put myself to rights in his good opinion, was I to tell him of the secrets of our family, involving, as they seemed to do, the chances of poor Frederick's entire exculpation? Fred's last words had been to enjoin me to keep his visit a secret from all. You see, papa never told, even you. No! I could bear the shame--I thought I could at least. I did bear it. Mr. Thornton has never respected me since.'

'He respects you, I am sure,' said Mr. Bell. 'To be sure, it accounts a little for----. But he always speaks of you with regard and esteem, though now I understand certain reservations in his manner.'

Margaret did not speak; did not attend to what Mr. Bell went on to say; lost all sense of it. By-and-by she said:

'Will you tell me what you refer to about "reservations" in his manner of speaking of me?'

'Oh! simply he has annoyed me by not joining in my praises of you. Like an old fool, I thought that every one would have the same opinions as I had; and he evidently could not agree with me. I was puzzled at the time. But he must be perplexed, if the affair has never been in the least explained. There was first your walking out with a young man in the dark--'

'But it was my brother!' said Margaret, surprised.

'True. But how was he to know that?'

'I don't know. I never thought of anything of that kind,' said Margaret, reddening, and looking hurt and offended.

'And perhaps he never would, but for the lie,--which, under the circumstances, I maintain, was necessary.'

'It was not. I know it now. I bitterly repent it.'

There was a long pause of silence. Margaret was the first to speak.

'I am not likely ever to see Mr. Thornton again,'--and there she stopped.

'There are many things more unlikely, I should say,' replied Mr. Bell.

'But I believe I never shall. Still, somehow one does not like to have sunk so low in--in a friend's opinion as I have done in his.' Her eyes were full of tears, but her voice was steady, and Mr. Bell was not looking at her. 'And now that Frederick has given up all hope, and almost all wish of ever clearing himself, and returning to England, it would be only doing myself justice to have all this explained. If you please, and if you can, if there is a good opportunity, (don't force an explanation upon him, pray,) but if you can, will you tell him the whole circumstances, and tell him also that I gave you leave to do so, because I felt that for papa's sake I should not like to lose his respect, though we may never be likely to meet again?'

'Certainly. I think he ought to know. I do not like you to rest even under the shadow of an impropriety; he would not know what to think of seeing you alone with a young man.'

'As for that,' said Margaret, rather haughtily, 'I hold it is "Honi soit qui mal y pense." Yet still I should choose to have it explained, if any natural opportunity for easy explanation occurs. But it is not to clear myself of any suspicion of improper conduct that I wish to have him told--if I thought that he had suspected me, I should not care for his good opinion--no! it is that he may learn how I was tempted, and how I fell into the snare; why I told that falsehood, in short.'

'Which I don't blame you for. It is no partiality of mine, I assure you.'

'What other people may think of the rightness or wrongness is nothing in comparison to my own deep knowledge, my innate conviction that it was wrong. But we will not talk of that any more, if you please. It is done--my sin is sinned. I have now to put it behind me, and be truthful for evermore, if I can.'

'Very well. If you like to be uncomfortable and morbid, be so. I always keep my conscience as tight shut up as a jack-in-a-box, for when it jumps into existence it surprises me by its size. So I coax it down again, as the fisherman coaxed the genie. "Wonderful," say I, "to think that you have been concealed so long, and in so small a compass, that I really did not know of your existence. Pray, sir, instead of growing larger and larger every instant, and bewildering me with your misty outlines, would you once more compress yourself into your former dimensions?" And when I've got him down, don't I clap the seal on the vase, and take good care how I open it again, and how I go against Solomon, wisest of men, who confined him there.'

But it was no smiling matter to Margaret. She hardly attended to what Mr. Bell was saying. Her thoughts ran upon the Idea, before entertained, but which now had assumed the strength of a conviction, that Mr. Thornton no longer held his former good opinion of her--that he was disappointed in her. She did not feel as if any explanation could ever reinstate her--not in his love, for that and any return on her part she had resolved never to dwell upon, and she kept rigidly to her resolution--but in the respect and high regard which she had hoped would have ever made him willing, in the spirit of Gerald Griffin's beautiful lines,

1. *'To turn and look back when thou hearest*
2. *The sound of my name.'*

She kept choking and swallowing all the time that she thought about it. She tried to comfort herself with the idea, that what he imagined her to be, did not alter the fact of what she was. But it was a truism, a phantom, and broke down under the weight of her regret. She had twenty questions on the tip of her tongue to ask Mr. Bell, but not one of them did she utter. Mr. Bell thought thatshe was tired, and sent her early to her room, where she sate long hours by the open window, gazing out on the purple dome above, where the stars arose, and twinkled and disappeared behind the great umbrageous trees before she went to bed. All night long too, there burnt a little light on earth; a candle in her old bedroom, which was the nursery with the present inhabitants of the parsonage, until the new one was built. A sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment, over-powered Margaret. Nothing had been the same; and this slight, all-pervading instability, had given her greater pain than if all had been too entirely changed for her to recognise it.

'I begin to understand now what heaven must be--and, oh! the grandeur and repose of the words--"The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Everlasting! "From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." That sky above me looks as though it could not change, and yet it will. I am so tired--so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place; it is like the circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually. I am in the mood in which women of another religion take the veil. I seek heavenly steadfastness in earthly monotony. If I were a Roman Catholic and could deaden my heart, stun it with some great blow, I might become a nun. But I should pine after my kind; no, not my kind, for love for my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals. Perhaps it ought to be so, perhaps not; I cannot decide to-night.'

Wearily she went to bed, wearily she arose in four or five hours' time. But with the morning came hope, and a brighter view of things.

'After all it is right,' said she, hearing the voices of children at play while she was dressing. 'If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt, if that is not Irish. Looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change, the progress all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful trustful heart.' And with a smile ready in her eyes to quiver down to her lips, she went into the parlour and greeted Mr. Bell.

'Ah, Missy! you were up late last night, and so you're late this morning. Now I've got a little piece of news for you. What do you think of an invitation to dinner? a morning call, literally in the dewy morning. Why, I've had the Vicar here already, on his way to the school. How much the desire of giving our hostess a teetotal lecture for the benefit of the haymakers, had to do with his earliness, I don't know; but here he was, when I came down just before nine; and we are asked to dine there to-day.'

'But Edith expects me back--I cannot go,' said Margaret, thankful to have so good an excuse.

'Yes! I know; so I told him. I thought you would not want to go. Still it is open, if you would like it.'

'Oh, no!' said Margaret. 'Let us keep to our plan. Let us start at twelve. It is very good and kind of them; but indeed I could not go.'

'Very well. Don't fidget yourself, and I'll arrange it all.'

Before they left Margaret stole round to the back of the Vicarage garden, and gathered a little straggling piece of honeysuckle. She would not take a flower the day before, for fear of being observed, and her motives and feelings commented upon. But as she returned across the common, the place was reinvested with the old enchanting atmosphere. The common sounds of life were more musical there than anywhere else in the whole world, the light more golden, the life more tranquil and full of dreamy delight. As Margaret remembered her feelings yesterday, she said to herself:

'And I too change perpetually--now this, now that--now disappointed and peevish because all is not exactly as I had pictured it, and now suddenly discovering that the reality is far more beautiful than I had imagined it. Oh, Helstone! I shall never love any place like you.

A few days afterwards, she had found her level, and decided that she was very glad to have been there, and that she had seen it again, and that to her it would always be the prettiest spot in the world, but that it was so full of associations with former days, and especially with her father and mother, that if it were all to come over again, she should shrink back from such another visit as that which she had paid with Mr. Bell.

CHAPTER XXII

SOMETHING WANTING

1.

'Experience, like a pale musician, holds
- *A dulcimer of patience in his hand;*
- *Whence harmonies we cannot understand,*
- *Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds*
- *In sad, perplexed minors.'*

MRS. BROWNING.

About this time Dixon returned from Milton, and assumed her post as Margaret's maid. She brought endless pieces of Milton gossip: How Martha had gone to live with Miss Thornton, on the latter's marriage; with an account of the bridesmaids, dresses and breakfasts, at that interesting ceremony; how people thought that Mr. Thornton had made too grand a wedding of it, considering he had lost a deal by the strike, and had had to pay so much for the failure of his contracts; how little money articles of furniture--long cherished by Dixon--had fetched at the sale, which was a shame considering how rich folks were at Milton; how Mrs. Thornton had come one day and got two or three good bargains, and Mr. Thornton had come the next, and in his desire to obtain one or two things, had bid against himself, much to the enjoyment of the bystanders, so as Dixon observed, that made things even; if Mrs. Thornton paid too little, Mr. Thornton paid too much. Mr. Bell had sent all sorts of orders about the books; there was no understanding him, he was so particular; if he had come himself it would have been all right, but letters always were and always will be more puzzling than they are worth. Dixon had not much to tell about the Higginses. Her memory had an aristocratic bias, and was very treacherous whenever she tried to recall any circumstance connected with those below her in life. Nicholas was very well she believed. He had been several times at the house asking for news of Miss Margaret--the only person who ever did ask, except once Mr. Thornton. And Mary? oh! of course she was very well, a great, stout, slatternly thing! She did hear, or perhaps it was only a dream of hers, though it would be strange if she had dreamt of such people as the Higginses, that Mary had gone to work at Mr. Thornton's mill, because her father wished her to know how to cook; but what nonsense that could mean she didn't know. Margaret rather agreed with her that the story was incoherent enough to be like a dream. Still it was pleasant to have some one now with whom she could talk of Milton, and Milton people. Dixon was not over-fond of the subject, rather wishing to leave that part of her life in shadow. She liked much more to dwell upon speeches of Mr. Bell's, which had suggested an idea to her of what was really his intention--making Margaret his heiress. But her young lady gave her no encouragement, nor in any way gratified her insinuating enquiries, however disguised in the form of suspicions or assertions.

All this time, Margaret had a strange undefined longing to hear that Mr. Bell had gone to pay one of his business visits to Milton; for it had been well understood between them, at the time of their conversation at Helstone, that the explanation she had desired should only be given to Mr. Thornton by word of mouth, and even in that manner should be in nowise forced upon him. Mr. Bell was no great correspondent, but he wrote from time to time long or short letters, as the humour took him, and although Margaret was not conscious of any definite hope, on receiving them, yet she always put away his notes with a little feeling of disappointment. He was not going to Milton; he said nothing about it at any rate. Well! she must be patient. Sooner or later the mists would be cleared away. Mr. Bell's letters were hardly like his usual self; they were short, and complaining, with every now and then a little touch of bitterness that was unusual. He did not look forward to the future; he rather seemed to regret the past, and be weary of the present. Margaret fancied that he could not be well; but in answer to some enquiry of hers as to his health, he sent her a short note, saying there was an old-fashioned complaint called the spleen; that he was suffering from that, and it was for her to decide if it was more mental or physical; but that he should like to indulge himself in grumbling, without being obliged to send a bulletin every time.

In consequence of this note, Margaret made no more enquiries about his health. One day Edith let out accidentally a fragment of a conversation which she had had with Mr. Bell, when he was last in London, which possessed Margaret with the idea that he had some notion of taking her to pay a visit to her brother and new sister-in-law, at Cadiz, in the autumn. She questioned and cross-questioned Edith, till the latter was weary, and declared that there was nothing more to remember; all he had said was that he half-thought he should go, and hear for himself what Frederick had to say about the mutiny; and that it would be a good opportunity for Margaret to become acquainted with her new sister-in-law; that he always went somewhere during the long vacation, and did not see why he should not go to Spain as well as anywhere else. That was all. Edith hoped Margaret did not want to leave them, that she was so anxious about all this. And then, having nothing else particular to do, she cried, and said that she knew she cared much more for Margaret than Margaret did for her. Margaret comforted her as well as she could, but she could hardly explain to her how this idea of Spain, mere Chateau en Espagne as it might be, charmed and delighted her. Edith was in the mood to think that any pleasure enjoyed away from her was a tacit affront, or at best a proof of indifference. So Margaret had to keep her pleasure to herself, and could only let it escape by the safety-valve of asking Dixon, when she dressed for dinner, if she would not like to see Master Frederick and his new wife very much indeed?

'She's a Papist, Miss, isn't she?'

'I believe--oh yes, certainly!' said Margaret, a little damped for an instant at this recollection.

'And they live in a Popish country?'

'Yes.'

'Then I'm afraid I must say, that my soul is dearer to me than even Master Frederick, his own dear self. I should be in a perpetual terror, Miss, lest I should be converted.'

'Oh' said Margaret, 'I do not know that I am going; and if I go, I am not such a fine lady as to be unable to travel without you. No! dear old Dixon, you shall have a long holiday, if we go. But I'm afraid it is a long "if."'

Now Dixon did not like this speech. In the first place, she did not like Margaret's trick of calling her 'dear old Dixon' whenever she was particularly demonstrative. She knew that Miss Hale was apt to call all people that she liked 'old,' as a sort of term of endearment; but Dixon always winced away from the application of the word to herself, who, being not much past fifty, was, she thought, in the very prime of life. Secondly, she did not like being so easily taken at her word; she had, with all her terror, a lurking curiosity about Spain, the Inquisition, and Popish mysteries. So, after clearing her throat, as if to show her willingness to do away with difficulties, she asked Miss Hale, whether she thought if she took care never to see a priest, or enter into one of their churches, there would be so very much danger of her being converted? Master Frederick, to be sure, had gone over unaccountable.

'I fancy it was love that first predisposed him to conversion,' said Margaret, sighing.

'Indeed, Miss!' said Dixon; 'well! I can preserve myself from priests, and from churches; but love steals in unawares! I think it's as well I should not go.'

Margaret was afraid of letting her mind run too much upon this Spanish plan. But it took off her thoughts from too impatiently dwelling upon her desire to have all explained to Mr. Thornton. Mr. Bell appeared for the present to be stationary at Oxford, and to have no immediate purpose of going to Milton, and some secret restraint seemed to hang over Margaret, and prevent her from even asking, or alluding again to any probability of such a visit on his part. Nor did she feel at liberty to name what Edith had told her of the idea he had entertained,--it might be but for five minutes,--of going to Spain. He had never named it at Helstone, during all that sunny day of leisure; it was very probably but the fancy of a moment,--but if it were true, what a bright outlet it would be from the monotony of her present life, which was beginning to fall upon her.

One of the great pleasures of Margaret's life at this time, was in Edith's boy. He was the pride and plaything of both father and mother, as long as he was good; but he had a strong will of his own, and as soon as he burst out into one of his stormy passions, Edith would throw herself back in despair and fatigue, and sigh out, 'Oh dear, what shall I do with him! Do, Margaret, please ring the bell for Hanley.'

But Margaret almost liked him better in these manifestations of character than in his good blue-sashed moods. She would carry him off into a room, where they two alone battled it out; she with a firm power which subdued him into peace, while every sudden charm and wile she possessed, was exerted on the side of right, until he would rub his little hot and tear-smeared face all over hers, kissing and caressing till he often fell asleep in her arms or on her shoulder. Those were Margaret's sweetest moments. They gave her a taste of the feeling that she believed would be denied to her for ever.

Mr. Henry Lennox added a new and not disagreeable element to the course of the household life by his frequent presence. Margaret thought him colder, if more brilliant than formerly; but there were strong intellectual tastes, and much and varied knowledge, which gave flavour to the otherwise rather insipid conversation. Margaret saw glimpses in him of a slight contempt for his brother and sister-in-law, and for their mode of life, which he seemed to consider as frivolous and purposeless. He once or twice spoke to his brother, in Margaret's presence, in a pretty sharp tone of enquiry, as to whether he meant entirely to relinquish his profession; and on Captain Lennox's reply, that he had quite enough to live upon, she had seen Mr. Lennox's curl of the lip as he said, 'And is that all you live for?'

But the brothers were much attached to each other, in the way that any two persons are, when the one is cleverer and always leads the other, and this last is patiently content to be led. Mr. Lennox was pushing on in his profession; cultivating, with profound calculation, all those connections that might eventually be of service to him; keen-sighted, far-seeing, intelligent, sarcastic, and proud. Since the one long conversation relating to Frederick's affairs, which she had with him the first evening in Mr. Bell's presence, she had had no great intercourse with him, further than that which arose out of their close relations with the same household. But this was enough to wear off the shyness on her side, and any symptoms of mortified pride and vanity on his. They met continually, of course, but she thought that he rather avoided being alone with her; she fancied that he, as well as she, perceived that they had drifted strangely apart from their former anchorage, side by side, in many of their opinions, and all their tastes.

And yet, when he had spoken unusually well, or with remarkable epigrammatic point, she felt that his eye sought the expression of her countenance first of all, if but for an instant; and that, in the family intercourse which constantly threw them together, her opinion was the one to which he listened with a deference,--the more complete, because it was reluctantly paid, and concealed as much as possible.

CHAPTER XXIII

'NE'ER TO BE FOUND AGAIN'

'My own, my father's friend!

1.

I cannot part with thee!

- *I ne'er have shown, thou ne'er hast known,*
- *How dear thou art to me.'*

ANON.

The elements of the dinner-parties which Mrs. Lennox gave, were these; her friends contributed the beauty, Captain Lennox the easy knowledge of the subjects of the day; and Mr. Henry Lennox and the sprinkling of rising men who were received as his friends, brought the wit, the cleverness, the keen and extensive knowledge of which they knew well enough how to avail themselves without seeming pedantic, or burdening the rapid flow of conversation.

These dinners were delightful; but even here Margaret's dissatisfaction found her out. Every talent, every feeling, every acquirement; nay, even every tendency towards virtue was used up as materials for fireworks; the hidden, sacred fire, exhausted itself in sparkle and crackle. They talked about art in a merely sensuous way, dwelling on outside effects, instead of allowing themselves to learn what it has to teach. They lashed themselves up into an enthusiasm about high subjects in company, and never thought about them when they were alone; they squandered their capabilities of appreciation into a mere flow of appropriate words. One day, after the gentlemen had come up into the drawing-room, Mr. Lennox drew near to Margaret, and addressed her in almost the first voluntary words he had spoken to her since she had returned to live in Harley Street.

'You did not look pleased at what Shirley was saying at dinner.'

'Didn't I? My face must be very expressive,' replied Margaret.

'It always was. It has not lost the trick of being eloquent.'

'I did not like,' said Margaret, hastily, 'his way of advocating what he knew to be wrong--so glaringly wrong--even in jest.'

'But it was very clever. How every word told! Do you remember the happy epithets?'

'Yes.'

'And despise them, you would like to add. Pray don't scruple, though he is my friend.'

'There! that is the exact tone in you, that--' she stopped short.

He listened for a moment to see if she would finish her sentence; but she only reddened, and turned away; before she did so, however, she heard him say, in a very low, clear voice,--

'If my tones, or modes of thought, are what you dislike, will you do me the justice to tell me so, and so give me the chance of learning to please you?'

All these weeks there was no intelligence of Mr. Bell's going to Milton. He had spoken of it at Helstone as of a journey which he might have to take in a very short time from then; but he must have transacted his business by writing, Margaret thought, ere now, and she knew that if he could, he would avoid going to a place which he disliked, and moreover would little understand the secret importance which she affixed to the explanation that could only be given by word of mouth. She knew that he would feel that it was necessary that it should be done; but whether in summer, autumn, or winter, it would signify very little. It was now August, and there had been no mention of the Spanish journey to which he had alluded to Edith, and Margaret tried to reconcile herself to the fading away of this illusion.

But one morning she received a letter, saying that next week he meant to come up to town; he wanted to see her about a plan which he had in his head; and, moreover, he intended to treat himself to a little doctoring, as he had begun to come round to her opinion, that it would be pleasanter to think that his health was more in fault than he, when he found himself irritable and cross. There was altogether a tone of forced cheerfulness in the letter, as Margaret noticed afterwards; but at the time her attention was taken up by Edith's exclamations.

'Coming up to town! Oh dear! and I am so worn out by the heat that I don't believe I have strength enough in me for another dinner. Besides, everybody has left but our dear stupid selves, who can't settle where to go to. There would be nobody to meet him.'

'I'm sure he would much rather come and dine with us quite alone than with the most agreeable strangers you could pick up. Besides, if he is not well he won't wish for invitations. I am glad he has owned it at last. I was sure he was ill from the whole tone of his letters, and yet he would not answer me when I asked him, and I had no third person to whom I could apply for news.'

'Oh! he is not very ill, or he would not think of Spain.'

'He never mentions Spain.'

'No! but his plan that is to be proposed evidently relates to that. But would you really go in such weather as this?'

'Oh! it will get cooler every day. Yes! Think of it! I am only afraid I have thought and wished too much--in that absorbing wilful way which is sure to be disappointed--or else gratified, to the letter, while in the spirit it gives no pleasure.'

'But that's superstitious, I'm sure, Margaret.'

'No, I don't think it is. Only it ought to warn me, and check me from giving way to such passionate wishes. It is a sort of "Give me children, or else I die." I'm afraid my cry is, "Let me go to Cadiz, or else I die."'

'My dear Margaret! You'll be persuaded to stay there; and then what shall I do? Oh! I wish I could find somebody for you to marry here, that I could be sure of you!'

'I shall never marry.'

'Nonsense, and double nonsense! Why, as Sholto says, you're such an attraction to the house, that he knows ever so many men who will be glad to Visit here next year for your sake.'

Margaret drew herself up haughtily. 'Do you know, Edith, I sometimes think your Corfu life has taught you----'

'Well!'

'Just a shade or two of coarseness.'

Edith began to sob so bitterly, and to declare so vehemently that Margaret had lost all love for her, and no longer looked upon her as a friend, that Margaret came to think that she had expressed too harsh an opinion for the relief of her own wounded pride, and ended by being Edith's slave for the rest of the day; while that little lady, overcome by wounded feeling, lay like a victim on the sofa, heaving occasionally a profound sigh, till at last she fell asleep.

Mr. Bell did not make his appearance even on the day to which he had for a second time deferred his visit. The next morning there came a letter from Wallis, his servant, stating that his master had not been feeling well for some time, which had been the true reason of his putting off his journey; and that at the very time when he should have set out for London, he had been seized with an apoplectic fit; it was, indeed, Wallis added, the opinion of the medical men--that he could not survive the night; and more than probable, that by the time Miss Hale received this letter his poor master would be no more.

Margaret received this letter at breakfast-time, and turned very pale as she read it; then silently putting it into Edith's hands, she left the room.

Edith was terribly shocked as she read it, and cried in a sobbing, frightened, childish way, much to her husband's distress. Mrs. Shaw was breakfasting in her own room, and upon him devolved the task of reconciling his wife to the near contact into which she seemed to be brought with death, for the first time that she could remember in her life. Here was a man who was to have dined with them to-day lying dead or dying instead! It was some time before she could think of Margaret. Then she started up, and followed her upstairs into her room. Dixon was packing up a few toilette articles, and Margaret was hastily putting on her bonnet, shedding tears all the time, and her hands trembling so that she could hardly tie the strings.

'Oh, dear Margaret! how shocking! What are you doing? Are you going out? Sholto would telegraph or do anything you like.'

'I am going to Oxford. There is a train in half-an-hour. Dixon has offered to go with me, but I could have gone by myself. I must see him again. Besides, he may be better, and want some care. He has been like a father to me. Don't stop me, Edith.'

'But I must. Mamma won't like it at all. Come and ask her about it, Margaret. You don't know where you're going. I should not mind if he had a house of his own; but in his Fellow's rooms! Come to mamma, and do ask her before you go. It will not take a minute.'

Margaret yielded, and lost her train. In the suddenness of the event, Mrs. Shaw became bewildered and hysterical, and so the precious time slipped by. But there was another train in a couple of hours; and after various discussions on propriety and impropriety, it was decided that Captain Lennox should accompany Margaret, as the one thing to which she was constant was her resolution to go, alone or otherwise, by the next train, whatever might be said of the propriety or impropriety of the step. Her father's friend, her own friend, was lying at the point of death; and the thought of this came upon her with such vividness, that she was surprised herself at the firmness with which she asserted something of her right to independence of action; and five minutes before the time for starting, she found herself sitting in a railway-carriage opposite to Captain Lennox.

It was always a comfort to her to think that she had gone, though it was only to hear that he had died in the night. She saw the rooms that he had occupied, and associated them ever after most fondly in her memory with the idea of her father, and his one cherished and faithful friend.

They had promised Edith before starting, that if all had ended as they feared, they would return to dinner; so that long, lingering look around the room in which her father had died, had to be interrupted, and a quiet farewell taken of the kind old face that had so often come out with pleasant words, and merry quips and cranks.

Captain Lennox fell asleep on their journey home; and Margaret could cry at leisure, and bethink her of this fatal year, and all the woes it had brought to her. No sooner was she fully aware of one loss than another came--not to supersede her grief for the one before, but to re-open wounds and feelings scarcely healed. But at the sound of the tender voices of her aunt and Edith, of merry little Sholto's glee at her arrival, and at the sight of the well-lighted rooms, with their mistress pretty in her paleness and her eager sorrowful interest, Margaret roused herself from her heavy trance of almost superstitious hopelessness, and began to feel that even around her joy and gladness might gather. She had Edith's place on the sofa; Sholto was taught to carry aunt Margaret's cup of tea very carefully to her; and by the time she went up to dress, she could thank God for having spared her dear old friend a long or a painful illness.

But when night came--solemn night, and all the house was quiet, Margaret still sate watching the beauty of a London sky at such an hour, on such a summer evening; the faint pink reflection of earthly lights on the soft clouds that float tranquilly into the white moonlight, out of the warm gloom which lies motionless around the horizon. Margaret's room had been the day nursery of her childhood, just when it merged into girlhood, and when the feelings and conscience had been first awakened into full activity. On some such night as this she remembered promising to herself to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read

or heard of in romance, a life sans peur et sans reproche; it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such a life would be accomplished. And now she had learnt that not only to will, but also to pray, was a necessary condition in the truly heroic. Trusting to herself, she had fallen. It was a just consequence of her sin, that all excuses for it, all temptation to it, should remain for ever unknown to the person in whose opinion it had sunk her lowest. She stood face to face at last with her sin. She knew it for what it was; Mr. Bell's kindly sophistry that nearly all men were guilty of equivocal actions, and that the motive ennobled the evil, had never had much real weight with her. Her own first thought of how, if she had known all, she might have fearlessly told the truth, seemed low and poor. Nay, even now, her anxiety to have her character for truth partially excused in Mr. Thornton's eyes, as Mr. Bell had promised to do, was a very small and petty consideration, now that she was afresh taught by death what life should be. If all the world spoke, acted, or kept silence with intent to deceive,--if dearest interests were at stake, and dearest lives in peril,--if no one should ever know of her truth or her falsehood to measure out their honour or contempt for her by, straight alone where she stood, in the presence of God, she prayed that she might have strength to speak and act the truth for evermore.

CHAPTER XXIV

BREATHING TRANQUILLITY

'And down the sunny beach she paces slowly,

1.

With many doubtful pauses by the way;

- *Grief hath an influence so hush'd and holy.'*

HOOD.

'Is not Margaret the heiress?' whispered Edith to her husband, as they were in their room alone at night after the sad journey to Oxford. She had pulled his tall head down, and stood upon tiptoe, and implored him not to be shocked, before she had ventured to ask this question. Captain Lennox was, however, quite in the dark; if he had ever heard, he had forgotten; it could not be

much that a Fellow of a small college had to leave; but he had never wanted her to pay for her board; and two hundred and fifty pounds a year was something ridiculous, considering that she did not take wine. Edith came down upon her feet a little bit sadder; with a romance blown to pieces.

A week afterwards, she came prancing towards her husband, and made him a low curtsey:

'I am right, and you are wrong, most noble Captain. Margaret has had a lawyer's letter, and she is residuary legatee--the legacies being about two thousand pounds, and the remainder about forty thousand, at the present value of property in Milton.'

'Indeed! and how does she take her good fortune?'

'Oh, it seems she knew she was to have it all along; only she had no idea it was so much. She looks very white and pale, and says she's afraid of it; but that's nonsense, you know, and will soon go off. I left mamma pouring congratulations down her throat, and stole away to tell you.'

It seemed to be supposed, by general consent, that the most natural thing was to consider Mr. Lennox henceforward as Margaret's legal adviser. She was so entirely ignorant of all forms of business that in nearly everything she had to refer to him. He chose out her attorney; he came to her with papers to be signed. He was never so happy as when teaching her of what all these mysteries of the law were the signs and types.

'Henry,' said Edith, one day, archly; 'do you know what I hope and expect all these long conversations with Margaret will end in?'

'No, I don't,' said he, reddening. 'And I desire you not to tell me.'

'Oh, very well; then I need not tell Sholto not to ask Mr. Montagu so often to the house.'

'Just as you choose,' said he with forced coolness. 'What you are thinking of, may or may not happen; but this time, before I commit myself, I will see my ground clear. Ask whom you choose. It may not be very civil, Edith, but if you meddle in it you will mar it. She has been very farouche with me for a long time; and is only just beginning to thaw a little from her Zenobia ways. She has the making of a Cleopatra in her, if only she were a little more pagan.'

'For my part,' said Edith, a little maliciously, 'I am very glad she is a Christian. I know so very few!'

There was no Spain for Margaret that autumn; although to the last she hoped that some fortunate occasion would call Frederick to Paris, whither she could easily have met with a convoy. Instead of Cadiz, she had to content herself with Cromer. To that place her aunt Shaw and the Lennoxes were bound. They had all along wished her to accompany them, and, consequently, with their characters, they made but lazy efforts to forward her own separate wish.

Perhaps Cromer was, in one sense of the expression, the best for her. She needed bodily strengthening and bracing as well as rest.

Among other hopes that had vanished, was the hope, the trust she had had, that Mr. Bell would have given Mr. Thornton the simple facts of the family circumstances which had preceded the unfortunate accident that led to Leonards' death. Whatever opinion--however changed it might be from what Mr. Thornton had once entertained, she had wished it to be based upon a true understanding of what she had done; and why she had done it. It would have been a pleasure to her; would have given her rest on a point on which she should now all her life be restless, unless she could resolve not to think upon it. It was now so long after the time of these occurrences, that there was no possible way of explaining them save the one which she had lost by Mr. Bell's death. She must just submit, like many another, to be misunderstood; but, though reasoning herself into the belief that in this hers was no uncommon lot, her heart did not ache the less with longing that some time--years and years hence--before he died at any rate, he might know how much she had been tempted. She thought that she did not want to hear that all was explained to him, if only she could be sure that he would know. But this wish was vain, like so many others; and when she had schooled herself into this conviction, she turned with all her heart and strength to the life that lay immediately before her, and resolved to strive and make the best of that.

She used to sit long hours upon the beach, gazing intently on the waves as they chafed with perpetual motion against the pebbly shore,--or she looked out upon the more distant heave, and sparkle against the sky, and heard, without being conscious of hearing, the eternal psalm, which went up continually. She was soothed without knowing how or why. Listlessly she sat there, on the ground, her hands clasped round her knees, while her aunt Shaw did small shoppings, and Edith and Captain Lennox rode far and wide on shore and inland. The nurses, sauntering on with their charges, would pass and repass her, and wonder in whispers what she could find to look at so long, day after day. And when the family gathered at dinner-time, Margaret was so silent and absorbed that Edith voted her moped, and hailed a proposal of her husband's with great satisfaction, that Mr. Henry Lennox should be asked to take Cromer for a week, on his return from Scotland in October.

But all this time for thought enabled Margaret to put events in their right places, as to origin and significance, both as regarded her past life and her future. Those hours by the sea-side were not lost, as any one might have seen who had had the perception to read, or the care to understand, the look that Margaret's face was gradually acquiring. Mr. Henry Lennox was excessively struck by the change.

'The sea has done Miss Hale an immense deal of good, I should fancy,' said he, when she first left the room after his arrival in their family circle. 'She looks ten years younger than she did in Harley Street.'

'That's the bonnet I got her!' said Edith, triumphantly. 'I knew it would suit her the moment I saw it.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Lennox, in the half-contemptuous, half-indulgent tone he generally used to Edith. 'But I believe I know the difference between the charms of a dress and the charms of a woman. No mere bonnet would have made Miss Hale's eyes so lustrous and yet so soft, or her lips so ripe and red--and her face altogether so full of peace and light.--She is like, and yet more,'--he dropped his voice,--'like the Margaret Hale of Helstone.'

From this time the clever and ambitious man bent all his powers to gaining Margaret. He loved her sweet beauty. He saw the latent sweep of her mind, which could easily (he thought) be led to embrace all the objects on which he had set his heart. He looked upon her fortune only as a part of the complete and superb character of herself and her position: yet he was fully aware of the rise which it would immediately enable him, the poor barrister, to take. Eventually he would earn such success, and such honours, as would enable him to pay her back, with interest, that first advance in wealth which he should owe to her. He had been to Milton on business connected with her property, on his return from Scotland; and with the quick eye of a skilled lawyer, ready ever to take in and weigh contingencies, he had seen that much additional value was yearly accruing to the lands and tenements which she owned in that prosperous and increasing town. He was glad to find that the present relationship between Margaret and himself, of client and legal adviser, was gradually superseding the recollection of that unlucky, mismanaged day at Helstone. He had thus unusual opportunities of intimate intercourse with her, besides those that arose from the connection between the families.

Margaret was only too willing to listen as long as he talked of Milton, though he had seen none of the people whom she more especially knew. It had been the tone with her aunt and cousin to speak of Milton with dislike and contempt; just such feelings as Margaret was ashamed to remember she had expressed and felt on first going to live there. But Mr. Lennox almost exceeded Margaret in his appreciation of the character of Milton and its inhabitants. Their energy, their power, their indomitable courage in struggling and fighting; their lurid vividness of existence, captivated and arrested his attention. He was never tired of talking about them; and had never perceived how selfish and material were too many of the ends they proposed to themselves as the result of all their mighty, untiring endeavour, till Margaret, even in the midst of her gratification, had the candour to point this out, as the tainting sin in so much that was noble, and to be admired. Still, when other subjects palled upon her, and she gave but short answers to many questions, Henry Lennox found out that an enquiry as to some Darkshire peculiarity of character, called back the light into her eye, the glow into her cheek.

When they returned to town, Margaret fulfilled one of her sea-side resolves, and took her life into her own hands. Before they went to Cromer, she had been as docile to her aunt's laws as if she were still the scared little stranger who cried herself to sleep that first night in the Harley Street nursery. But she had learnt, in those solemn hours of thought, that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it; and she tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working. Mrs. Shaw was as good-tempered as could be; and Edith had inherited this charming domestic quality; Margaret herself had probably the worst temper of the three, for her quick perceptions, and over-lively imagination made her hasty, and her early isolation from sympathy had made her proud; but she had an indescribable childlike sweetness of heart, which made her manners, even in her rarely wilful moods,

irresistible of old; and now, chastened even by what the world called her good fortune, she charmed her reluctant aunt into acquiescence with her will. So Margaret gained the acknowledgment of her right to follow her own ideas of duty.

'Only don't be strong-minded,' pleaded Edith. 'Mamma wants you to have a footman of your own; and I'm sure you're very welcome, for they're great plagues. Only to please me, darling, don't go and have a strong mind; it's the only thing I ask. Footman or no footman, don't be strong-minded.'

'Don't be afraid, Edith. I'll faint on your hands at the servants' dinner-time, the very first opportunity; and then, what with Sholto playing with the fire, and the baby crying, you'll begin to wish for a strong-minded woman, equal to any emergency.'

'And you'll not grow too good to joke and be merry?'

'Not I. I shall be merrier than I have ever been, now I have got my own way.'

'And you'll not go a figure, but let me buy your dresses for you?'

'Indeed I mean to buy them for myself. You shall come with me if you like; but no one can please me but myself.'

'Oh! I was afraid you'd dress in brown and dust-colour, not to show the dirt you'll pick up in all those places. I'm glad you're going to keep one or two vanities, just by way of specimens of the old Adam.'

'I'm going to be just the same, Edith, if you and my aunt could but fancy so. Only as I have neither husband nor child to give me natural duties, I must make myself some, in addition to ordering my gowns.'

In the family conclave, which was made up of Edith, her mother, and her husband, it was decided that perhaps all these plans of hers would only secure her the more for Henry Lennox. They kept her out of the way of other friends who might have eligible sons or brothers; and it was also agreed that she never seemed to take much pleasure in the society of any one but Henry, out of their own family. The other admirers, attracted by her appearance or the reputation of her fortune, were swept away, by her unconscious smiling disdain, into the paths frequented by other beauties less fastidious, or other heiresses with a larger amount of gold. Henry and she grew slowly into closer intimacy; but neither he nor she were people to brook the slightest notice of their proceedings.

CHAPTER XXV

'Here we go up, up, up;

1.

And here we go down, down, downee!'

NURSERY SONG.

Meanwhile, at Milton the chimneys smoked, the ceaseless roar and mighty beat, and dizzying whirl of machinery, struggled and strove perpetually. Senseless and purposeless were wood and iron and steam in their endless labours; but the persistence of their monotonous work was rivalled in tireless endurance by the strong crowds, who, with sense and with purpose, were busy and restless in seeking after--What? In the streets there were few loiterers,--none walking for mere pleasure; every man's face was set in lines of eagerness or anxiety; news was sought for with fierce avidity; and men jostled each other aside in the Mart and in the Exchange, as they did in life, in the deep selfishness of competition. There was gloom over the town. Few came to buy, and those who did were looked at suspiciously by the sellers; for credit was insecure, and the most stable might have their fortunes affected by the sweep in the great neighbouring port among the shipping houses. Hitherto there had been no failures in Milton; but, from the immense speculations that had come to light in making a bad end in America, and yet nearer home, it was known that some Milton houses of business must suffer so severely that every day men's faces asked, if their tongues did not, 'What news? Who is gone? How will it affect me?' And if two or three spoke together, they dwelt rather on the names of those who were safe than dared to hint at those likely, in their opinion, to go; for idle breath may, at such times, cause the downfall of some who might otherwise weather the storm; and one going down drags many after. 'Thornton is safe,' say they. 'His business is large--extending every year; but such a head as he has, and so prudent with all his daring!' Then one man draws another aside, and walks a little apart, and, with head inclined into his neighbour's ear, he says, 'Thornton's business is large; but he has spent his profits in extending it; he has no capital laid by; his machinery is new within these two years, and has cost him--we won't say what!--a word to the wise!' But that Mr. Harrison was a croaker,--a man who had succeeded to his father's trade-made fortune, which he had feared to lose by altering his mode of business to any having a larger scope; yet he grudged every penny made by others more daring and far-sighted.

But the truth was, Mr. Thornton was hard pressed. He felt it acutely in his vulnerable point--his pride in the commercial character which he had established for himself. Architect of

his own fortunes, he attributed this to no special merit or qualities of his own, but to the power, which he believed that commerce gave to every brave, honest, and persevering man, to raise himself to a level from which he might see and read the great game of worldly success, and honestly, by such far-sightedness, command more power and influence than in. any other mode of life. Far away, in the East and in the West, where his person would never be known, his name was to be regarded, and his wishes to be fulfilled, and his word pass like gold. That was the idea of merchant-life with which Mr. Thornton had started. 'Her merchants be like princes,' said his mother, reading the text aloud, as if it were a trumpet-call to invite her boy to the struggle. He was but like many others--men, women, and children--alive to distant, and dead to near things. He sought to possess the influence of a name in foreign countries and far-away seas,--to become the head of a firm that should be known for generations; and it had taken him long silent years to come even to a glimmering of what he might be now, to-day, here in his own town, his own factory, among his own people. He and they had led parallel lives--very close, but never touching--till the accident (or so it seemed) of his acquaintance with Higgins. Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and (take notice) out of the character of master and workman, in the first instance, they had each begun to recognise that 'we have all of us one human heart.' It was the fine point of the wedge; and until now, when the apprehension of losing his connection with two or three of the workmen whom he had so lately begun to know as men,--of having a plan or two, which were experiments lying very close to his heart, roughly nipped off without trial,--gave a new poignancy to the subtle fear that came over him from time to time; until now, he had never recognised how much and how deep was the interest he had grown of late to feel in his position as manufacturer, simply because it led him into such close contact, and gave him the opportunity of so much power, among a race of people strange, shrewd, ignorant; but, above all, full of character and strong human feeling.

He reviewed his position as a Milton manufacturer. The strike a year and a half ago,--or more, for it was now untimely wintry weather, in a late spring,--that strike, when he was young, and he now was old--had prevented his completing some of the large orders he had then on hand. He had locked up a good deal of his capital in new and expensive machinery, and he had also bought cotton largely, for the fulfilment of these orders, taken under contract. That he had not been able to complete them, was owing in some degree to the utter want of skill on the part of the Irish hands whom he had imported; much of their work was damaged and unfit to be sent forth by a house which prided itself on turning out nothing but first-rate articles. For many months, the embarrassment caused by the strike had been an obstacle in Mr. Thornton's way; and often, when his eye fell on Higgins, he could have spoken angrily to him without any present cause, just from feeling how serious was the injury that had arisen from this affair in which he was implicated. But when he became conscious of this sudden, quick resentment, he resolved to curb it. It would not satisfy him to avoid Higgins; he must convince himself that he was master over his own anger, by being particularly careful to allow Higgins access to him, whenever the strict rules of business, or Mr. Thornton's leisure permitted. And by-and-bye, he lost all sense of resentment in wonder how it was, or could be, that two men like himself and Higgins, living by the same trade, working in their different ways at the same object, could look upon each other's position and duties in so strangely different a way. And thence arose that intercourse, which though it might not have the effect of preventing all future clash of opinion and action, when the occasion arose, would, at any rate, enable both master and man to look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy, and bear with each other more patiently and kindly. Besides this

improvement of feeling, both Mr. Thornton and his workmen found out their ignorance as to positive matters of fact, known heretofore to one side, but not to the other.

But now had come one of those periods of bad trade, when the market falling brought down the value of all large stocks; Mr. Thornton's fell to nearly half. No orders were coming in; so he lost the interest of the capital he had locked up in machinery; indeed, it was difficult to get payment for the orders completed; yet there was the constant drain of expenses for working the business. Then the bills became due for the cotton he had purchased; and money being scarce, he could only borrow at exorbitant interest, and yet he could not realise any of his property. But he did not despair; he exerted himself day and night to foresee and to provide for all emergencies; he was as calm and gentle to the women in his home as ever; to the workmen in his mill he spoke not many words, but they knew him by this time; and many a curt, decided answer was received by them rather with sympathy for the care they saw pressing upon him, than with the suppressed antagonism which had formerly been smouldering, and ready for hard words and hard judgments on all occasions. 'Th' measter's a deal to potter him,' said Higgins, one day, as he heard Mr. Thornton's short, sharp inquiry, why such a command had not been obeyed; and caught the sound of the suppressed sigh which he heaved in going past the room where some of the men were working. Higgins and another man stopped over-hours that night, unknown to any one, to get the neglected piece of work done; and Mr. Thornton never knew but that the overlooker, to whom he had given the command in the first instance, had done it himself

'Eh! I reckon I know who'd ha' been sorry for to see our measter sitting so like a piece o' grey calico! Th' ou'd parson would ha' fretted his woman's heart out, if he'd seen the woeful looks I have seen on our measter's face,' thought Higgins, one day, as he was approaching Mr. Thornton in Marlborough Street.

'Measter,' said he, stopping his employer in his quick resolved walk, and causing that gentleman to look up with a sudden annoyed start, as if his thoughts had been far away.

'Have yo' heerd aught of Miss Marget lately?'

'Miss--who?' replied Mr. Thornton.

'Miss Marget--Miss Hale--th' oud parson's daughter--yo known who I mean well enough, if yo'll only think a bit--' (there was nothing disrespectful in the tone in which this was said).

'Oh yes!' and suddenly, the wintry frost-bound look of care had left Mr. Thornton's face, as if some soft summer gale had blown all anxiety away from his mind; and though his mouth was as much compressed as before, his eyes smiled out benignly on his questioner.

'She's my landlord now, you know, Higgins. I hear of her through her agent here, every now and then. She's well and among friends--thank you, Higgins.' That 'thank you' that lingered after the other words, and yet came with so much warmth of feeling, let in a new light to the acute Higgins. It might be but a will-o'-th'-wisp, but he thought he would follow it and ascertain whither it would lead him.

'And she's not getten married, measter?'

'Not yet.' The face was cloudy once more. 'There is some talk of it, as I understand, with a connection of the family.'

'Then she'll not be for coming to Milton again, I reckon.'

'No!'

'Stop a minute, measter.' Then going up confidentially close, he said, 'Is th' young gentleman cleared?' He enforced the depth of his intelligence by a wink of the eye, which only made things more mysterious to Mr. Thornton.

'Th' young gentleman, I mean--Master Frederick, they ca'ad him--her brother as was over here, yo' known.'

'Over here.'

'Ay, to be sure, at th' missus's death. Yo' need na be feared of my telling; for Mary and me, we knowed it all along, only we held our peace, for we got it through Mary working. in th' house.'

'And he was over. It was her brother!'

'Sure enough, and I reckoned yo' knowed it or I'd never ha' let on. Yo' knowed she had a brother?'

'Yes, I know all about him. And he was over at Mrs. Hale's death?'

'Nay! I'm not going for to tell more. I've maybe getten them into mischief already, for they kept it very close. I nobbut wanted to know if they'd getten him cleared?'

'Not that I know of. I know nothing. I only hear of Miss Hale, now, as my landlord, and through her lawyer.'

He broke off from Higgins, to follow the business on which he had been bent when the latter first accosted him; leaving Higgins baffled in his endeavour.

'It was her brother,' said Mr. Thornton to himself. 'I am glad. I may never see her again; but it is a comfort--a relief--to know that much. I knew she could not be unmaidenly; and yet I yearned for conviction. Now I am glad!'

It was a little golden thread running through the dark web of his present fortunes; which were growing ever gloomier and more gloomy. His agent had largely trusted a house in the American trade, which went down, along with several others, just at this time, like a pack of

cards, the fall of one compelling other failures. What were Mr. Thornton's engagements? Could he stand?

Night after night he took books and papers into his own private room, and sate up there long after the family were gone to bed. He thought that no one knew of this occupation of the hours he should have spent in sleep. One morning, when daylight was stealing in through the crevices of his shutters, and he had never been in bed, and, in hopeless indifference of mind, was thinking that he could do without the hour or two of rest, which was all that he should be able to take before the stir of daily labour began again, the door of his room opened, and his mother stood there, dressed as she had been the day before. She had never laid herself down to slumber any more than he. Their eyes met. Their faces were cold and rigid, and wan, from long watching.

'Mother! why are not you in bed?'

'Son John,' said she, 'do you think I can sleep with an easy mind, while you keep awake full of care? You have not told me what your trouble is; but sore trouble you have had these many days past.'

'Trade is bad.'

'And you dread----'

'I dread nothing,' replied he, drawing up his head, and holding it erect. 'I know now that no man will suffer by me. That was my anxiety.'

'But how do you stand? Shall you--will it be a failure?' her steady voice trembling in an unwonted manner.

'Not a failure. I must give up business, but I pay all men. I might redeem myself--I am sorely tempted--'

'How? Oh, John! keep up your name--try all risks for that. How redeem it?'

'By a speculation offered to me, full of risk; but, if successful, placing me high above water-mark, so that no one need ever know the strait I am in. Still, if it fails--'

'And if it fails,' said she, advancing, and laying her hand on his arm, her eyes full of eager light. She held her breath to hear the end of his speech.

'Honest men are ruined by a rogue,' said he gloomily. 'As I stand now, my creditors, money is safe--every farthing of it; but I don't know where to find my own--it may be all gone, and I penniless at this moment. Therefore, it is my creditors' money that I should risk.'

'But if it succeeded, they need never know. Is it so desperate a speculation? I am sure it is not, or you would never have thought of it. If it succeeded--'

'I should be a rich man, and my peace of conscience would be gone!'

'Why! You would have injured no one.'

'No; but I should have run the risk of ruining many for my own paltry aggrandisement. Mother, I have decided! You won't much grieve over our leaving this house, shall you, dear mother?'

'No! but to have you other than what you are will break my heart. What can you do?'

'Be always the same John Thornton in whatever circumstances; endeavouring to do right, and making great blunders; and then trying to be brave in setting to afresh. But it is hard, mother. I have so worked and planned. I have discovered new powers in my situation too late--and now all is over. I am too old to begin again with the same heart. It is hard, mother.'

He turned away from her, and covered his face with his hands.

'I can't think,' said she, with gloomy defiance in her tone, 'how it comes about. Here is my boy--good son, just man, tender heart--and he fails in all he sets his mind upon: he finds a woman to love, and she cares no more for his affection than if he had been any common man; he labours, and his labour comes to nought. Other people prosper and grow rich, and hold their paltry names high and dry above shame.'

'Shame never touched me,' said he, in a low tone: but she went on.

'I sometimes have wondered where justice was gone to, and now I don't believe there is such a thing in the world,--now you are come to this; you, my own John Thornton, though you and I may be beggars together--my own dear son!'

She fell upon his neck, and kissed him through her tears.

'Mother!' said he, holding her gently in his arms, 'who has sent me my lot in life, both of good and of evil?'

She shook her head. She would have nothing to do with religion just then.

'Mother,' he went on, seeing that she would not speak, 'I, too, have been rebellious; but I am striving to be so no longer. Help me, as you helped me when I was a child. Then you said many good words--when my father died, and we were sometimes sorely short of comforts--which we shall never be now; you said brave, noble, trustful words then, mother, which I have never forgotten, though they may have lain dormant. Speak to me again in the old way, mother. Do not let us have to think that the world has too much hardened our hearts. If you would say the old good words, it would make me feel something of the pious simplicity of my childhood. I say them to myself, but they would come differently from you, remembering all the cares and trials you have had to bear.'

'I have had a many,' said she, sobbing, 'but none so sore as this. To see you cast down from your rightful place! I could say it for myself, John, but not for you. Not for you! God has seen fit to be very hard on you, very.'

She shook with the sobs that come so convulsively when an old person weeps. The silence around her struck her at last; and she quieted herself to listen. No sound. She looked. Her son sate by the table, his arms thrown half across it, his head bent face downwards.

'Oh, John!' she said, and she lifted his face up. Such a strange, pallid look of gloom was on it, that for a moment it struck her that this look was the forerunner of death; but, as the rigidity melted out of the countenance and the natural colour returned, and she saw that he was himself once again, all worldly mortification sank to nothing before the consciousness of the great blessing that he himself by his simple existence was to her. She thanked God for this, and this alone, with a fervour that swept away all rebellious feelings from her mind.

He did not speak readily; but he went and opened the shutters, and let the ruddy light of dawn flood the room. But the wind was in the east; the weather was piercing cold, as it had been for weeks; there would be no demand for light summer goods this year. That hope for the revival of trade must utterly be given up.

It was a great comfort to have had this conversation with his mother; and to feel sure that, however they might henceforward keep silence on all these anxieties, they yet understood each other's feelings, and were, if not in harmony, at least not in discord with each other, in their way of viewing them. Fanny's husband was vexed at Thornton's refusal to take any share in the speculation which he had offered to him, and withdrew from any possibility of being supposed able to assist him with the ready money, which indeed the speculator needed for his own venture.

There was nothing for it at last, but that which Mr. Thornton had dreaded for many weeks; he had to give up the business in which he had been so long engaged with so much. honour and success; and look out for a subordinate situation. Marlborough Mills and the adjacent dwelling were held under a long lease; they must, if possible, be relet. There was an immediate choice of situations offered to Mr. Thornton. Mr. Hamper would have been only too glad to have secured him as a steady and experienced partner for his son, whom he was setting up with a large capital in a neighbouring town; but the young man was half-educated as regarded information, and wholly uneducated as regarded any other responsibility than that of getting money, and brutalised both as to his pleasures and his pains. Mr. Thornton declined having any share in a partnership, which would frustrate what few plans he had that survived the wreck of his fortunes. He would sooner consent to be only a manager, where he could have a certain degree of power beyond the mere money-getting part, than have to fall in with the tyrannical humours of a moneyed partner with whom he felt sure that he should quarrel in a few months.

So he waited, and stood on one side with profound humility, as the news swept through the Exchange, of the enormous fortune which his brother-in-law had made by his daring speculation. It was a nine days' wonder. Success brought with it its worldly consequence of extreme admiration. No one was considered so wise and far-seeing as Mr. Watson.

CHAPTER XXVI

MEETING AGAIN

'Bear up, brave heart! we will be calm and strong;

1.

Sure, we can master eyes, or cheek, or tongue,
- *Nor let the smallest tell-tale sign appear*
- *She ever was, and is, and will be dear.'*

RHYMING PLAY.

It was a hot summer's evening. Edith came into Margaret's bedroom, the first time in her habit, the second ready dressed for dinner. No one was there at first; the next time Edith found Dixon laying out Margaret's dress on the bed; but no Margaret. Edith remained to fidget about.

'Oh, Dixon! not those horrid blue flowers to that dead gold-coloured gown. What taste! Wait a minute, and I will bring you some pomegranate blossoms.'

'It's not a dead gold-colour, ma'am. It's a straw-colour. And blue always goes with straw-colour.' But Edith had brought the brilliant scarlet flowers before Dixon had got half through her remonstrance.

'Where is Miss Hale?' asked Edith, as soon as she had tried the effect of the garniture. 'I can't think,' she went on, pettishly, 'how my aunt allowed her to get into such rambling habits in Milton! I'm sure I'm always expecting to hear of her having met with something horrible among all those wretched places she pokes herself into. I should never dare to go down some of those streets without a servant. They're not fit for ladies.'

Dixon was still huffed about her despised taste; so she replied, rather shortly:

'It's no wonder to my mind, when I hear ladies talk such a deal about being ladies--and when they're such fearful, delicate, dainty ladies too--I say it's no wonder to me that there are no longer any saints on earth----'

'Oh, Margaret! here you are! I have been so wanting you. But how your cheeks are flushed with the heat, poor child! But only think what that tiresome Henry has done; really, he exceeds brother-in-law's limits. Just when my party was made up so beautifully--fitted in so precisely for Mr. Colthurst--there has Henry come, with an apology it is true, and making use of your name for an excuse, and asked me if he may bring that Mr. Thornton of Milton--your tenant, you know--who is in London about some law business. It will spoil my number, quite.'

'I don't mind dinner. I don't want any,' said Margaret, in a low voice. 'Dixon can get me a cup of tea here, and I will be in the drawing-room by the time you come up. I shall really be glad to lie down.'

'No, no! that will never do. You do look wretchedly white, to be sure; but that is just the heat, and we can't do without you possibly. (Those flowers a little lower, Dixon. They look glorious flames, Margaret, in your black hair.) You know we planned you to talk about Milton to Mr. Colthurst. Oh! to be sure! and this man comes from Milton. I believe it will be capital, after all. Mr. Colthurst can pump him well on all the subjects in which he is interested, and it will be great fun to trace out your experiences, and this Mr. Thornton's wisdom, in Mr. Colthurst's next speech in the House. Really, I think it is a happy hit of Henry's. I asked him if he was a man one would be ashamed of; and he replied, "Not if you've any sense in you, my little sister." So I suppose he Is able to sound his h's, which is not a common Darkshire accomplishment--eh, Margaret?'

'Mr. Lennox did not say why Mr. Thornton was come up to town? Was it law business connected with the property?' asked Margaret, in a constrained voice.

'Oh! he's failed, or something of the kind, that Henry told you of that day you had such a headache,--what was it? (There, that's capital, Dixon. Miss Hale does us credit, does she not?) I wish I was as tall as a queen, and as brown as a gipsy, Margaret.'

'But about Mr. Thornton?'

'Oh I really have such a terrible head for law business. Henry will like nothing better than to tell you all about it. I know the impression he made upon me was, that Mr. Thornton is very badly off, and a very respectable man, and that I'm to be very civil to him; and as I did not know how, I came to you to ask you to help me. And now come down with me, and rest on the sofa for a quarter of an hour.'

The privileged brother-in-law came early and Margaret reddening as she spoke, began to ask him the questions she wanted to hear answered about Mr. Thornton.

'He came up about this sub-letting the property--Marlborough Mills, and the house and premises adjoining, I mean. He is unable to keep it on; and there are deeds and leases to be

looked over, and agreements to be drawn up. I hope Edith will receive him properly; but she was rather put out, as I could see, by the liberty I had taken in begging for an invitation for him. But I thought you would like to have some attention shown him: and one would be particularly scrupulous in paying every respect to a man who is going down in the world.' He had dropped his voice to speak to Margaret, by whom he was sitting; but as he ended he sprang up, and introduced Mr. Thornton, who had that moment entered, to Edith and Captain Lennox.

Margaret looked with an anxious eye at Mr. Thornton while he was thus occupied. It was considerably more than a year since she had seen him; and events had occurred to change him much in that time. His fine figure yet bore him above the common height of men; and gave him a distinguished appearance, from the ease of motion which arose out of it, and was natural to him; but his face looked older and care-worn; yet a noble composure sate upon it, which impressed those who had just been hearing of his changed position, with a sense of inherent dignity and manly strength. He was aware, from the first glance he had given round the room, that Margaret was there; he had seen her intent look of occupation as she listened to Mr. Henry Lennox; and he came up to her with the perfectly regulated manner of an old friend. With his first calm words a vivid colour flashed into her cheeks, which never left them again during the evening. She did not seem to have much to say to him. She disappointed him by the quiet way in which she asked what seemed to him to be the merely necessary questions respecting her old acquaintances, in Milton; but others came in--more intimate in the house than he--and he fell into the background, where he and Mr. Lennox talked together from time to time.

'You think Miss Hale looking well,' said Mr. Lennox, 'don't you? Milton didn't agree with her, I imagine; for when she first came to London, I thought I had never seen any one so much changed. To-night she is looking radiant. But she is much stronger. Last autumn she was fatigued with a walk of a couple of miles. On Friday evening we walked up to Hampstead and back. Yet on Saturday she looked as well as she does now.

'We!' Who? They two alone?

Mr. Colthurst was a very clever man, and a rising member of parliament. He had a quick eye at discerning character, and was struck by a remark which Mr. Thornton made at dinner-time. He enquired from Edith who that gentleman was; and, rather to her surprise, she found, from the tone of his 'Indeed!' that Mr. Thornton of Milton was not such an unknown name to him as she had imagined it would be. Her dinner was going off well. Henry was in good humour, and brought out his dry caustic wit admirably. Mr. Thornton and Mr. Colthurst found one or two mutual subjects of interest, which they could only touch upon then, reserving them for more private after-dinner talk. Margaret looked beautiful in the pomegranate flowers; and if she did lean back in her chair and speak but little, Edith was not annoyed, for the conversation flowed on smoothly without her. Margaret was watching Mr. Thornton's face. He never looked at her; so she might study him unobserved, and note the changes which even this short time had wrought in him. Only at some unexpected mot of Mr. Lennox's, his face flashed out into the old look of intense enjoyment; the merry brightness returned to his eyes, the lips just parted to suggest the brilliant smile of former days; and for an instant, his glance instinctively sought hers, as if he wanted her sympathy. But when their eyes met, his whole countenance changed; he was grave and anxious once more; and he resolutely avoided even looking near her again during dinner.

There were only two ladies besides their own party, and as these were occupied in conversation by her aunt and Edith, when they went up into the drawing-room, Margaret languidly employed herself about some work. Presently the gentlemen came up, Mr. Colthurst and Mr. Thornton in close conversation. Mr. Lennox drew near to Margaret, and said in a low voice:

'I really think Edith owes me thanks for my contribution to her party. You've no idea what an agreeable, sensible fellow this tenant of yours is. He has been the very man to give Colthurst all the facts he wanted coaching in. I can't conceive how he contrived to mismanage his affairs.'

'With his powers and opportunities you would have succeeded,' said Margaret. He did not quite relish the tone in which she spoke, although the words but expressed a thought which had passed through his own mind. As he was silent, they caught a swell in the sound of conversation going on near the fire-place between Mr. Colthurst and Mr. Thornton.

'I assure you, I heard it spoken of with great interest--curiosity as to its result, perhaps I should rather say. I heard your name frequently mentioned during my short stay in the neighbourhood.' Then they lost some words; and when next they could hear Mr. Thornton was speaking.

'I have not the elements for popularity--if they spoke of me in that way, they were mistaken. I fall slowly into new projects; and I find it difficult to let myself be known, even by those whom I desire to know, and with whom I would fain have no reserve. Yet, even with all these drawbacks, I felt that I was on the right path, and that, starting from a kind of friendship with one, I was becoming acquainted with many. The advantages were mutual: we were both unconsciously and consciously teaching each other.'

'You say "were." I trust you are intending to pursue the same course?'

'I must stop Colthurst,' said Henry Lennox, hastily. And by an abrupt, yet apropos question, he turned the current of the conversation, so as not to give Mr. Thornton the mortification of acknowledging his want of success and consequent change of position. But as soon as the newly-started subject had come to a close, Mr. Thornton resumed the conversation just where it had been interrupted, and gave Mr. Colthurst the reply to his inquiry.

'I have been unsuccessful in business, and have had to give up my position as a master. I am on the look out for a situation in Milton, where I may meet with employment under some one who will be willing to let me go along my own way in such matters as these. I can depend upon myself for having no go-ahead theories that I would rashly bring into practice. My only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere "cash nexus." But it might be the point Archimedes sought from which to move the earth, to judge from the importance attached to it by some of our manufacturers, who shake their heads and look grave as soon as I name the one or two experiments that I should like to try.'

'You call them "experiments" I notice,' said Mr. Colthurst, with a delicate increase of respect in his manner.

'Because I believe them to be such. I am not sure of the consequences that may result from them. But I am sure they ought to be tried. I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise, and however much thought may have been required to organise and arrange them, can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life. A working man can hardly be made to feel and know how much his employer may have laboured in his study at plans for the benefit of his workpeople. A complete plan emerges like a piece of machinery, apparently fitted for every emergency. But the hands accept it as they do machinery, without understanding the intense mental labour and forethought required to bring it to such perfection. But I would take an idea, the working out of which would necessitate personal intercourse; it might not go well at first, but at every hitch interest would be felt by an increasing number of men, and at last its success in working come to be desired by all, as all had borne a part in the formation of the plan; and even then I am sure that it would lose its vitality, cease to be living, as soon as it was no longer carried on by that sort of common interest which invariably makes people find means and ways of seeing each other, and becoming acquainted with each others' characters and persons, and even tricks of temper and modes of speech. We should understand each other better, and I'll venture to say we should like each other more.'

'And you think they may prevent the recurrence of strikes?'

'Not at all. My utmost expectation only goes so far as this--that they may render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been. A more hopeful man might imagine that a closer and more genial intercourse between classes might do away with strikes. But I am not a hopeful man.'

Suddenly, as if a new idea had struck him, he crossed over to where Margaret was sitting, and began, without preface, as if he knew she had been listening to all that had passed:

'Miss Hale, I had a round-robin from some of my men--I suspect in Higgins' handwriting--stating their wish to work for me, if ever I was in a position to employ men again on my own behalf. That was good, wasn't it?'

'Yes. Just right. I am glad of it,' said Margaret, looking up straight into his face with her speaking eyes, and then dropping them under his eloquent glance. He gazed back at her for a minute, as if he did not know exactly what he was about. Then sighed; and saying, 'I knew you would like it,' he turned away, and never spoke to her again until he bid her a formal 'good night.'

As Mr. Lennox took his departure, Margaret said, with a blush that she could not repress, and with some hesitation,

'Can I speak to you to-morrow? I want your help about--something.'

'Certainly. I will come at whatever time you name. You cannot give me a greater pleasure than by making me of any use. At eleven? Very well.'

His eye brightened with exultation. How she was learning to depend upon him! It seemed as if any day now might give him the certainty, without having which he had determined never to offer to her again.

CHAPTER XXVII

'PACK CLOUDS AWAY'

'For joy or grief, for hope or fear,

1.

For all hereafter, as for here,

- *In peace or strife, in storm or shine.'*

ANON.

Edith went about on tip-toe, and checked Sholto in all loud speaking that next morning, as if any sudden noise would interrupt the conference that was taking place in the drawing-room. Two o'clock came; and they still sate there with closed doors. Then there was a man's footstep running down stairs; and Edith peeped out of the drawing-room.

'Well, Henry?' said she, with a look of interrogation.

'Well!' said he, rather shortly.

'Come in to lunch!'

'No, thank you, I can't. I've lost too much time here already.'

'Then it's not all settled,' said Edith despondingly.

'No! not at all. It never will be settled, if the "it" is what I conjecture you mean. That will never be, Edith, so give up thinking about it.'

'But it would be so nice for us all,' pleaded Edith. 'I should always feel comfortable about the children, if I had Margaret settled down near me. As it is, I am always afraid of her going off to Cadiz.'

'I will try, when I marry, to look out for a young lady who has a knowledge of the management of children. That is all I can do. Miss Hale would not have me. And I shall not ask her.'

'Then, what have you been talking about?'

'A thousand things you would not understand: investments, and leases, and value of land.'

'Oh, go away if that's all. You and she will be unbearably stupid, if you've been talking all this time about such weary things.'

'Very well. I'm coming again to-morrow, and bringing Mr. Thornton with me, to have some more talk with Miss Hale.'

'Mr. Thornton! What has he to do with it?'

'He is Miss Hale's tenant,' said Mr. Lennox, turning away. 'And he wishes to give up his lease.'

'Oh! very well. I can't understand details, so don't give them me.'

'The only detail I want you to understand is, to let us have the back drawing-room undisturbed, as it was to-day. In general, the children and servants are so in and out, that I can never get any business satisfactorily explained; and the arrangements we have to make to-morrow are of importance.'

No one ever knew why Mr. Lennox did not keep to his appointment on the following day. Mr. Thornton came true to his time; and, after keeping him waiting for nearly an hour, Margaret came in looking very white and anxious.

She began hurriedly:

'I am so sorry Mr. Lennox is not here,--he could have done it so much better than I can. He is my adviser in this'----

'I am sorry that I came, if it troubles you. Shall I go to Mr. Lennox's chambers and try and find him?'

'No, thank you. I wanted to tell you, how grieved I was to find that I am to lose you as a tenant. But, Mr. Lennox says, things are sure to brighten'----

'Mr. Lennox knows little about it,' said Mr. Thornton quietly. 'Happy and fortunate in all a man cares for, he does not understand what it is to find oneself no longer young--yet thrown back to the starting-point which requires the hopeful energy of youth--to feel one half of life gone, and nothing done--nothing remaining of wasted opportunity, but the bitter recollection that it has been. Miss Hale, I would rather not hear Mr. Lennox's opinion of my affairs. Those who are happy and successful themselves are too apt to make light of the misfortunes of others.'

'You are unjust,' said Margaret, gently. 'Mr. Lennox has only spoken of the great probability which he believes there to be of your redeeming--your more than redeeming what you have lost--don't speak till I have ended--pray don't!' And collecting herself once more, she went on rapidly turning over some law papers, and statements of accounts in a trembling hurried manner. 'Oh! here it is! and--he drew me out a proposal--I wish he was here to explain it--showing that if you would take some money of mine, eighteen thousand and fifty-seven pounds, lying just at this moment unused in the bank, and bringing me in only two and a half per cent.--you could pay me much better interest, and might go on working Marlborough Mills.' Her voice had cleared itself and become more steady. Mr. Thornton did not speak, and she went on looking for some paper on which were written down the proposals for security; for she was most anxious to have it all looked upon in the light of a mere business arrangement, in which the principal advantage would be on her side. While she sought for this paper, her very heart-pulse was arrested by the tone in which Mr. Thornton spoke. His voice was hoarse, and trembling with tender passion, as he said:--

'Margaret!'

For an instant she looked up; and then sought to veil her luminous eyes by dropping her forehead on her hands. Again, stepping nearer, he besought her with another tremulous eager call upon her name.

'Margaret!'

Still lower went the head; more closely hidden was the face, almost resting on the table before her. He came close to her. He knelt by her side, to bring his face to a level with her ear; and whispered-panted out the words:--

'Take care.--If you do not speak--I shall claim you as my own in some strange presumptuous way.--Send me away at once, if I must go;--Margaret!--'

At that third call she turned her face, still covered with her small white hands, towards him, and laid it on his shoulder, hiding it even there; and it was too delicious to feel her soft cheek against his, for him to wish to see either deep blushes or loving eyes. He clasped her close. But they both kept silence. At length she murmured in a broken voice:

'Oh, Mr. Thornton, I am not good enough!'

'Not good enough! Don't mock my own deep feeling of unworthiness.'

After a minute or two, he gently disengaged her hands from her face, and laid her arms as they had once before been placed to protect him from the rioters.

'Do you remember, love?' he murmured. 'And how I requited you with my insolence the next day?'

'I remember how wrongly I spoke to you,--that is all.'

'Look here! Lift up your head. I have something to show you!' She slowly faced him, glowing with beautiful shame.

'Do you know these roses?' he said, drawing out his pocket-book, in which were treasured up some dead flowers.

'No!' she replied, with innocent curiosity. 'Did I give them to you?'

'No! Vanity; you did not. You may have worn sister roses very probably.'

She looked at them, wondering for a minute, then she smiled a little as she said--

'They are from Helstone, are they not? I know the deep indentations round the leaves. Oh! have you been there? When were you there?'

'I wanted to see the place where Margaret grew to what she is, even at the worst time of all, when I had no hope of ever calling her mine. I went there on my return from Havre.'

'You must give them to me,' she said, trying to take them out of his hand with gentle violence.

'Very well. Only you must pay me for them!'

'How shall I ever tell Aunt Shaw?' she whispered, after some time of delicious silence.

'Let me speak to her.'

'Oh, no! I owe to her,--but what will she say?'

'I can guess. Her first exclamation will be, "That man!"'

'Hush!' said Margaret, 'or I shall try and show you your mother's indignant tones as she says, "That woman!"'

Finale: End of Book Two