A

SON OF THE SOIL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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A SON OF THE SOIL.

CHAPTER I.

"I'm no saying if I'm well or ill," said Lauderdale; "I'm saying it's grand for you to leave your friends in a suffering condition, and go off and make up to other folk. It's well to be off with the old love—for my own part, however," said Colin's Mentor, "I'm no for having a great deal to do with women. They're awfu' doubtful creatures, you may take my word for it; some seem about as good as the angels—no that I have any personal acquaintance with the angels, but it's aye an intelligible metaphor—some just as far on the other side. Besides, it's a poor thing for a man to fritter away what little capability of a true feeling there may be in him. I've no fancy for the kind of friendships that are carried on after the manner of flirtations. For my part, I'm a believer in *love*," said the philosopher, with a sudden fervour of reproof which brought an unusual amount of colour to his face.

"You are absurd all the same," said Colin, laughing; "here is no question either of love, or flirtation, or even of friendship. I know what you mean," he added with a slightly heightened colour; "you think that, having once imagined I admired Miss Frankland, I ought to have continued in the same mind all my life. You don't appreciate my good sense, Lauderdale; but, at

all events, the young lady has nothing to do with my interest here."

"I was saying nothing about Miss Frankland," said Lauderdale; "I was making a confession of faith on my own part, which has naething to do with you that I can see. As for the young leddy, as you say, if it doesna begin with her, it's a' the more likely to end with her, according to my experience. To be sure, there's no great amount of time; but a boat like this is provocative of intimacy. You're aye in the second cabin, which is a kind of safeguard; but, as for your good sense—"

"Don't associate that poor fellow's name with anything ridiculous," said Colin, "but come up on deck, like a reasonable man, and judge for yourself."

"Ay, ay," said Lauderdale, slowly; "I understand the kind of thing. I've seen it many a day myself. Partly youthfulness, that thinks the thing that is happening to itself more important than anything else in the world; partly a kind of self-regard; partly a wish to take compensation out of the world for what has to be given up. I'm no saying but there's something better at the bottom, but it's awfu' hard to separate the physical and the spiritual. I wouldna say but even you, your own self—but it took a different form with you," said Lauderdale, stopping short abruptly. Looking at Colin, and seeing that still there was not much bloom on his worn cheeks, it occurred to his careful guardian that it might be as well not to recall the distempered thoughts of the sick-room at Wodensbourne to his patient's mind too soon.

"I suppose you are right," said Colin; "it took a different form with me. A more undutiful, unbelieving form; for Meredith makes no question what it means, as I used to do."

"I'm no so clear of that," said Lauderdale. "It's seldom unbelief that asks a reason. I would not say, now I'm on my feet, but what there may be a place known among men by the name

of Italy. Come, callant, and let me see if the skies are aught like what they are at hame."

Everything was changed when Colin and his friend stood again on deck. The calm weather had restored to life the crowd of sea-sick passengers who, like Lauderdale, had, up to this moment, kept themselves and their miseries under cover below. The universal scepticism and doubt of ever being better had given way to a cheerful confidence. Everybody believed—happy in his delusion—that for himself he had mastered the demon, and would be sea-sick no more. Among so many, it was not so easy to distinguish Meredith as Colin had expected; and he had time to discuss several matters with Lauderdale, showing a certain acrid feeling on his side of the question which surprised his interlocutor, before his new friends appeared. Colin had taken his second-class berth gladly enough, without thinking of any drawback; but, when he saw the limit clearly before his eyes, and perceived within reach, and indeed within hearing, the little "society" which he was not able to join, the fact of this momentary inferiority chafed him a little. Like most other people, he had a dislike to the second place—not that he cared about society, as he took pains to convince himself. But the truth was, that Colin did care for society, and, though too proud to confess such a thought, even to himself, secretly longed to join those new groups which were gradually growing into acquaintance before his eyes.

When he saw the two figures approaching which had attracted him so strongly on the previous night, his heart gave a little jump, though his eyes were fixed in another direction. They were not only two curious human creatures whom it was hard to comprehend, but, at the same time, they represented the world to Colin, who was at this present moment shut out from intercourse with everybody but Lauderdale, whose manner of musing he knew by heart. He did not look round, but he heard the

footsteps approaching, and would have been equally disappointed and irritated had they turned back. This danger, however, speedily terminated. Meredith came up hastily, drawing along with him, as usual, the sister who had not any being except in him, and laid his thin hand on Colin's shoulder. The sunshine and the brightened skies did not change the strain of the young preacher's thoughts. He laid his hand on Colin, pressing the young man's shoulder with an emphatic touch. "We meet again in the land of living men, in the place of hope," he said, turning his sister with him as he turned. She clung to him so closely that they moved like one, without any apparent volition on her part; and even Colin's salutation seemed to disturb her, as if it had been something unnecessary and unexpected. Her little hurried bow, her lips that just parted in an anxious momentary smile, had a certain surprise in them; and there was even a little impatience, as if she had said, "Answer *him;* why should you mind me?" in the turn of her head.

"Yes, we meet on a bright morning, which looks like life and hope," said Colin; "and everybody seems disposed to enjoy it; even my friend here, who has been helpless since we started, has come to life at last."

Thus directed, Meredith's eager eyes turned to Lauderdale, upon whom they paused with their usual solemn inquiring look. "I hope he has come to life in a higher sense," said the sick man, who thought it his duty to speak in season and out of season; "but for that true life, existence is only the payment of a terrible penalty. I hope, like you, he has thought on the great subject."

When he stopped short, and looked straight in Lauderdale's face, there was a wonderful silence over the little group. The dying prophet said nothing more, but looked down, awful and abstracted, from the heights of death on which he was standing, to receive an answer, which Lauderdale was too much taken by

surprise, and Colin too much alarmed for the result of the inquiry, to give at once.

"I've thought on an awfu' quantity of subjects," said Lauderdale, after a moment; "a hundred or two more than can have gone through your mind at your age; and I'm no averse to unfolding my experiences, as this callant will tell you," he added, with a smile, which, however, was lost upon his questioner.

"Your experiences!" said Meredith. He put his thin arm eagerly, before any one was aware what he intended to do, through Lauderdale's arm. "I frighten and horrify many," said the invalid, not without a gleam of satisfaction; "but there are so few, so miserably few, with whom it is possible to have true communion. Let me share your experiences—there must be instruction in them."

The philosopher, thus seized, made a comical grimace, unseen by anybody but Colin; but the sick man was far too much in earnest to observe any reluctance on the part of his new acquaintance, and Lauderdale submitted to be swept on in the strange wind of haste and anxiety and eagerness which surrounded the dying youth, to whom a world lying in wickedness, and "I, I alone" left to maintain the knowledge of God among men, was the one great truth. There was not much room to move about upon the deck; and, as Meredith turned and went on, with his arm in Lauderdale's, his sister, who was sharply turned round also by his movement, found it hard enough to maintain her position by his side. Though he was more attached to her than to any other living creature, it was not his habit, as it might have been in happier circumstances, to care for her comfort, or to concern himself about her personal convenience. He swept her along with him over the hampered deck, through passages which were barely wide enough for two, but through which she crushed herself as long as possible, catching her dress on all the corners, and losing her breath in the effort. As for

Colin, he found himself left behind with a half-amazed, half-mortified sensation.

> Not his the form, not his the eye,
> That youthful maidens wont to fly;

and though he was not truly open to Lauderdale's jibe concerning flirtations, the very name of that agreeable but dangerous amusement had roused him into making the discovery that Meredith's sister was very pretty, and that there was something extremely interesting in the rapt devotion to her brother, which at first had prevented him from observing her. It seemed only natural that, when the sick man seized upon Lauderdale, the young lady should have fallen to Colin's share; and he kept standing where they had left him, as has been described, half amused and half mortified, thinking to himself that, after all, he was not an ogre, nor a person whom ladies in general are apt to avoid.

After poor little Alice had hurt herself and torn her dress in two or three rapid turns through the limited space, she gave up her brother's arm with a pained, surprised look, which went to Colin's heart, and withdrew to the nearest bench, gathering up her torn dress in her hand, and still keeping her eyes upon him. What good she thought she could do by her watching it was difficult to tell, but it evidently was the entire occupation and object of her life. She scarcely turned her eyes upon Colin when he approached; and, as the eyes were like a fawn's—brown, wistful, and appealing (whereas Miss Matty's were blue, and addicted to laughter)—it is not to be wondered at that Colin, in whom his youth was dimly reawaking, with all its happier susceptibilities, should feel a little pique at her neglect. The shadow of death had floated away from the young man's horizon. He believed himself, whether truly or not, to have come to a new beginning of life. He had been dead and was

alive again; and the solemn interval of suffering, during which he questioned earth and heaven, had made the rebound all the sweeter, and restored with a freshness almost more delightful than the first, the dews and blossoms to the new world. Thus he approached Alice Meredith, who had no attention to spare to him—not with any idea that he had fallen in love with her, or that love was likely, but only with that vague sense that Paradise still exists somewhere, not entirely out of reach, and that the sweet Eve, who alone can reveal it, might meet him unawares at any turn of his path—which is one of the sweetest privileges of youth. But he did not know what to say to the other youthful creature, who ought to have been as conscious of such possibilities as he. No thought was in *her* mind that she ever could be the Eve of any paradise; and the world to her was a confused and darkling universe, in which death lay lurking somewhere, she could not tell how close at hand—death, not for herself, which could be borne, but for one far dearer than herself. The more she felt the nearness of this adversary, the more she contradicted herself and would not believe it; and so darkness spread all round the beginning path of the poor girl, who was not much more than a child. She would not have understood the meaning of any pretty speeches had Colin been so far left to himself as to think of making them. As it was, she looked up at him wistfully as he sat down beside her. She thought in her mind that he would be a good friend for Arthur, and might cheer him; which was the chief thing she cared for in this world.

"Has your brother been long ill?" said Colin. It seemed the only subject on which the two could speak.

"Ill?" said Alice; "he is not very ill—he takes a great deal of exercise. You must have observed that; and his appetite is very good." The question roused her to contradict her own fears, and doing so out loud to another was more effectual some-

how than anything she could say to herself. "The storm which made everybody else so ill had no effect upon Arthur," she went on, almost with a little irritation. "He is thin to be sure, but then many people are thin who are quite well; and I am sure you do not look very strong yourself."

"No," said Colin, who possessed the instinct rare among men of divining what his companion wished him to say; "my people had given me up a few weeks ago. I gave myself a poke somewhere in the lungs which very nearly made an end of me; but I mean to get better if I can," he said, with a smile, which for the moment brought a doubtful look upon the girl's face.

"You don't think it wrong to talk like that," she said; "that was what made me wish so much you should come to see Arthur. Perhaps if he were more cheerful it would do him good. Not that he is very ill, you know, but still—we are going to Italy," she went on with a little abruptness, "to a place near Rome—not to Rome itself, because I am a little afraid of that—but into the country. Are you going there?"

"I suppose so," said Colin; "it is the most interesting place in the world. Do you not think so? But everything will be new to me."

"If you were to come where we are going," said his companion with a composure which was wonderful to Colin, "you would find it cheaper, and you could see things almost as easily, and it would not be so hot when summer comes. I think it would do Arthur a great deal of good. It is so hard to know what to do with a man," she went on, unconsciously yielding to that inexpressible influence of a sympathetic listener which few people can resist; "they cannot occupy themselves, you know, as we women can, and they get tired of *our* society. I have so longed to find some man who would understand him, and whom he could talk to," cried the poor girl, with tears in her eyes. She made a pause when she had said so much—not that it

occurred to her that any one could misunderstand her, but because the tears were getting into her voice, which was a weakness not to be yielded to. "I don't know why I should cry," she added a minute after, with a faint smile; "it is talking about Italy I suppose; but you will like it when you get there."

"Yet you do not seem to like it," said Colin, with a little curiosity.

This time she made him no direct answer. Her eyes were following her brother and Lauderdale as they walked about the deck. "Is *he* nice?" she asked, with a little timidity, pointing at Lauderdale, and giving another hasty wistful look at Colin's face.

"I don't know if you would think so," said Colin; "he is very Scotch, and a little odd sometimes; but kinder and better, and more truly a friend than words can describe. He is tender and true," said the young man, with a little enthusiasm which woke up the palest ghost of an answering light in his young companion's face.

"Being Scotch is a recommendation to me," she said; "the only person I ever loved, except Arthur, of course,—and those who are gone—was Scotch." After this quaint intimation, which woke in Colin's mind an incipient spark of the earliest stage of jealousy—not jealousy proper, but only a lively and contemptuous curiosity to know "who the fellow was"—she dropped back again into her habitual silence. When Colin tried to bring her back by ordinary remarks about the voyage and their destination, she answered him simply by "Yes," or "No." She was of one idea, incapable apparently of exerting her mind on any other subject. When they had been thus sitting silent for some time, she began again abruptly at the point where she had left off.

"If you were to come to the same place," she said—"Arthur can speak Italian very well, and I know it a little—we might be

able to help you, and you would have very good air—pure air off the sea. If he had society he would soon be better." This was said softly to herself; and then she went on, drawn farther and farther by the sympathy which she felt in her listener. "There are only us two in the world."

"If I can do anything," said Colin, "as long as we are here at least; but there is no lack of society," he said, pointing to the groups on the quarter-deck, at which Alice Meredith shook her head.

"He frightens them," she said; "they prefer to go out of his way; they don't want to answer his questions. I don't know why he does it. When he was young he was fond of society, and went out a great deal, but he has changed so much of late," said the anxious sister, with a certain look of doubt and wonder on her face. She was not quite sure whether the change was an improvement. "I don't understand it very well myself," she went on, with a sigh; "perhaps I have not thought enough about it. And then he does not mind what I say to him—men never do; I suppose it is natural. But, if he had society, and you would talk and keep him from writing—"

"Does he write?" said Colin, with new interest. It was a bond of sympathy he had not expected to hear of; and here again the tears, in spite of all her exertions, got into Alice's voice.

"At night, when he ought to be sleeping," said the poor girl. "I don't mean to say he is very ill; but, oh! Mr. Campbell, is it not enough to make any man ill to sit up when he is so tired he cannot keep awake, writing that dreadful book? He is going to call it "A Voice from the Grave." I sometimes think he wants to break my heart; for what has the grave to do with it? He is rather delicate, but so are you. Most people are delicate," said poor Alice, "when they sit up at night, and don't take care of themselves. If you could only get him to give up that book, I would bless you all my life."

Such an appeal from sweet lips quivering with suppressed anguish, from beautiful eyes full of heavy tears, was not likely to be without effect; and, when Colin went to his own cabin in the evening, hearing but imperfectly the criticisms of Lauderdale on his new friend and his affairs, he was more and more impressed by the conviction that something must come of an encounter so singular and unexpected. The young man immediately set himself to wind new threads of fate about his feet, and while he was doing so, thought with a little thrill of the wonderful way in which things came about, and the possible purposes of Providence in this new change. It roused and excited him to see the new scenery coming into its place, and the ground preparing for another act of his life.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT for?" said Lauderdale. "I'll no say but what it's an interesting study, if life was long enough to allow such indulgences; but—take you my word for it, callant—it's awfu' hard to see a life wearing out like that, drop by drop. It's not only that you might get to be fond of the poor lad himself, and miss him sair when he was gone," said the philosopher, who had not just then perfect command of himself; "but it raises awfu' questions, and you are not one of those that can take things as they come and ask no reason. What should you bind yourself for! I see a' that would happen as clear as day. You would go into a bit country place with him, only to watch him die; and, when he was gone, you would be left with the bit bonnie sister, two bairns together—and then—but you're no destitute of imagination," said Lauderdale, grimly; "and I leave you to figure that part of the business to yoursel'."

"This is foolish talk," said Colin. "The sister, except that I am very sorry for her, has nothing in the world to do with it. If we could manage as well beside them as anywhere else, one should be glad to be of some use to one's fellow-creatures. I am not afraid of anything that might happen," the young man added, with a slight additional colour. "As for responsibility, it is strange to hear you warning me against that—you who were willing to take upon yourself all the responsibility of travelling with me when you thought I was dying—"

"No such thing," said Lauderdale, hotly. "I'm fool enough, no doubt, but no such a fool as that. Callants of your age canna

keep a medium. When you have a sore finger you take thoughts of dying; but I'm a man of some experience in this world. I'm travelling for my own pleasure and no for you, nor no man. As for this lad, I've seen the like before. He's no singular, though I've little doubt he thinks he is. It's awfu' hard work to stop short just when you've come to the brow of the hill, and see a' the fair prospect before you," said Colin's guardian, whose countenance was overcast and cloudy. "When the mind's no very strong, the like of that sets it off its balance. I've seen them that came out of the trial as calm as the angels of God," he went on, after a little pause, with a strain in his voice which showed unusual emotion; "and I have seen them that battled with Him that made them, to make Him render a reason; and I have seen them that took it with a high hand, and turned into preachers like this one. 'A Voice from the Grave,' did she say? But you're a' babies that ken no better. How are the like of you to know that there's men like me—ay, and women more than men—that would give a' their living, and would not grudge life itself, no for a voice only, but for two or three words—for one word and no more." He put down his face in his hands for a moment as he spoke, though not to conceal tears; for Lauderdale's sorrows, whatever they might have been, were wrapped in the deadly stillness of that past grief with which no stranger intermeddles; and his young companion watched him sorrowfully, sympathetically, but in ignorance, and with the timidity of youth, not knowing what to say.

"Him, and the like of him," said Lauderdale, going on more softly when he found that Colin made no reply, "their voice from the grave is like a Halloween ghost to frighten the unwary. Whisht, callant! I'm no laughing at the poor dying lad. There's nae laughing in my head one way or another; but it's so little you know. You never think, with your warnings and your terrors, of us that have sat by our graves for years, and been

confounded by the awfu' silence. Why can they no speak nor we hear? You'll no tell me that Heaven and the presence of God can take the love out of a living soul. I wish you would not disturb my mind with your vain thoughts; it's no a question I dare go into. If love's no everlasting, I've no desire to be everlasting myself; and, if I'm to be no more hereafter to them that belong to me, than to legions of strange angels, or a haill nation of fremd folk!—Whisht, callant! you're no to say such things to me."

Colin said nothing at all to interrupt this monologue. He let his friend wear himself out, pacing up and down the narrow little cabin, which it required but two of Lauderdale's strides to traverse from end to end. He had known a chance word to produce similar results before, but had never been made acquainted with the real history of his friend's life. He waited now till this excitement was over, knowing by experience that it was the best way; and, after a while, Lauderdale calmed down and came back to his seat, and resumed the conversation where he had left it, before his heart within him was roused to make brief utterance of its unknown burden.

"The short and the long of it is," said Lauderdale, "that you're making up your mind, by some process of your own—I'm no saying what it is—to give up our own plan and tack yourself on to a poor failing callant that has not above a month or two to live?"

"How do you know he has not above a month or two to live?" said Colin. "You thought the same of me a few weeks ago. One hears of the climate working wonders; and, if he had some one by him to amuse and interest him, and keep him off that book, as—as Miss Meredith says—"

"Oh, ay, no doubt, no doubt," said Lauderdale, drily. "He has one nurse already bound to him body and soul, and maybe, if he had another to undertake the spiritual department—!

But you're no old enough, callant, to take him in hand, and you're no strong enough, and I cannot say, for my own part, that I see any special qualification for such an office in ye," said the merciless critic, looking at Colin in a seriously contemplative way, with his head a little on one side. After he had shown any deep emotion, Lauderdale, like a true Briton, despised himself, and made as great a leap as was practicable on the other side.

"No," said Colin, who was a little piqued in spite of himself; "I don't suppose I am good for much; and I never thought of being his nurse. It is out of the question to imagine that I could be for Meredith, or any other man, what you have been for me."

"I've kent ye longer than two days," said Colin's guardian, without showing any signs of propitiation, "which to be sure makes a little difference. Though them that are destined to come together need little time to make it up—I've aye been a believer, for my part, not only in love, but in friendship, at first sight."

"There's no question of either love or friendship," said Colin, with prompt irritation. "Surely one may feel pity, sympathy, fellow-feeling, with a man of one's own age without being misunderstood."

"I understand you an awfu' deal better than you understand yourself," said Lauderdale; "and, as I was saying, I am a great believer in first impressions. It's a mercenary kind of thing to be friends with a man for his good qualities—there's a kind of barter in it that goes against my instincts; but, when you take to a man for nae reason, but out of pure election and choice, that's real friendship—or love, as it might be," he went on, without pity, enjoying the heightened colour and air of embarrassment on Colin's face.

"You say all this to make me lose my temper," said Colin.

"Don't let us talk of it any more to-night; I will think it all over again, since you oppose it, and to-morrow—"

"Ay, to-morrow," said Lauderdale — "it's a bonnie new world, and we'll no interfere with it. Good-night, callant; I'm no a man that can be quarrelled with if you tried ever so hard; to-morrow you'll take your own way."

Colin did not sleep till the night was far advanced. He lay awake, watching the moonlight, and pondering over this matter, which looked very important as he contemplated it. By thinking was meant, in his mind, as in most minds of his age, not any complicated course of reasoning, but a rapid framing of pictures on one side and the other. On one side he saw Meredith beguiled from his book, persuaded to moderate his words in season and out of season, and induced to take a little interest in ordinary human affairs, gradually recovering his health, and returning to a life which should no longer appear to him a near preparation for dying; and it cannot be denied that there did come into Colin's mind a certain consciousness of grateful looks and sweet-voiced thanks attending this restoration, which made the picture wonderfully pleasant. Then, on the other side, there was Lauderdale's sketch of the sadder possibilities filled in by Colin's imagination:—poor Meredith dying slowly, looking death in the face for long days and lonely nights, sorely wanting all the succour that human compassion could give him; and the forlorn and solitary mourner that would be left, so young and friendless, by the stranger's grave. Perhaps, on the whole, this suggestion of Lauderdale's decided the matter. The thought was too pitiful, too sad to be borne. She was nothing in the world to him; but she was a woman, and Colin thought indignantly of the unchristian cowardice which, for fear of responsibility, would desert a friendless creature exposed to such dangers. Notwithstanding, he was prudent, very prudent, as was natural. It was not Alice, but Arthur Meredith who was

to be his friend. She had nothing to do with this decision whatever. If such a melancholy necessity should happen, Colin felt it was in him, respectfully, sympathetically, to take the poor girl home; and if, somehow, the word "home" suggested to him his mother, who that knew anything of the Mistress, could wonder at that thought?

Thus he went on drawing the meshes closer about his feet, while the moonlight shone on the sea, and poor Meredith wrote his book, and Lauderdale, as sleepless as his charge, anxiously pondered the new state of affairs. At home that same moon suggested Colin to more minds than one in the peaceful country over which the March winds were blowing. Miss Matty thought of him, looking out over the Wodensbourne avenue, where the great trees stood stately in the moonlight with a glory on their heads. She was so late because she had been at a ball, where her cousin Harry had made himself highly disagreeable, and where, prompted by his sulky looks, she had carried a little flirtation a hair's-breadth too far—which was not a comfortable consciousness. Why she should think of Colin under such circumstances it would be hard to say; but the thoughts of a young woman at three o'clock in the morning are not expected to be logical. She thought of him with a shadow of the same feeling that made the Psalmist long for the wings of a dove; though, if Miss Matty had but known it, her reception—could she have made her escape to her former worshipper at that moment—would have been of a disappointing character. And about the same time the Mistress woke out of her quiet sleep, and saw the broad, white flood of light streaming through the little square window of the room in which Colin was born. Her fancy was busy enough about him night and day; and she fancied she could see, as clear as in a picture, the ship speeding on, with perhaps its white wings spread over the glistening sea, and the moon stealing in at the cabin window,

and caressing her boy, who must be fast asleep, resting and gathering strength, with new life breathing in upon him in every breath of favourable wind that crisped the sleeping sea. Such was the vision that came to the mind of the Mistress when she woke in the "dead of night," and saw the moonlight at her window. "God bless my Colin," she said to herself, as she closed her tender eyes; and in the meantime Colin, thinking nothing of his old love, and not very much of his home, was busily engaged in weaving for himself another tangle in the varied web of existence—although none of the people most interested in him—except Lauderdale, who saw a faint shadow of the future—had the least idea that this night at sea was of any moment in his life. He did not know it himself, though he was conscious of a certain thrill of pleasant excitement and youthful awe, half voluntary, half real. And so the new scene got arranged for this new act of the wonderful drama; and all the marvellous, delicate influences of Providence and will, poising and balancing each other, began to form and shape the further outlines of his life.

CHAPTER III.

THE place which the Merediths had chosen for their residence was Frascati, where everything was quieter, and most things cheaper, than in Rome—to which, besides, the brother and sister had objections, founded on former passages in their family history, of which their new friends were but partially aware; and to Frascati, accordingly, the two Scotch pilgrims were drawn with them. Colin had, as usual, persevered in his own way, as Lauderdale prophesied, and the arrangement came about, naturally enough, after the ten days' close company on board ship, where young Meredith, whom most people were either contemptuous of, or inclined to avoid, found refuge with his new friends, who, though they did not agree with him, at least understood what he meant. He slackened nothing of those exertions which he thought to be his duty—and on which, perhaps unconsciously, the young invalid rather prided himself, as belonging to his *rôle* of dying man,—during the remainder of the voyage; but, finding one of the sailors ill, succeeded in making such an impression upon the poor fellow's uninstructed and uncertain mind as repaid him, he said, for all the exertions he had made. After that event, he went very often to the forecastle to pray with his convert, being, perhaps, disposed to the opinion that they two were the salt of the earth to their small community; for which proceeding he was called fool, and fanatic, and Methodist, and a great many other hard names by the majority of his fellow-passengers—some of whom, indeed, being,

like most ordinary people, totally unable to discriminate between things that differ, confidently expected to hear of some secret vice on the part of Meredith; such things being always found out, as they maintained, of people who considered themselves better than their neighbours. "After a while, it will be found out what he's up to," said a comfortable passenger, who knew the world; "such fellows always have their private peccadilloes. I daresay he doesn't go so often to the forecastle for nothing. The stewardess ain't bad looking, and I've seen our saint engaged in private conversation when he didn't know I was there," said the large-minded Christian who denounced poor Meredith's uncharitableness. And, to be sure, he was uncharitable, poor fellow. As for Colin, and, indeed, Lauderdale also, who had been attracted, in spite of himself, they looked on with a wonderful interest, from amid-ships, knowing better. They saw him dragging his sister after him, as far as she could go, along the crowded deck, when he went to visit his patient—neither he, whose thoughts were occupied solely with matters of life and death, nor she, who was thinking entirely of him, having any idea that the dark dormitory below, among the sailors' hammocks, was an unfit place for her. It was Colin who stepped forward to rescue the girl from this unnecessary trial: and Meredith gave her up to him, with as little idea that this, too, was a doubtful expedient as he had of anything unsuitable in his original intention. "It is a privilege, if she but knew it," the invalid would say, fixing his hollow eyes on her, as if half doubtful whether he approved of her or not; and poor Alice stayed behind him with a bad grace, without feeling much indebted on her own account to her new friends. "It does not matter where I go, so long as I am with him," she said, following him with her anxious looks; and she remained there seated patiently upon her bench, with her eyes fixed on the spot where he had disappeared, until he rejoined her. When Arthur's

little prayer-meeting was ended, he came with a severe, and yet serene countenance towards the sister he had left behind, and the two friends who did not propose to accompany him. "He is a child of God," said the sick man; "his experiences are a great comfort to me"—and he looked with a little defiance at the companions, who, to be sure, so far as the carnal mind was concerned, could not but be more congenial to an educated man.

His new companions were indeed so interesting to Meredith, that the new chapter of the "Voice from the Grave" was all about Lauderdale and Colin. They were described under the initials L. and C., with a heightening of all their valuable qualities, which was intended to make more and more apparent their want of "the one thing needful." They were like the rich young man whom Jesus loved, but who had not the heart to give up all and follow Him—they were like "him who, through cowardice, made the great refusal—" the sick man wrote without, however, quoting Dante; and he contrasted with their virtuous and thoughtful worldliness the condition of his convert, who knew nothing but the love of God, poor Meredith said. Perhaps it was true that the sick sailor knew the love of God, and certainly the prayers of the volunteer missionary were not less likely to reach the ear of the Divine Majesty for being uttered by the poor fellow's bedside. But, though he wrote a chapter in his book about them, Meredith still clung to his friends. The unseen and unknown were familiar to their thoughts—perhaps even too familiar, being considered by them as reasonably and naturally interesting; and poor Meredith was disposed to think that anything natural must be more or less wicked. But still he considered them interesting, and thought he might be able to do them good, and, for his own part, found all the human comfort he was capable of in their society. Thus it was that, with mutual compassions and sympathy, he sorry

for them and they for him, and mutual good offices, the three grew into friendship hour by hour.

As for Alice, her brother was fond of her, but had never had his attention specially attracted to her, nor been led to think of her as a companion for himself. She was his tender little nurse and attendant—a creature with loving watchful eyes, and anxious little noiseless cares. He would have missed her terribly had she failed him, without quite knowing what it was he missed. But, though he was in the habit of instructing her now and then, it did not occur to him to talk to his sister. She was a creature of another species—an awakened soul, with few thoughts or feelings worth speaking of. At least such was the estimate her brother had formed of her, and in which Alice herself agreed to a great extent. It was not exactly humility that kept the anxious girl in this mind, but an undisturbed habit and custom, out of which no personal impulse had delivered her. The women of her kindred had never been remarkable one way or another. They were good women, perfectly virtuous and a little tiresome, as even Alice was sensible; and it had not been the custom of the men of the house to consult or confide in their partners. Her mother and aunts had found quite enough to occupy them in housekeeping and needlework, and had accepted it as a matter of faith that men, except, perhaps, when in love, or in "a passion," did not care to talk to women—a family creed from which so young and submissive a girl had not dreamt of enfranchising herself. Accordingly she accepted quite calmly Arthur's low estimate of her powers of companionship, and was moved by no injured feeling when he sought the company of his new friends, and gave himself up to the pleasure of conversation. It was the most natural thing in the world to Alice. She kept by him, holding by his arm when he and his companions walked about the deck together, as long as there was room for her; and, when there was no room, she

withdrew and sat down on the nearest seat, and took out a little bit of needlework which never made any progress; for, though her intellect could not do Arthur any good, the anxious scrutiny of her eyes could, or at least so she seemed to think.

Very often, it was true, she was joined in her watch by Colin; of whom, however, it never occurred to her to think under any other possible aspect than that of Arthur's friend. It might as well have been Lauderdale who shared her anxieties, so far as that went—for, notwithstanding a certain proclivity on the part of Colin to female friendship, Alice was too entirely unconscious, too utterly devoid of any sense or feeling of self, to be interesting to the young man. Perhaps a certain amount of self-regard is necessary to attract the regard of others. Alice was not conscious of herself at all, and her insensibility communicated itself to her companion. He sometimes even wondered if her intelligence was up to the ordinary level, and then felt ashamed of himself when by chance she lifted upon him her wistful eyes; not that those eyes were astonishingly bright, or conveyed any intimations of hidden power—but they looked, as they were, unawakened, suggestive eyes, which might wake up at any moment and develop unthought-of lights. But, on the whole, this twilight was too dim to interest Colin, except by moments; and it was incomprehensible and to some extent provoking and vexatious to the young man, to see by his side a creature so young, and with so many natural graces, who neutralized them all by her utter indifference to herself.

So that after all it came to be a very natural and reasonable step to accompany the Merediths, to whose knowledge of the country and language even Lauderdale found himself indebted when suddenly thrown without warning upon the tumultuous crowd of Leghorn boatmen, which was his first foreign ex-

perience. "They all understand French," a benevolent fellow-passenger said, as he went on before them; which did not give the consolation it was intended to convey to the two Scotch travellers, who only looked at each other sheepishly, and laughed with a very mixed and doubtful sort of mirth, not liking to commit themselves. They had to give themselves up blindly into the hands of Meredith and his sister—for Alice felt herself of some importance in a country where she "knew the language" —and it was accordingly in the train of those two that Colin and Lauderdale were dragged along, like a pair of English captives, through the very gates of Rome itself, and across the solemn Campagna to the little city set upon a hill, to which the sick man was bound. They made their way to it in a spring afternoon when the sun was inclining towards the west, throwing long shadows of those long, weird, endless arches of the Claudian aqueduct across the green wastes, and shining full upon the white specks of scattered villages on the Alban hills. The landscape would have been impressive even had it conveyed no associations to the minds of the spectators. But, as the reluctant strangers left Rome, they saw unfold before them a noble semicircle of hills—the Sabines, blue and mysterious, on one side, the Latin range breaking bluntly into the centre of the ring, and towards the right hand the softer Alban heights with their lakes hidden in the hollows, and the sunshine falling full upon their crest of towns. When they had mounted the steep ascent to Frascati, it was still more wonderful to look back and see the sunset arranging itself over that great Campagna, falling into broad radiant bands of colour with inconceivable tints and shadings, betraying in a sudden flash the distant sea, and shining all misty and golden over the dwarfed dome of St. Peter's, which rose up by itself upon the distant plain with a wonderful insignificance of grandeur—all Rome around being blotted into oblivion. That would have been a sight to linger

over had not Meredith been weary and worn out, and eager to get to his journey's end.

"You will see it often enough," he said, with a little petulance; "neither the sunset nor St. Peter's can run away:" for it was to himself a sufficiently familiar sight. They went in accordingly to a large house, which, a little to the disappointment of Colin, was just as square and ugly as anything he could have found at home, though it stood all the days and nights gazing with many eyes over that Campagna which looked like a thing to dream over for ever. It was the third storey of this house—the upper floor—to which Meredith and his sister directed their steps; Colin and Lauderdale following them—not without a little expectation, natural enough under the circumstances. It was cold, and they were tired, though not so much as the invalid; and they looked for a bright fire, a comfortable room, and a good meal—with a little curiosity, it is true, about the manner of it, but none as to the blazing hearth and spread board, and all the other items indispensable to comfort, according to English ideas. The room, when they got admittance, was very large, and full of windows, letting in a flood of light, which, as the sunshine was now too low to enter, was cold light—white, colourless, and chilling. Not a vestige of carpet was on the tiled floor, except before the fire-place, where a square piece of a curious coarse fabric and wonderful pattern had been laid down. A few logs were burning on the wide hearth, and close by was a little stack of wood intended to replenish the fire. The great desert room contained a world of tables and hard uncushioned chairs, but the tired travellers looked in vain for the spread board which had pleased their imagination. If Colin had thought the house too like an ordinary ugly English house outside to satisfy him, he found this abundantly made up for now by the interior, so unlike anything English; for the walls were painted with a brilliant landscape set in a frame of

still more brilliant scarlet curtains, which the simple-minded artist had looped across his sky without any hesitation; and underneath this gorgeous bit of fresco was set a table against the wall, upon which were spread out a humble store of little brown rolls, a square slice of butter, a basin full of eggs, and a flask of oil—the humble provisions laid in by the attendant Maria, who had rushed forward to kiss the young lady's hand when she opened the door. While the two inexperienced Scotch travellers stood horror-stricken, their companions, who were aware of what they were coming to, threw down their wraps and began to take possession, and to settle themselves in this extraordinary wilderness.

Meredith for his part threw himself into a large primitive easy-chair which stood by the fire. "This is a comfort I did not look for," he said; "and, thank heaven, here we are at last." He drew a long breath of satisfaction as he stretched out his long meagre limbs before the fire. "Come in and make yourselves comfortable. Alice will attend to everything else," he said, looking back at his amazed companions, who, finding themselves in some degree his guests, had to subdue their feelings. They came and sat by him, exchanging looks of dismay—looks which, perhaps, he perceived, for he drew in his long languid limbs, and made a little room for the others. "Many things, of course, that are necessary in our severe climate are unnecessary here," he said, with a slight shiver; and, as he spoke, he reached out his hand for one of the wraps he had thrown off, and drew it round his shoulders. This movement gave a climax to the universal discomfort. Colin and Lauderdale once more looked at each other with mutual comments that could find no utterance in words—the only audible expression of their mutual sentiment being an exclamation of "Climate!" from the latter in an undertone of unspeakable surprise and consternation. This, then, was the Italy of which they had

dreamed! The Mistress's parlour on the Holy Loch was, words could not tell how much warmer and more genial. The tired travellers turned towards the fire as the only possible gleam of consolation, and Meredith put out his long thin arm to seize another log and place it on the hearth; even he felt the difference. He had done nothing to help himself till he came here; but habits of indulgence dropped off on the threshold of this Spartan dwelling. Colin repeated within himself Lauderdale's exclamation, "Climate!" as he shivered in his chair. No doubt the invalid chair by the fire-side on the banks of the Holy Loch was a very different thing, so far as comfort was concerned.

In the meantime Alice found herself mistress of the position. Humble little woman as she was, there came by moments, even to her, a compassionate contempt for the male creatures who got hungry and sulky after this fashion, and could only sit down ill-tempered and disconsolate before the fire. Alice for her part sent off Maria to the trattoria, and cheerfully prepared to feed the creatures who did not know how to set about it for themselves. When she had done her utmost, however, there was still a look of dismay on Colin's face. The dinner from the trattoria was a thing altogether foreign to the experiences of the two Scotchmen. They suspected it while they ate, making secret wry faces to each other across the equivocal board. This was the land of poets into which they had come—the land of the ideal, where, according to their inexperienced imagination, everything was to share the general refinement! But, alas, there was nothing refined about the dinner from the trattoria, which was altogether a native production, and with which the Merediths, being accustomed, and knowing what they had to expect, contented themselves well enough. When Lauderdale and his charge retired, chilled to the bone, to their stony, chilly bedrooms, where everything seemed to convey not warmth but a sensation of freezing,

they looked at each other with amazement and disgust on their faces. "Callant, you would have been twenty times better at home," said Lauderdale with a remorseful groan; "and as for thae poor innocents, who have nobody to look after them— But they kent what they were coming to," he continued, with a flash of momentary anger. Altogether it was as unsuccessful a beginning as could well be imagined of the ideal poetic Italian life.

CHAPTER IV.

It is impossible to deny that, except in hotels which are cosmopolitan, and adapted to the many wants of the rich English, life in Italy is hard business enough for the inexperienced traveller, who knows the strange country into which he has suddenly dropped rather by means of poetical legends than by the facts of actual existence. A country of vineyards and orange-groves, of everlasting verdure and sunshine, is indeed, in its way, a true enough description of one aspect of that many-sided country: but these words of course convey no intimation of the terrors of an Italian palace in the depth of winter, where everything is stone-cold, and the possibilities of artificial warmth are of the most limited description; where the idea of doors and windows closely fitting has never entered the primitive mind, and where the cardinal virtue of patience and endurance of necessary evils wraps the contented native sufferer like the cloak which he hugs round him. Yet, notwithstanding, even Lauderdale relaxed out of the settled gloom on his face when he went to the window of the great bare sitting-room, and gazed out upon the grand expanse of the Campagna, lighted up with morning sunshine. The silence of that depopulated plain, with its pathetic bits of ruin here and there—ruins, to be sure, identified and written down in books, but speaking for themselves with a more woeful and suggestive voice than can be uttered by any mere historical associations, through the very depths of their dumbness and loss of all distinction—went to the spectator's heart. What they were or had been, what human hands had erected, or human hearts

rejoiced in them, these lingering remains had ceased to tell; and it was only with that vagueness which is sadder than any story that they indicated a former forgotten existence, a past too far away to be deciphered now.

Lauderdale laid his hand on Colin's shoulder, and drew him away. "Ay, ay," he said, with an unusual thrill in his voice, "it's grand to hear that yon's Soracte, and thereaway is the Sabine country, and that's Rome lying away among the clouds. It's no Rome, callant; it's a big kirk, or heathen temple, or whatever you like to call it. I'm no heeding about Rome. It's the awfu' presence of the dead, and the skies smiling at them—that's a' I see. Come away with me, and let's see if there's ony living creatures left. It's an awfu' thought to come into a man's head in connexion with that bonnie innocent sky," the philosopher continued, with a slight shudder, as he drew his charge with him down the chilly staircase; "but it's aye bewildering to me to see the indifference of Nature. It's terrible like as if she was a senseless heathen hersel', and cared nothing about nobody. No that I'm asserting that to be the case; but it's gruesome to look at her smiles and her wiles, as if she kent no better. I'm no addicted to little bairns in a general way," said Lauderdale, drawing a long breath, as he emerged from the great door, and suddenly found himself in the midst of a group of ragged little picturesque savages; "but it's aye a comfort to see that there's still living creatures left in the world."

"It is not for the living creatures, however, that people come to Italy," said Colin. "Stop here, and have another look at the Campagna. I am not of your opinion about Nature. Sometimes tears themselves are less pathetic than a smile."

"Where did *you* learn that, callant?" said his friend. "But there's plenty of time for the Campagna, and I have aye an awfu' interest in human folk. What do the little animals mean, raging like a set of little furies? Laddies, if you've quarrelled fight it

out like men, instead of scolding like a parcel of fishwives," said the indignant stranger, addressing himself to a knot of boys who were playing morra. When he found his remonstrance disregarded, Lauderdale seized what appeared to him the two ringleaders, and held them, one in each hand, with the apparent intention of knocking their heads together, entirely undisturbed by the outcries and struggles of his victims, as well as by the voluble explanations of the rest of the party. "It's no use talking nonsense to me," said the inexorable judge; "they shall either hold their tongues, the little cowardly wretches, or they shall fight."

It was, luckily, at this moment that Alice Meredith made her appearance, going out to provide for the wants of her family like a careful little housewife. Her explanation filled Lauderdale with unbounded shame and dismay. "It's an awful drawback no to understand the language," said the philosopher, with a rush of burning colour to his face, for Lauderdale, like various other people, could not help entertaining an idea, in spite of his better knowledge, that English (or what he was pleased to call English), spoken with due force and emphasis, was sure in the end to be perfectly intelligible. Having received this painful lesson, he shrank out of sight with the utmost discomfiture, holding Colin fast, who betrayed an inclination to accompany Alice. "This will never do; we'll have to put to our hands and learn," said Colin's guardian. "I never put much faith before in that Babel business. It's awfu' humbling to be made a fool of by a parcel of bairns." Lauderdale did not recover this humiliating defeat during the lengthened survey which followed of the little town and its dependencies, where now and then they encountered the slight little figure of Alice walking alone, with a freedom permitted (and wondered at) to the Signorina Inglese, who thus declared her independence. They met her at the baker's, where strings of biscuits, made in the shape of rings, hung like garlands

about the door, and where the little Englishwoman was using all her powers of persuasion to seduce the master of the shop into the manufacture of *pane Inglese*, bread made with yeast instead of leaven; and they met her again in the dark vicinity of the trattoria, consulting with a dingy *traiteur* about dinner; though, fortunately for the success of the meal, the strangers were unaware that it was out of these dingy shades that their repast was to come.

Thus the two rambled about, recovering their spirits a little as the first glow of the Italian sunshine stole over them, and finding summer in the bright piazza, though winter and gloom lingered in the narrow streets. Last of all they entered the cathedral, which was a place the two friends approached with different feelings—Colin's mind being full of the curiosity of a man who was himself to be a priest, and who felt to a certain degree that the future devotions and even government of his country was in his hands. He was consequently quick to observe, and even, notwithstanding the prejudices of education, not disinclined to learn, if anything worth learning was to be seen in the quiet country church, where at present nothing beyond the ordinary services were going on. Lauderdale, in whose mind a lively and animated army of prejudices was in full operation, though met and crossed at every turn by an equally lively belief in the truth of his fellow-creatures—which was a sad drawback to his philosophy—went into the Frascati Cathedral with a curious mixture of open criticism and concealed respect, not unusual in a Scotchman. He was even ashamed of himself for his own alacrity in taking off his hat, as if one place could be holier than another; yet, nevertheless, stowed his gaunt gigantic figure away behind the pillars, and did what he could to walk softly, lest he should disturb the devotions of one or two kneeling women, who, however, paused with perfect composure to look at the strangers without apparently being conscious of any interruption. As for

Colin, he was inspecting the arrangements of the cathedral at his leisure, when a sudden exclamation from Lauderdale attracted his attention. He thought his friend had got into some new bewilderment, and hastened to join him, looking round first, with the helplessness of a speechless stranger in a foreign country, to see if there was anyone near who could explain for them in case of necessity. When, however, Colin had rejoined his companion, he found him standing rapt and silent before a tombstone covered with lettering, which was placed against the wall of the church. Lauderdale made a curious unsteady sign, pointing to it, as Colin approached. It was a pompous Latin inscription, recording imaginary grandeurs which had never existed, and bearing the names of three British kings who never reigned. Neither of the spectators who thus stood moved and speechless before it had been brought up with any Jacobite tendencies—indeed, Jacobite ideas had died out of all reality before either of them was born,—but Lauderdale, Whig and sceptic as he was, uttered hoarsely out of his throat the two words, "Prince Chairlie!" and then stood silent, gazing at the stone with its pompous Latin lies and its sorrowful human story, as if it had been not an extinct family, but something of his own blood and kindred which had lain underneath. Thus the two strangers went out, subdued and silenced, from their first sight-seeing. It was not in man, nor in Scotchman, to see the names and not remember all the wonderful vain devotion, all the blind heroic efforts that had been made for these extinct Stuarts; and, with a certain instinctive loyalty, reverential yet protesting, Colin and his friend turned away from Charles Edward's grave.

"Well," said Lauderdale, after a long pause, "they were little to brag of, either for wisdom or honesty, and no credit to *us* that I can see; but it comes over a man with an awfu' strange sensation to fall suddenly without any warning on the grave of a race that was once in such active connexion with his own.

'Jacobus III., Carolus III., Henricus IX.'—is that how it goes? It's terrible real, that inscription, though it's a' a fiction. They might be a feckless race; but, for a' that, it was awfu' hard, when you think of it, upon Prince Chairlie. He was neither a fool nor a liar, so far as I ever heard—which is more than you can say for other members of the family; and he had to give way, and give up his birthright for thae miserable little wretches from Hanover. I dinna so much wonder, when I think of it, at the '45. It was a pleasant alternative for a country, callant, to choose between a bit Dutch idiot that knew nothing, and the son of her auld kings. I'm no speaking of William of Orange—he's awfu' overrated, and a cold-blooded devil, but aye a kind of a *man* notwithstanding—but thae Hanover fellows— And so yon's Prince Chairlie's grave!"

Just then Meredith, who had come out to bask in the sunshine, came up to them, and took, as he had learned to do, by way of supporting himself, Lauderdale's vigorous arm.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that the Pretender's grave was there. I never enter these churches of Antichrist if I can help it. Life is too short to be wasted even in looking on at the wiles of the destroyer. Oh that we could do something to deliver these dying souls!"

"I saw little of the wiles of the destroyer for my part," said Lauderdale, abruptly; "and, as for the Pretender, there's many pretenders, and it's awfu' hard to tell which is the true. I know no harm of Prince Chairlie, the little I do know of him. If it had been mysel', I'm no free in my mind to say that I would have let go my father's inheritance without striking a blow."

"These are the ideas of the carnal mind," said Meredith. "Oh, my friend, if you would but be more serious! Does not your arrival in this country suggest to you another arrival which cannot be long delayed—which indeed, for some of us at least, may happen any day," the sick man continued, putting out his

long thin hand to clasp that of Colin, who was on his other side. Lauderdale, who saw this gesture, started aside with a degree of violence which prevented the meeting of the two invalid hands.

"I know little about this country," he said, almost with sullenness; "but I know still less about the other. It's easy for you, callants, to speak. I'm real willing to make experiment of it, if that were possible," he continued, softening; "but there's no an ignorant soul hereabouts that is more ignorant than me."

"Let us read together—let us consider it together," said Meredith; "it is all set down very plain, you know. He that runneth may read. In all the world there is nothing so important. My friend, you took pains to understand about Italy—"

"And a bonnie business I made of it," said Lauderdale; "deluded by the very bairns; set right by one that's little more than a bairn, that little sister of yours; and now letting myself be drawn into discussions! I'm twenty years, or near it, older than you are," he went on, "and I've walked with them that have gone away *yonder*, as far as flesh and blood would let me. I'm no misdoubting anything that's written, callant, if that will satisfy you. It's a' an awfu' darkness, with visions of white angels here and there; but the angels dinna belong to me. Whisht—whisht—I'm no profane; I'm wanting more—more than what's written; and, as I cannot get that, I must even wait till I see for myself.—Here's a grand spot for looking at your Campagna now," he said, breaking abruptly off; but poor Meredith, who had so little time to spare, and whose words had to be in season and out of season, could not consent to follow, as a man without so great a mission might have done, the leading of his companion's thoughts.

"The Campagna is very interesting," he said, "but it is nothing to the safety of your soul. Oh, my dear friend!—and here is Campbell, too, who is not far from the kingdom of heaven. Promise me that you will come with me," said the

dying man. "I shall not be able to stay long with you. Promise me that you will come and join me *there!*" He put out his thin arm, and raised it towards the sky, which kept smiling in its sunny calm, and took no note of these outbursts of human passion. "I will wait for you at the golden gates," the invalid went on, fixing his hollow eyes first on one and then on another. "You will be my joy and crown of rejoicing! You cannot refuse the prayer of a dying man."

"Colin, who was young, and upon whom the shadow of these golden gates was hovering, held out his hand this time, touched to the heart. "I am coming," he said, softly, almost under his breath, but yet loud enough to catch the quick ear of Lauderdale, whose sudden movement displaced Meredith's arm, which was clinging almost like a woman's to his own.

"It's no for man to make any such unfounded promises," said Lauderdale, hoarsely; "though you read till your heart's sick, there's nothing written like *that*. It's a' imaginations, and yearnings, and dreams. I'm no saying that it cannot be, or that it will not be, but I tell you there's no such thing written; and, as far as I ken, or you ken, it may be a' delusion and disappointment. Whisht, whisht, callants! Dinna entice each other out of this world, where there's aye plenty to do for the like of you. I'm saying, Silence, sir!" cried the philosopher, with sudden desperation. And then he became aware that he had withdrawn the support which Meredith stood so much in need of. "A sober-minded man like me should have other company than a couple of laddies, with their fancies," he said, in a hurried, apologetic tone; "but, as long as we're together, you may as well take the good of me," he added, holding out his arm, with a rare, momentary smile. As for Meredith, for once in his life—partly because of a little more emotion than usual, partly because his weakness felt instantly the withdrawal of a support which had become habitual to him—he felt beyond a

possibility of doubt that further words would be out of season just at that moment: and they resumed their way a little more silently than usual. The road, like other Italian roads, was marked by here and there a rude shrine in a niche in the wall, or a cross erected by the wayside—neither of which objects possessed in the smallest degree the recommendation of picturesqueness which sentimental travellers attribute to them; for the crosses were of the rudest construction, as rude as if meant for actual use, and the poor little niches, each with its red-eyed Madonna daubed on the wall, suggested no more idea of beauty than the most arbitrary symbol could have done. But Meredith's soul awoke within him when he saw the looks with which Colin regarded those shabby emblems of religious feeling. The Protestant paused to regain his breath, and could keep silence no more.

"You look with interest at these devices of Antichrist," said the sick man. "You think they promote a love of beauty, I suppose, or you think them picturesque. You don't think how they ruin the souls of those who trust in them," he said, eagerly and loudly; for they were passing another English party at that moment, and already the young missionary longed to accost them, and put his solemn questions about life and death to their (presumably) careless souls.

"They don't appear to me at all picturesque," said Colin; "and nobody looks at them that I can see except ourselves; so they can't ruin many souls. But you and I don't agree in all things, Meredith. The cross does not seem to me to come amiss anywhere. ' Perhaps the uglier and ruder it is it becomes the more suggestive," the young man added, with a little emotion. "I should like to build a few crosses along our Scotch roads; if anybody was moved to pray, I can't see what harm would be done; or, if anybody was surprised by a sudden thought, it might be all the better; even—one has heard of such a thing,"

said Colin, whose heart was still a little out of its usual balance —"a stray gleam of sunshine might come out of it here and there. If I was rich like some of your Glasgow merchants, Lauderdale," he said, laughing a little, "I think, instead of a few fine dinners, I'd build a cross somewhere. I don't see that it would come amiss on a Scotch road—"

"I wish you would think of something else than Scotch roads," said Meredith, with a little vexation; "when I speak of things that concern immortal souls, you answer me with something about Scotland. What is Scotland to the salvation of a fellow-creature? I would rather that Scotland, or England either, was sunk to the bottom of the sea than stand by and see a man dying in his sins."

The two Scotchmen looked at each other as he spoke; they smiled to each other with a perfect community of feeling and motive, which conveyed another pang of irritation to the invalid, who by nature had a spirit which insisted upon being first and best beloved.

"I think we had better go home," he said abruptly, after a pause. "I know Scotch pretty well, but I can't quite follow when you speak on these subjects. I want to have a talk with Maria about her brother, who used to be very religiously disposed. Poor fellow, he's ill now, and I've got something for him," said the young man. Here he paused, and drew forth from his pocket a sheet folded like a map, which he opened out carefully, looking first to see that there was nobody on the road. "They took them for maps at the dogana," said Meredith; "and geography is not prohibited—to the English at least; but this is better than geography. I mean to send it to poor Antonio, who can read, poor fellow." The map, which was no map, consisted of a large sheet of paper, intended apparently to be hung upon a wall, and containing the words, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," translated into Italian. It

was not without a little triumph that Meredith exhibited this effort at clandestine instruction. "He has to lie in bed," he said, with a softened inflection of his voice; "this will console him and bear him company. It is a map of his future inheritance," the young missionary concluded, putting it back fondly into its deceitful folds;—and after this there was an uneasy pause, no one quite knowing what to say.

"You fight Antichrist with his own weapons, then," said Colin, "and do evil that good may come,"—and Lauderdale added his comment almost in the same breath—

"That's an awfu' fruitful principle if you once adopt it," he said; "there's no telling where it may end. I would sooner leave the poor lad in God's hands, as no doubt he is, than smuggle in light to him after that fashion. I'm no fond of maps that are no maps," said the dissatisfied critic; by which time Colin had reloaded his guns, and was ready to fire.

"It is only a few words," said Colin; "a man might keep such an utterance in his memory without any necessity for double dealing. Do you think, for all the good it will do your patient to look at that text, it is worth your while to risk him and yourself?"

"For myself I am perfectly indifferent," said Meredith, glad of an opportunity to defend himself. "I hope I could take imprisonment joyfully for the saving of a soul."

"Imprisonment would be death to you," said Colin, with a touch of compunction, "and would make an end of all further possibilities of use. To be thrown into a stony Italian prison at this season—"

"Hush," said Meredith; "for my Master's sake could I not bear more than that? If not, I am not worthy to call myself a Christian. I am ready to be offered," said the young enthusiast. "It would be an end beyond my hopes to die like my Lord for the salvation of my brother. Such a prophecy is no terror to me."

"If you two would but hold your tongues for five minutes at a time," said Lauderdale, with vexation, "it would be a comfort. No doubt you're both ready enough to fling away your lives for any nonsensical idea that comes into your heads. But suppose we take the case of the other innocent callant, the Italian lad that a' this martyrdom's to be for. No to say that it's awfu' cheating—which my soul loathes," said the emphatic Scotchman—"figure to yourselves a wheen senseless women maybe, or a wheen frightened priests, getting on the scent o' this heresy of yours. I'm real reluctant to think that he would not get the same words, poor callant, in his ain books without being torn to pieces for the sake of a map that was not a map. It's getting a wee chilly," said the philosopher, "and there's a fire to be had in the house if nothing else. Come in, callant, and no expose yourself; and you would put your grand map in the fire if you were to be guided by me."

"With these words of consolation on it!" said Meredith. "Never, if it should cost me my life."

"Nae fear of its costing you your life; but I wouldna use even the weapons of God after the devil's manner of fighting," said Lauderdale, with a little impatience. "Allowing you had a' the charge of saving souls, as you call it, and the Almighty Himself took no trouble on the subject, I'm no for using the sword o' the Spirit to give stabs in the dark."

Just then, fortunately, there came a seasonable diversion, which stayed the answer on Meredith's lips.

"Arthur, we are going to dine early," said the voice of Alice just behind them; "the doctor said you were to dine early. Come and rest a little before dinner. I met some people just now who were talking of Mr. Campbell. They were wondering where he lived, and saying they had seen him somewhere. I told them you were with us," the girl went on, with the air of a woman who might be Colin's mother. "Will you please come home in case they should call?"

This unexpected intimation ended the ramble and the talk, which was of a kind rather different from the tourist talk which Colin had shortly to experience from the lips of his visitors, who were people who had seen him at Wodensbourne, and had been commissioned by the Franklands to look for him, and report upon his condition. Little Alice received the ample English visitors still with the air of being Colin's mother, or mature protecting female friend, and talked to the young lady daughter, who was about half as old again as herself, with an indulgent elderly kindness which was beautiful to behold. There were a mother, father, daughter, and two sons, moving about in a compact body, all of whom were exceedingly curious about the quaint little brotherhood which, with Alice for its protecting angel, had taken possession of the upper floor of the Palazzo Savvielli. They were full of a flutter of talk about the places they had visited, and of questions as to whether their new acquaintances had been here or there. "I promised Matty to write, and I shall be sure to tell her I have seen you, and all about it," the young lady said, playfully, not without a glance at Alice. Was it possible that this remark brought a little colour to Alice's cheek, or was it a mere reflection from his own thoughts, throwing a momentary gleam across her unimpassioned face? Anyhow, it occurred to Colin that the little abstract Alice looked more like an ordinary girl of her years for the five minutes after the tourist party, leaving a wonderful silence and sense of relief behind them, had disappeared down the chilly stone stairs.

CHAPTER V.

It is not to be inferred from what has just been said that it had become a matter of importance to Colin how Alice Meredith looked. On the contrary, the relations between the two young people grew more distant, instead of becoming closer. It was Lauderdale with whom she talked about the domestic arrangements, which he and she managed together; and indeed it was apparent that Alice, on the whole, had come to regard Colin, in a modified degree, as she regarded her brother—as something to be taken care of, watched, fed, tended, and generally deferred to, without any great possibility of comprehension or fellowship. Lauderdale, like herself, was the nurse and guardian of his invalid. Though she lost sight of him altogether in the discussions which perpetually arose among the three (which was not so much from being unable to understand these discussions as from the conclusion made beforehand that she had nothing to do with them), it was quite a different matter when they fell into the background to consult what would be best for their two charges. There Alice was the superior, and felt her power. She talked to her tall companion with all the freedom of her age, accepting his as that of a grandfather at least, to the amusement of the philosopher, to whom her chatter was very pleasant. All the history of her family (as he imagined) came unawares to Lauderdale's ears in this simple fashion, and more of Alice's own mind and thoughts than she had the least idea of. He walked about with her as the lion might have done with Una, with a certain mixture of superiority and inferiority, amusement

and admiration. She was only a little girl to Lauderdale, but a delightsome thing in her innocent way; and, so far from approving of Colin's indifference, there were times when he became indignant at it, speculating impatiently on the youthful folly which did not recognise good fortune when it saw it. "Of all women in the world the wife for the callant, if he only would make use of his een," Lauderdale said to himself; but so far from making use of his eyes, it pleased Colin, with the impertinence of youth, to turn the tables on his Mentor, and to indulge in unseasonable laughter, which sometimes had all but offended the graver and older man.

Alice, however, whose mind was bent upon other things, was none the wiser for this; and for her own part found "Mr. Lauderdale" of wonderful service to her. When they sat making up their accounts at the end of the week, Alice with her little pencil putting everything down in pauls and scudi, which Lauderdale elaborately did into English money, as a preliminary to the exact division of expenses which the two careful housekeepers made, the sight was pleasant enough. By times it occurred that Alice, dreadfully puzzled by her companion's Scotch, but bound in chains of iron by her good breeding, which coming direct from the heart was of the most exquisite type, came stealing up to Colin, after a long interview with his friend, to ask the meaning of a word or two preserved by painful mnemonic exercises in her memory; and she took to reading the Waverley novels by way of assisting her in the new language; but, as the only available copies of these works were in the shape of an Italian translation, it may be imagined that her progress was limited, and that the oral teaching was the most instructive.

Meanwhile, Meredith lived on as best he could, poor fellow, basking in the sun in the middle of the day, and the rest of his time sitting close to the fire with as many pillows and cloaks in

his hard, old-fashioned easy chair as might have sufficed for Siberia; and, indeed, it was a kind of Siberian refuge which they had set up in the top floor of the empty cold palace, which was used for a residence only during the hot season, and was adapted solely to the necessities of a blazing Italian summer. For the Italian winter—often so keen and penetrating, with its cutting winds that come from the mountains, and those rapid and violent transitions which form the shadow to its sunshine—there, as elsewhere, little provision had been made; and the surprise of the inexperienced travellers, who had come there for warmth and genial atmosphere, and found themselves suddenly plunged into a life of Spartan endurance—of deadly chill and iciness indescribable—has been already described. Yet neither of them would consent to go into Rome, where comfort might be had by paying for it, and leave the brother and sister alone in this chilly nest of theirs. So they remained together on their lofty perch, looking over the great Campagna, witnessing such sunsets and grandeurs of cloud and wind as few people are privy to all their lifetime; watching the gleams of snow appear and disappear over the glorious purple depths of the Sabine hills, and the sun shooting golden arrows into the sea; and gloom more wonderful still than the light, rolling on like an army in full march over that plain which has no equal. All these things they watched and witnessed, with comments of every description, and with silence better than any comment. In themselves they were a strange little varied company; one of them, still in the middle of life, but to his own consciousness done with it, and watching the present actors as he watched the sunsets; two of them full of undeveloped prospects beginning the world which was so familiar and yet so unknown; the last of all making his way steadily with few delays into a world still more unknown—a world which they all by times turned to investigate, with speculations, with questions, with enthusiastic anticipation, with pro-

found, child-like faith. Such was their life up among the breezes, on the soft slopes of the Alban hills; and in the midst of everything more serious, of opening life and approaching death, Lauderdale and Alice sat down together weekly to reckon up their expenses in Italian and English money, and keep their accounts straight, as the little housewife termed it, with the world.

During this wintry weather, however, the occupations of the party were not altogether limited to these weekly accounts. Meredith, though a little startled by the surprise shown by his companions at the too ingenious device of the map—which, after all, was not his device, but that of some Tract Society, or other body more zealous than scrupulous—had not ceased his warnings, in season and out of season. He talked to Maria about dying in a way which inspired that simple woman to the unusual exertion of a pilgrimage to Vicovaro, where the kind Madonna had just been proved upon ample testimony to have moved her eyes, to the great comfort and edification of the faithful. "No doubt it would be much better to be walking about all day among the blessed saints in heaven, as the Signor Arturo gives himself the trouble of telling me," Maria said, with some anxiety in her face, "but *vedi, cara Signorina mia*, it would be very inconvenient at the beginning of the season;" and, indeed, the same opinion was commonly expressed by Arthur's Italian auditors, who had, for the most part, affairs on hand which did not admit of immediate attention to such a topic. Even the good-natured friars at Capo Croce declined to tackle the young Englishman after the first accost; for they were all of opinion that dying was a business to be got over in the most expeditious manner possible, not to be dwelt on either by unnecessary anxiousness before or lingering regret after; and, as for the inevitable event itself, there were the last sacraments to make all right—though, indeed, the English invalid, *povero infelice*,

might well make a fuss about a matter which must be so hopless to him. This was all the fruit he had of his labours, there being at that time no enterprising priest at hand to put a stop to the discussions of the heretic. But, at the same time, he had Colin and Lauderdale close by, and was using every means in his power to "do them good," as he said; and still, in the quiet nights, when the cold and the silence had taken entire possession of the great, vacant house and the half-frozen village, poor Meredith dragged his chair and his table closer to the fire, and drew his cloak over his shoulders, and added yet another and another chapter to his "Voice from the Grave."

As for Colin, if he had been a *littérateur* by profession, it is likely that, by this time, he would have begun to compile "Letters from Italy," like others of the trade; but, being only a Scotch scholar, the happy holder of a Glasgow bursary, he felt himself superior to such temptations; though, indeed, after a week's residence at Frascati, Colin secretly felt himself in a condition to let loose his opinion about Italian affairs in general. In the meantime, however, he occupied himself in another fashion. Together, he and his watchful guardian made pilgrimages into Rome. They went to see everything that it was right to go to see; but, over and above that, they went into the churches—into all manner of churches out of the way, where there were no grand functions going on, but only every-day worship. Colin was not a watchful English divine spying upon the superstition of Rome, nor a rampant Protestant finding out her errors and idolatries. He was the destined priest of a nation in a state of transition and renaissance, which had come to feel itself wanting in the balance after a long period of self-complacency. With the instinct of a budding legislator and the eagerness of youth, he watched the wonderful scene before him—not the Pope, with his peacock feathers, and purple and scarlet followers, and wonderful audience of heretics —not high masses in great basilicas, nor fine processions, nor

sweet music. The two Scotsmen made part of very different assemblies in those Lenten days, and even in the joyful time of Easter, when carriagefulls of English visitors, rushing to the ceremonies of the week, made the narrow Roman streets almost impassable. Perhaps it was a feeling of a different kind which drew the two strangers for the first time to the awful and solemn temple, where once the heathen gods were worshipped, and where Raphael rests; but let artists pardon Colin, whose own profession has associations still more lofty than theirs, if, on his second visit, he forgot Raphael, and even the austere nobility of the place. A humble congregation of the commonest people about—people not even picturesque—women with shawls over their heads, and a few of the dreamy poor old men who seem to spend their lives about Italian churches, were dotted over the vast floor, kneeling on those broken marbles which are as old as Christianity; some dropped at random in the middle, beneath the wonderful blue breadth of sky which looked in upon their devotions; some about the steps of the little altars round, and a little group at the special shrine where vespers were being sung. A lover of music would not have found a voice worth listening to in the place, and perhaps neither time nor tune was much attended to; but there was not a soul there, from the faint old men to the little children, who did not, according to his capabilities, take up the response, which was to every one, apparently, matter as familiar as an every-day utterance. These worshippers had no books, and did not need any. It might be words in a dead language—it might be but partially understood, or not understood at all; but at least it was known and familiar as no religious service is in England, notwithstanding all our national vaunt of the prayer-book, and as nothing could possibly be in Scotland, where we have no guide (save "the minister") to our devotion. When Colin, still weak and easily fatigued, withdrew a little, and sat down upon the steps of the high altar to listen,

with a kind of shame in his heart at being unable to join those universal devotions, there came to his ear a wonderful chime of echoes from the great dome, which sent his poetic heart astray in spite of itself—for it sounded to the young dreamer like another unseen choir up there, who could tell of what spectators and assistants?—wistful voices of the past, coming back to echo the Name which was greater than that of Jove or Apollo. And then he returned to his legislative thoughts; to his dreams, patriotic and priestly: to his wondering, incredulous question with himself whether worship so familiar and so general, so absolutely a part of their daily existence, could ever be known to his own people. Such a thought, no doubt, had it been known, would almost have warranted the withdrawal of the scholarship, and certainly would have deferred indefinitely Colin's chances of obtaining licence from any Scotch Presbytery. But, fortunately, Presbyterians are little interested in investigating what takes place in the Pantheon at Rome;—whether old Agrippa breathes a far-off Amen out of the dome of his dead magnificence to the worship of the Nazarene, as Colin thought in his dreams; or what vain imaginations may possess the soul of a wandering student there. He was roused abruptly out of these visions by the English party who had visited him at Frascati, and who came up to salute him now with that frank indifference to other people for which our nation is said to be pre-eminent. They shook hands with him all round, for they were acquainted with his story, and Colin was of the kind of man to make people interested in him; and then they began to talk.

"A sad exhibition this, is it not, Mr. Campbell?" said the mother; "one forgets how dreadful it is, you know, when one sees it in all its grandeur—with fine music, and silver trumpets, and so forth; but it is terrible to see all these poor creatures, and to think they know no better. Such singing! There is not a charity school at home that would do so badly; and they

speak of music in Italy!" said the English matron, who indeed in her last observation had some truth on her side.

"Hush," said Colin, who was young, and not above saying a fine thing when he could; "listen to the echo. Are there some kind angels in the dome, do you think, to mend the music? or is it the poor old heathens who hang about for very wistfulness, and say as good an Amen as they can, poor souls? Listen; I have heard no music like it in Rome."

"Oh, Mr. Campbell, what a beautiful idea!" said the young lady; and then, the service being ended, they walked about a little, and looked up from the centre of the place to the blue wintry sky, which forms the living centre of that vault of ages —an occupation which Lauderdale interrupted hurriedly enough by reminding Colin that they had still to get out to Frascati, and were already after time.

"Oh! you still live in Frascati," said Colin's acquaintance, "with that very strange young man? I never spoke to anybody in my life who startled me so much. Do you happen to know if he is a son of that very strange Mr. Meredith, whom there was so much talk of last year? that man, you know, who pretended to be so very good, and ran away with somebody. Dear me, I thought everybody knew that story. His son was ill, I know, and lived abroad. I wonder if it is the same."

"I don't think my friend has any father," said Colin, who, stimulated by the knowledge that the last train would start in half an hour, was anxious to get away.

"Ah, well, I hope so, I am sure, for your sake; for *that* Mr. Meredith was a dreadful man, and pretended to be *so* good till he was found out," said the lady. "Something Hall was the name of his place. Let me recollect. Dear me, does nobody know the name?"

"Good-bye; it is our time," said Colin, and he obeyed the gesture of Lauderdale, and rushed after his already distant figure;

but, before he had turned the corner of the square, one of the sons overtook him. "I beg your pardon, but my mother wishes you to know that it was Meredith of Maltby she was talking of just now," said the young man out of breath. Colin laughed to himself as he hastened after his friend. What had he to do with Meredith of Maltby? But, as he dashed along, he began to recollect an ugly story in the papers, and to bethink himself of a certain odd prejudice which he had been conscious of on first hearing the name of the brother and sister. When he got near enough to Lauderdale to lay hold of his arm, Colin could not help uttering, as was usual to him, what was at present on the surface of his mind.

"You know all about them," he said; "do you think they have a father?" which simple words were said with a few gasps, as he was out of breath.

"What's the use of coming after me like a steam-engine?" said Lauderdale; "did you think I would run away? and you've need of a' your breath for that weary brae. How should I ken all about them? They're your friends, and not mine."

"All very well, Lauderdale; but she never makes *me* her confidant," said the young man, with his usual laugh.

"It's no canny to speak of *she*," said Lauderdale; "it's awfu' suggestive, and no a word for either you or me. She has an aunt in India, and two uncles that died in the Crimea, if you want to know exactly. That is all she has ever told to me."

And with this they dismissed the subject from their minds, and, arm-in-arm, addressed themselves to the arduous task of getting to the station through the narrow crowded streets in time for the train.

CHAPTER VI.

THE fatigue of sight-seeing, wound up by a frantic rush to the railway to be in time for the train, which after all was a train quite at leisure, as most passengers are in Italy, was too much for the early budding of Colin's strength, and laid him up for a day or two, as was only natural; an occurrence which had a curious effect upon the little household. To Lauderdale it was a temporary return into those mists of despair which, partly produced by the philosopher's own sad experience, had made him at first come to so abrupt a conclusion touching Colin's chances of life. When he saw him once more prostrated, Lauderdale's patience and courage alike gave way. He became like a man in a sinking ship, who has not composure to await the end which is naturally at hand, but flings himself into the sea to meet it. He talked wildly of going home, and bitterly of the utter privation of comfort to which his invalid was exposed; and his heart was closed for the moment even to the approaches of Alice. "If it hadna been for you!" he said within his clenched teeth, turning away from her; and was not safe to speak to for the moment. But, oddly enough, the effect of Colin's illness upon the others was of an entirely different character. Instead of distressing Meredith and his sister, it produced, by some wonderful subtle action which we do not pretend to explain, an exhilarating effect upon them. It seemed to prove somehow, to Alice especially, that illness was a general evil distributed over all the world; that it was a usual thing for young men to be reduced to weakness and obliged to be careful

of themselves. "Mr. Campbell, you see, is just the same as Arthur. It is a great deal commoner than one thinks," the poor little girl said to Sora Antonia, who had charge of the house; and though her feelings towards Colin were of the most benevolent and even affectionate description, this thought was a sensible consolation to her. Meredith regarded the matter from a different point of view. "I have always hoped that he was one of the chosen," the invalid said when he heard of Colin's illness; "but I feared that God was leaving him alone. We always judge His ways prematurely even when we least intend it. We ought to thank God that our dear friend is feeling His hand, and is subject to chastisements which may lead him to Christ."

"Callant," said Lauderdale fiercely, "speak of things ye understand; it's not for you to interfere between a man and his Maker. A soul more like Him of whom you dare to speak never came out of the Almighty's hands. Do you think God is like a restless woman and never can be done meddling?" said Colin's guardian, betrayed out of his usual self-restraint; but his own heart was trembling for his charge, and he had not composure enough to watch over his words. As for the sick man, whose own malady went steadily on without any great pauses or sudden increase, he lifted his dying eyes and addressed himself eagerly, as he was wont, to his usual argument.

"If any man can understand it, I should," said Meredith. "Cannot I trace the way by which He has led *me?*—a hard way to flesh and blood. Cannot I see how He has driven me from one stronghold after another, leaving me no refuge but in Christ? And, such being the case, can you wonder that I should wish the same discipline for my friend? The only thing I should fear for myself is restoration to health; and are you surprised that I should fear it for him?"

"I am not surprised at anything but my ain idiocy in having

any hand in the matter," said Lauderdale; and he went away abruptly to Colin's room with a horrible sense of calamity and helplessness. There was something in Meredith's confident explanation of God's dealings which drove him half frantic, and filled him with an unreasonable panic. Perhaps it was true; perhaps those lightnings in the clouds had been but momentary —a false hope. When, however, with his agitation so painfully compressed and kept under that it produced a morose expression upon his grave face, he went into Colin's room, he found his patient sitting up in bed, with his great-coat over his shoulders, writing with a pencil on the fly-leaf of the book which his faithful attendant had given him to "keep him quiet."

"Never mind," said the disorderly invalid. "I am all right, Lauderdale. Give us pen and ink, like a kind soul. You don't imagine I am ill, surely, because I am lazy after last night?"

"I've given up imagining anything on the subject," said Colin's grim guardian. "When a man in his senses sets up house with a parcel of lunatics it's easy to divine what will come of it. Lie down in your bed and keep quiet, and get well again; or else get up," said Lauderdale, giving vent to a sharp acrid sound as if he had gnashed his teeth, "and let us be done with it all, and go home."

At this Colin opened his great brown eyes, which were as far from being anxious or depressed as could well be conceived, and laughed softly in his companion's face.

"This comes of Meredith's talk, I suppose," he said; "and of course it has been about me, or it would not have riled you. How often have you told me that you understood the state of mind which produced all that? He is very good at the bottom, Lauderdale," said Colin. "There's a good fellow, give me my little writing-case. I want to write it out."

"You want to write what out?" asked Lauderdale. "Some of your nonsense verses? I'll give you no writing-case. Lie

down in your bed and keep yourself warm. "You're awfu' fond of looking at your ain productions. I've no doubt its terrible rubbish if a man could read it. Let's see the thing. Do you think a parcel of verses in that halting *In Memoriam* metre—I'm no saying anything against *In Memoriam*—but if *I* set up for a poet, I would make a measure for mysel'—are worth an illness? and the cold of this wretched place is enough to kill ony rational man. Eetaly! I wouldna send a dog here, to be perished with cold and hunger. Do what I tell you, callant, and lie down. It shows an awfu' poverty of invention, that desire to copy everything out."

"Stuff!" said Colin; "you don't suppose it is for myself. I want to give it to somebody," said the young man with a conscious smile. And to look at him with his countenance all a-glow, pleasure and fun and affection brightening his eyes, and his face lighted up with the gentle commotion of thought which had ended in that writing of verses, it was hard to think of him as a man whom God for a solemn purpose had weighted with affliction—as he had appeared in Meredith's eyes. Rather he looked, what he was, one of God's most joyful and gifted creatures; glad without knowing why; glad because the sweet imaginations of youth had possession of him, and filled heaven and earth with brave apparitions. Love and anxiety had introduced into the heart of Lauderdale, so far as Colin was concerned, a certain feminine element—and he laughed unsteadily out of a poignant thrill of relief and consolation, as he took the book from his patient's hands.

"He's no a callant that can do without an audience," said Lauderdale; "and, seeing it's poetry that's in question, no doubt it's a female audience that's contemplated. You may spare yourself the trouble, Colin. She's bonnie, and she's good; and I'm no free to say that I don't like her all the better for caring for none of these things; but I see no token that she'll

ever get beyond Watts's hymns all her days. You needna trouble your head about writing out things for her."

Upon which Colin reddened a little, and said "Stuff!" and made a long grasp at the writing-case—which exertion cost him a fit of coughing. Lauderdale sat by his side gloomily enough all day, asking himself whether the colour was hectic that brightened Colin's cheeks, and listening to the sound of his breathing and the ring of his voice with indescribable pangs of anxiety. When evening came the watcher had considerably more fever than the patient, and turned his eyes abroad over the Campagna, with a gaze which saw nothing glorious in the scene. At that moment, the sun going down in grandeur over the misty distance, which was Rome—the wonderful belts and zones of colour in the vault of sky which covered in that melancholy waste with its specks of ruin—were nothing in Lauderdale's eyes in comparison with the vision that haunted him of a cosy homely room in a Scotch farmhouse, full of warm glimmers of fire light and humble comforts. "He would mend if he were but at home," he said to himself almost with bitterness, turning his eyes from the landscape without, to which he was indifferent, to the bare white stony walls within. He was so cold sitting there, he who was well and strong, that he had put on his great-coat. And it was for this he had brought the youth whom he loved so far away from those "who belonged to him!" Lauderdale thought with a pang of the Mistress, and what she would say if she could see the comfortless place to which she had sent her boy. Meanwhile the patient who caused so much anxiety, was, for his own part, very comfortable, and copied out his verses with a care that made it very apparent he had no intention of coming to a speedy end, either of life or its enjoyments. He had not written anything for a long time, and the exercise was pleasant to him—and when it was done he lay back on his pillows, and took the trouble to remark to

Lauderdale upon the decorations of the poor bare stony chamber which the philosopher was cursing in his heart.—"We are before them in some things," said Colin, reflectively, "but they beat us in a great many. See how simply that effect is obtained—just a line or two of colour, and yet nothing could be more perfect in its way." To which observation Lauderdale responded only by an indescribable growl, which provoked the laughter of his unruly patient. The next remark Colin made was, however, received with greater favour, for he asked plaintively if it was not time for dinner—a question more soothing to Lauderdale's feelings than volumes of remonstrances. He carried Colin's portion into the room when that meal arrived from the Trattoria, scorning female assistance, and arranging everything with that exquisite uncouth tenderness which, perhaps, only a woman could do full justice to; for the fact is, that Colin, though ravenously hungry, and fully disposed to approve of the repast, had a momentary thought that it would have been ever so much pleasanter to have been served by the little housekeeper herself.

When the darkness had hushed and covered up the Campagna, and stilled all the village sounds, Lauderdale himself, a little flushed from an address he had just been delivering to Meredith, went in and looked at the sleeping face which was so precious to him, and tortured himself once more with questions whether it might be fever which gave colour to the young man's cheek. But Colin, notwithstanding his cold, was breathing full long breaths, with life in every inspiration, and his friend went not uncomforted to bed.

But while Colin lay thus at rest, Meredith had resumed his writing, and was working into his current chapter the conversation which had just taken place. "The worldly man asks if the afflictions of the just are signs of favouritism on God's part," wrote the young author, "and appeals to us whether a happy man

is less beloved of his Father than I am who suffer. He virtually contradicts scripture, and tells me that the Lord does *not* scourge every son whom He receiveth. But I say, and the Holy Bible says with me, Tremble, oh ye who are happy—our troubles are God's tokens of love and mercy to our souls." As he wrote this, the young eyes, which were so soon to close upon life, brightened and expanded with a wonderful glow. His mind was not broad nor catholic, nor capable of perceiving the manifold diversity of those ways of God which are beyond the comprehension of men. He could not understand how, upon the last and lightest labourer, the Master of the vineyard might bestow the equal hire; and—taking that as the hardest labour which fell to his own share—was bent at least on making up for it by the most supreme compensation. And, indeed, it was hard to blame him for claiming, by way of balance to his afflictions, a warmer and closer share in the love of God. At least, that was no vulgar recompense. As for the "worldly man" of Arthur's paragraph, he, too, sat a long while in his chamber, not writing, but pondering—gazing into the flame of the tall Roman lamp on his table as if some solution of the mysteries in his thoughts was to be found in its smoky light. To identify Lauderdale in the character of a worldly man would have been difficult enough to any one who knew him; yet, to Meredith, he had afforded a perfect example of "carnal reasoning," and the disposition which is according to the flesh, and not according to the Spirit. This worldly-minded individual sat staring into the lamp, even after his young critic had ceased to write—revolving things that he could see were about to happen, and things which he dreaded without being able to see; and more than all wondering over that awful mystery of Providence to which the young invalid gave so easy a solution. "It wouldna be so hard to make out if a man could think he was less loved than his fellows, as they thought lang-syne," said

Lauderdale to himself, "or more loved, as, twisting certain scriptures, it's the fashion to say now; but its awfu' ill to understand such dealings in Him that is the Father of all, and makes nae favourites. Poor Callant! it's like he'll be the first to find the secret out." And, as he pondered, he could not restrain a groan over the impending fate which threatened Meredith, and on the complications that were soon to follow. To be sure, he had nothing particular to do with it, however it might happen; but every kind of Christian tenderness and charity lurked in the heart of the homely Scotch philosopher who stood in Arthur Meredith's last chapter as the impersonation of the worldly man.

Next day Colin reappeared, to the astonishment of the brother and sister. Let us not say, to their disappointment—and yet poor little Alice, underneath her congratulations, said to herself with a pang, "He has got well—they all get well but Arthur;" and, when she was aware of the thought, hated herself, and wondered wistfully whether it was because of her wickedness that her prayers for Arthur were not heard. Anxiety and even grief are not the improving influences they are sometimes thought to be—and it is hard upon human nature to be really thankful for the benefits which God gives to others, passing over one's self. Meredith, who was the sufferer in his own person, could afford to be more generous. He said, "I am glad you are better" with all his heart; and then he added—"The Lord does not mean to leave you alone, Campbell. Though He has spared you, He still continues His warnings. Do not neglect them, I beseech you, my dear friend"—before he returned to his writing. He was occupied now day and night with his "Voice from the Grave." He was less able to walk, less able to talk, than he had been, and now, as the night came fast in which no man can work, was devoting all his time and all his feeble strength to this last message to the world.

It would have been pitiful enough to any indifferent spectator to note the contrast between the sick man's solemn labour apart, and the glow of subdued pleasure in Colin's face as he drew his seat in the evening towards the table which Alice had chosen for herself. The great bare room had so much space and so many tables, and there was so large a stock of lamps among the movables of the house, that each of the party had a corner for himself, to which (with his great-coat on or otherwise) he could retire when he chose. The table of Alice was the central point; and as she sat with the tall antique lamp throwing its primitive unshaded light upon her, still and graceful with her needlework, the sight of her was like that of a supreme *objet de luxe* in the otherwise bare apartment. Perhaps, under due protection and control, the presence of womankind, thus calm, thus silent—letting itself, as the old maxim commanded, be seen and not heard—is to men of sober mind and middle age—such as Lauderdale, for example—the most agreeable ornament with which a room could be provided. Younger individuals might prefer that the tableau should dissolve, and the impersonation of womankind melt into an ordinary woman. Such at least was the feeling of Colin. She was very sweet to look at; but, if she had descended from her pedestal, and talked a little and laughed a little, and even perhaps—but the idea of anything like flirtation on the part of Alice Meredith was too absurd an idea to be entertained for a moment. However, abstracted and preoccupied as she was, she was still a woman young and fair—and Colin's voice softened and his eyes brightened as he drew his chair to the other side of the lamp, and looked across the table at her soft, downcast face. "I have something here I want you to look at," said the young poet, who had been used to Matty Frankland's sympathy and curiosity; "not that it is much worth your while; but Lauderdale told you that writing verses was a

weakness of mine," he went on, with a youthful blush and smile. As for Alice, she took the paper he gave her, looking a little frightened, and held it for a moment in her hand.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Campbell; am I to read it?" she said, with puzzled, uncertain looks. Naturally enough she was perplexed and even frightened by such an address; for, as Lauderdale said, her knowledge of poetry was confined to hymns, over which hung an awful shadow from the "Paradise Lost." She opened Colin's "copy of verses" timorously as she spoke, and glanced at them, and stumbled at his handwriting, which, like most other people's in these scribbling days, was careless and indistinct. "I am sure it is very pretty," faltered Alice as she got to the end of the page; and then, more timidly still, "What am I to do with it, Mr. Campbell?" asked the poor girl. When she saw the sudden flush that covered his face, Alice's slumbering faculties were wakened up by the sharp shock of having given pain—which was a fault which she had very seldom consciously committed in the course of her innocent life.

Colin was too much a gentleman to lose his temper; but it is impossible to deny that the effort which he made to keep it was a violent one, and required all his manhood. "Keep it if you like it," he said, with a smile which thinly covered his mortification; "or put it in the fire if you don't." He said this as philosophically as was possible under the circumstances. And then he tried a little conversation by way of proving his perfect composure and command of his feelings, during which poor Alice sat fluttered and uncomfortable and self-conscious as she had never been before. Her work was at an end for that night at least. She held Colin's little poem in her hand, and kept her eyes upon it, and tried with all her might to invent something gracious and complimentary which could be said without offence; for, of course, carefully as he imagined himself

to have concealed it, and utterly unconscious of the fact as Lauderdale remained, who was watching them, Alice was as entirely aware of the state of Colin's mind and temper at the moment as he was himself. After a while he got up and went to Meredith's table by the fire; and the two began to talk, as Alice imagined, of matters much too serious and momentous to leave either at leisure to remark her movements. When she saw them thus occupied she left the room almost stealthily, carrying with her the tall lamp with its four tongues of flame. She set down her light in her own room when she reached that sanctuary, and once more read and pored over Colin's poem. There was nothing about love in it, and consequently nothing improper or alarming to Alice. It was all about the Pantheon and its vespers, and the echoes in the dome. But then why did he give it to her? why did he look so much disturbed when she in her surprise and unreadiness hesitated over it? Such an offering was totally new to Alice: how could she be expected to understand exactly how it ought to be received? But it is impossible to describe how vexed and mortified she was to find she had failed of what was expected of her, and inflicted pain when she might have given pleasure. She had been rude, and to be rude was criminal in her code of manners; and a flutter of other questions, other curiosities, awoke without any will of her own in the young creature's maiden bosom; for, indeed, she was still very young, not nineteen, and so preoccupied by one class of thoughts that her mind had been absolutely barred against all others until now.

The end was that Alice put away Colin's poem in the private pocket of her writing-case, the very innermost of her sanctuaries. "How clever he is," she thought to herself; "how odd that such things should come into any one's head; and to think I had not even the civility to say that it was beautiful poetry!" Then she went back very humbly into the sitting-room, and

served Colin with the last cup of tea, which was the most excellent. "For I know you like strong tea, Mr. Campbell," she said, looking at him with appealing eyes. "It feels quite strange to think that we should know you so well—you who can write such beautiful poetry,"[1] she managed to say later in the evening. "I have always supposed a poet so different."

[1] Miss Matty had been so good an audience that Colin at this time of his life was a little spoiled in respect to his poetry, which, however, after all, he did not consider poetry, but only verses, to amuse himself with. The little poem in question, which he had entitled "Vespers in the Pantheon," is, for the satisfaction of his friends, given underneath :—

"What voice is in the mighty dome,
Where the blue eye of heaven looks through,
And where the rain falls, and the dew,
In the old heart of Rome?

On the vast area below
Are priests in robes of sullied white
And humble servitors that light
The altars with a feeble glow—

Pale tapers in the twilight dim:
Poor humble folks that come to say
Their farewell to departing day,
Their darkling faith in *Him*,

Who rules imperial Rome the last:
The song is shrill and sad below,
With discords harsh of want and woe
Into the music cast.

But from the mighty vault that bares
Its open heart unto the sky,
Vague peals of anthem sounding high
Echo the human prayers.

Oh solemn shrine, wherein lie dead
The gods of old, the dreams of men!
What voice is this that wakes again
The echoes overhead,

Pealing aloft the holiest name—
The lowliest name, Rome's ancient scorn—
Now to earth's furthest boundaries borne,
With fame above all fame?

"With wings, perhaps?" said Colin, who was not displeased even with this simple testimony.

"Oh no," said Alice, "that is impossible, you know—but certainly very different; and it was so very kind to think of giving it to me."

Thus she made her peace with the young man—but it is doubtful how far she promoted her own by so doing. It introduced a new element of wonder and curiosity, if nothing more, into her watching life.

Is it some soul whose mortal days
Had known no better God than Jove,
Though dimly prescient of a love
Was worthy higher praise?—

Some soul that late hath seen the Lord:
Some wistful soul, eager to share
The tender trust of Christian prayer,
Though not by wish or word:—

By homage inarticulate:
Murmurs and thunders of sweet sound:
And great Amens that circle round
Heaven's liberal open gate?

Great singer, wert thou one of those
Spirits in prison, whom He sought,
Soon as his wondrous work was wrought,
Ending all doubts and woes?

Alone? or comes there here a throng?
Agrippa—he who built this shrine—
And men who groped for the divine
Through lifetimes hard and long?

Dead Romans to this vault austere,
'Tis meet ye should return to tell,
Of that which was inscrutable,
That God hath made it clear.

So we, still bound in mortal pain,
Take courage 'neath the echoing dome,
In the dear heart of this sad Rome,
To give you back—Amen!"

CHAPTER VII.

"It would be a great satisfaction to me," said Lauderdale, "to have some understanding about their relations. There's few folk so lonely in this world but what they have some kin, be they kind or not. It's awfu' to look at this poor bit thing, and think how forlorn she'll be by and by, when——"

"When?" said Colin—"what do you mean? Meredith is not worse that I can see. Is *that* what you are thinking of?"

"It's an awfu' gradual descent," said Lauderdale; nae precipices there—and pitiful to behold; but he's making progress on his way. I'm no mistaken, callant; a man like me has seen such sights before. It looks as if it could go on for ever, and nae great difference perceptible from day to day; but the wheel's aye turning and the thread spinning off, and nobody can say for certain what moment it may break, like glass, and the spinning come to an end. Ay, it's an awfu' mystery. You may break your heart thinking, but you'll come to no solution. I've tried it as much as most men, and should ken;—but that's no the matter under consideration. I would be glad to know something about their friends."

"I don't suppose they have any friends," said Colin, who had by this time forgotten the suggestion of his English acquaintances. "He would never have brought his sister here with him if he had had anyone to leave her with—that is, if he believed, as he says he does, that he was going to die," said the young man, with a pang of fellow-feeling and natural pity, "which are terrible words to say."

"I'm no so sure about either of your propositions," said Lauderdale; "I've very little objection to die, for my part. No to speak of hopes a man has as a Christian—though I maybe canna see them as clear as that poor callant thinks he does—it would be an awfu' satisfaction to ken what was the meaning of it all, which is my grand difficulty in this life. And I cannot say I am satisfied, for that matter, that he brought his sister here for want of somebody to leave her with; she's a kind of property that he wouldna like to leave behind. He was not thinking of *her* when they started, but of himsel'; nor can I see that his mind's awakening to any thought of her even now, though he's awfu' anxious, no doubt, about her soul, and yours, and mine. Whisht! it's temperament, callant. I'm no blaming the poor dying lad. It's hard upon a man if he cannot be permitted to take some bit female creature that belongs to him as far as the grave's mouth. She maun find her way back from there the best way she can. It's human nature, Colin, for a' you look like a glaring lion at me."

"I prefer your ordinary manner of expounding human nature," said Colin. "Don't talk like this; if Miss Meredith is left so helpless and solitary, at all events, Lauderdale, she can rely on you and me."

"Ay," said the philosopher shortly; "and grand protectors we would be for the like of her. Two men no her equals in the eye of the world—I'm no heeding your indignant looks, my freend; I'm a better judge than you of some things—and one of us no of an age to be over and above trusted. A lad like you can take care of a bit thing like her only in one way; and that's out of the question under present circumstances—even if either of you were thinking of such vanities, of which I see no sign."

"None whatever," said Colin, with momentary heat. "She is not in my way; and, besides, she is greatly too much occupied to think of any such vanities, as you say."

Lauderdale cast a half-amused, suspicious look at his companion, whose face was flushed a little. Colin was thinking only of Alice's want of comprehension and sympathy on the previous night; but the touch of offence and mortification was as evident as if she had been unkind to him in more important particulars.

"Being agreed on that point, it's easier to manage the rest," Lauderdale resumed, with the ghost of a smile; "and I dinna pretend, for my own part, to be a fit guardian for a young leddy. It's a' very well for Telle-machus to wander about the world like this, but I'm no qualified to keep watch and ward over the princess. Poor thing!" said the philosopher, "it's awfu' early to begin her troubles; but I would be easy in my mind, comparatively, if we could find out about their friends. She's no so very communicative in that particular; and she has her bit woman's whiles, innocent as she looks. She'll give me no satisfaction, though I'm awfu' cunning in my questions. What was it yon silly woman said about some Meredith of some place? I'm no without suspicions in my own mind."

"What sort of suspicions?" said Colin. "She said Meredith of Maltby. I wrote it down somewhere. There was a row about him in the papers—don't you remember—a few years ago."

"Oh ay, I remember," said Lauderdale; "one of them that consume widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. The wonder to me is how this callant, if he should happen to be such a man's son, did not take a sickening at religion altogether. That's the consequence in a common mind. It gives me a higher notion of this poor lad. He has his faults, like most folk I ken," said Lauderdale. "He's awfu' young, which is the chief of all, and it's one that will never mend in his case in this life; but, if he's yon man's son, no to have abandoned a' religion, no to have scorned the very name of preaching and prayer, is a clear token to me that the root of the matter's in him; though he

may be a wee unrighteous to his ain flesh and blood"—the philosopher went on philosophically—"that's neither here nor there."

"If religion does not make us righteous to our own flesh and blood, what is the good of it?" said Colin. "To care for souls, as you say, but not to care for leaving his sister so helpless and desolate, would be to me as bad as his father's wickedness. Bah! his father!—what am I saying? He is no more his father than the Duke is mine. It is only a coincidence of name."

"I'm making no assertions," said Lauderdale. "It may be or it may not be; I'm no saying: but you should aye bear in mind that there's an awfu' difference between practice and theory. To have a good theory—or, if ye like, a grand ideal—o' existence, is about as much as a man can attain to in this world. To put it into full practice is reserved, let us aye hope, for the life to come. However, I wouldna say," said Colin's guardian, changing his tone, "but that kind of practical paradox might run in the blood. Our friend Arthur, poor man! has no meaning of neglect to his sister. Do no man injustice. Maybe the other had as little intention of cheating them that turned out his victims. An awfu' practical accident like that might be accompanied by a beautiful theory. Just as in the case of his son—"

"Stuff!" said Colin, who thought his friend prosy. "Why will you insist on saying 'his son?' Meredith is not an uncommon name. You might as well say Owen Meredith was his brother."

"There's nothing more likely," said the philosopher, composedly; "brothers aye take different roads, especially when they come out of such a nest; but listen now to what I've got to say——"

What Lauderdale had to say was still upon the subject of which Colin by this time had got tired—the supposed connexion of the brother and sister with the famous, or rather notorious

Meredith of Maltby, who was one of the great leaders of that fashion of swindling so prevalent a few years ago, by means of which directors of banks and joint-stock companies brought so many people to ruin. Of these practitioners Mr. Meredith of Maltby had been one of the most successful. He had passed through one or two disagreeable examinations, it is true, in Insolvent Courts and elsewhere; but he had managed to steer clear of the law, and to retain a comfortable portion of his ill-gotten gains. He was a pious man, who subscribed to all the societies, and had, of course, since these unpleasant accidents occurred, been held up to public admiration by half the newspapers of Great Britain as an instance of the natural effect produced upon the human mind by an assumption of superior piety; and more than one clever leading article, intended to prove that lavish subscriptions to benevolent purposes, and attendance at prayer meetings, were the natural evidences of a mind disposed to prey on its fellow-creatures, had been made pointed and emphatic by his name. Lauderdale's "case" was subtle enough, and showed that he, at least, had not forgotten the hint given in the Pantheon. He told Colin that all his cunning inquiries could elicit no information about the father of the forlorn pair. Their mother was dead, and, so far as she was concerned, Alice was sufficiently communicative; and she had an aunt in India whom Lauderdale knew by heart. "A' that is so easy to draw out that the other is all the more remarkable," said the inquisitor; "and it's awfu' instructive to see the way she doubles out when I think I've got her in a corner—no saying what's no true, but fencing like a little Jesuit; that is, speaking proverbially, and no vouching for my premises, for I ken nothing about Jesuits in my ain person. I would like to be at the bottom of a woman's notions on such subjects. The way that bit thing will lift up her innocent face, and give me to understand a lee without saying it—"

"Be civil," interrupted Colin; "a lie is strong language,

especially as you have no right whatever to question her so closely."

"I said nothing about lies," said Lauderdale; "I say she gives me to understand a *lee* without saying a word that's no true; which is not only an awfu' civil form of expression on my part, but a gift of womankind that, so far as I ken, is just unparalleled. If it werna instinct it would be genius. She went so far as once to say, in her bit fine way, that they were not quite happy in a' their connexions—'There are some of our friends that Arthur can't approve of,' said she, which was enough to make a man laugh or cry—whichever he might be most disposed to. A bonnie judge Arthur is, to be believed in like that. But the end of the whole matter is that I'm convinced the hot-headed callant has carried her off from her home without anybody's knowledge, and that it's an angry father you and me will have to answer to when we are left her protectors, as you say."

"I hope I am not afraid to meet anybody when I have justice on my side," said Colin, loftily. "She is nothing more to me than any other helpless woman; but I will do my best to take care of her against any man whatsoever, if she is trusted to me."

Lauderdale laughed with mingled exasperation and amusement. "Bravo," he said; "the like of that's grand talking; but I'll have no hand, for my part, in aiding and abetting domestic treason. I'm far from easy in my mind on the subject altogether. It's ill to vex a dying man, but it's worse to let a spirit go out of the world with guilt on its head. I'm in an awfu' difficulty whether to speak to him or no. If you would but come down off your high horse and give me a little assistance. It's a braw business, take it all together. A young woman, both bonnie and good, but abject to what her brother bids her, even now when he's living—and us two single men, with nae justification for meddling, and an indignant father, no

doubt, to make an account to. It's no a position I admire, for my part."

"It was I that drew you into it," said Colin, with some resentment. "After all, they were my friends to begin with. Don't let me bring you into a responsibility which is properly mine."

"Ay, ay," said Lauderdale, calmly, "that's aye the way with you callants. If a man sees a difficulty in anything concerning you, off you fling, and will have no more to do with him. I'm no one to be dismissed in that fashion—no to say that it would be more becoming to consider the difficulty, like reasonable creatures, and make up our minds how it is to be met."

"I beg your pardon," said Colin, repentant; "only, to be sure, the imprudence, if there was any imprudence, was mine. But it is hard to be talking in this manner, as if all was over, while Meredith lives, poor fellow. Such invalids live for ever, sometimes. There he is, for a miracle, riding! When summer comes he may be all right."

"Ay," said Lauderdale, "I make no doubt of that; but no in your way. He'll be better off when summer comes." Meredith turned a corner close upon them as he spoke. He was riding, it is true, but only on a mule, jogging along at a funeral pace, with Alice walking by his side. He smiled when he met them; but the smile was accompanied by a momentary flush, as of shame or pain.

"The last step but one," he said. "I have given up walking for ever. I did not think I should ever have come to this; but my spirit is proud, and needs to be mortified. Campbell, come here. It is long since we have had any conversation. I thought God was dealing with your soul when I last talked to you. Tell me, if you were as far gone as I am—if you were reduced to *this*"—and the sick man laid his thin white hand upon the neck of the animal he was riding—"what consolation would

you have to keep you from sinking? It may come sooner than you think."

"It is not easy to imagine how one would conduct oneself under such circumstances," said Colin; "let us talk of something else. If it were coming—and it may be, for anything I can tell—I think I should prefer not to give it too much importance. Look at that low blaze of sunshine, how it catches St. Peter's. These sunsets are like dramas—but nobody plans the grouping beforehand," said the young man, with an involuntary allusion which he was sorry for the next moment, but could not recall.

"That is an unkind speech," said Meredith; "but I forgive you. If I could plan the grouping, as you say, I should like to collect all the world to see me die. Heathens, papists, Mahometans, Christians of every description—I would call them to see with what confidence a Christian could traverse the dark valley, knowing Him who can sustain, and who has preceded him there."

"Yes, that was Addison's idea; but his was an age when people did things for effect," said Colin: "and everything I have heard makes me believe that people generally die very composedly upon the whole. The best and wisest are scarcely superior in that respect to the ignorant and stupid—scarcely even to the wicked. Either people have an infinite confidence in themselves and their good fortune; or else absolute faith in God is a great deal more general than you think it. I should like to believe that last was the case. Pardon me for what I said. You who realize so strongly what you are going to, should certainly die, when that time comes, a glorious and joyful death."

At these words a cloud passed over the eager, hectic countenance which Meredith had turned to his friend. "Ah, you don't know," he said, with a sudden depression which Colin had

never seen in him before. "Sometimes God sees fit to abandon His servants even in that hour; what, if after preaching to others I should myself be a castaway?" This conversation was going on while Alice talked to Lauderdale of the housekeeping, and how the man at the Trattoria had charged a scudo too much in the last weekly bill.

"Meredith," said Colin, laying his hand on his friend's arm, and forgetting all the discussion with Lauderdale which had occupied the afternoon, "when you say such words as Father and Saviour you put some meaning in them, do you not? You don't think it depends upon how you feel to-day or to-morrow whether God will stand by his children or not? I don't believe in the castaway as you understand it."

"Ah, my dear friend, I am afraid you don't believe in any castaways; don't fall into that deadly error and snare of the devil," said the sick man.

"We must not discuss mysteries," said Colin. "There are men for whom no punishment is bad enough, and whom no amount of mercy seems to benefit. I don't know what is to become of them. For my own part I prefer not to inquire. But this I *know*, that my father, much less my mother, would not altogether abandon their son for any crime; and does not God love us better than our fathers and our mothers?" said Colin, with a moisture gathering in his brown eyes and brightening his smile. As for Meredith, he snatched his hand away, and pushed forward with a feverish impulse. A sound, half sigh, half groan, burst from him, and Colin could see that this inarticulate complaint had private references of which he knew nothing. Then Lauderdale's suggestion returned to his mind with singular force; but it was not a time to make any inquiries, even if such had been possible. Instinctively, without knowing it, Meredith turned from that subject to the only other which could mutually interest men so unlike each other; and what he

said betrayed distinctly enough what had been the tenor of his thoughts.

"*She* has no mother," said Meredith, with a little wave of his hand towards his sister. "Poor Alice! But I have no doubt God has gracious purposes towards her," he continued, recovering himself. "*This* is in the family, and I don't doubt she will follow me soon."

It was thus he disposed of the matter which for the strangers to whose care he was about to leave her, was a matter of so much anxious thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER this Meredith's malady made gradual but rapid progress. When Colin and his friend returned from Rome in the evenings, after their expeditions there, they thought they could see a difference in his looks even from the morning. He ceased to move about; he ceased to go out; finally he ceased to get up from his bed. All these changes were accomplished very gradually, with a heart-breaking regularity of succession. Alice, who was constantly engaged about him, doing every kind of office for him, was fortunately too much occupied to take full cognizance of that remorseless progress of decay; but the two friends, who watched it with eyes less urgent than those of love, yet almost more painfully pitiful, could trace all the little advances of the malady. Then there came the time, the last stage of all, when it was necessary to sit up with him all night —an office which Colin and Lauderdale shared between them, to let the poor little sister have a little reluctant rest.

The season had warmed into May, of all seasons the sweetest in Italy. To see the sun shine, it seemed impossible to think that he would not shine for ever; and, when the window of the sick room was opened in the early morning, such a breath of life and happiness came in—such a sweet gust of air, wild from the great breadth of the Campagna, breathing of dews and blossoms—as felt to Colin's lips like an elixir of life. But that breathing balm imparted no refreshment to the dying man. He was not suffering much; he was only weary to the bottom of his soul—languid and yet restless, eager to be moved, yet

unable to bear any motion. While Alice withdrew behind them by times to shed the tears that kept always gathering, and say a prayer in her heart for her dying brother—a prayer in which, with a child's simplicity, she still left room for his restoration, and called it possible—the two others watched with the profoundest interest that which was not only the dying of a friend, but the waning of a life. To see him so individual and characteristic, with all the notable features and even faults of his mind as distinct and apparent as if he had been in the strongest health, and yet so near the end, was the strangest spectacle. What was it the end of? He directed them all from his deathbed, and, indeed, controlled them all, with a will stronger than ever before, securing his own way in face of all their remonstrances, and, indeed, seemed to grow more and more strong, absolute, and important, as he approached the final stage of weakness—which is a sight always wonderful to see. He kept on writing his book, propped up upon pillows, as long as he had strength enough to hold the pen; but, when that power too failed him, the unyielding soul coerced itself into accepting the pen of another, and dictated the last chapter, at which Alice laboured during the day, and which occasionally, to beguile the tedium of the long night-watches, his other attendants were permitted to carry on.

The nights grew shorter and shorter as the season advanced, and sometimes it was by the lovely light of the dawning morning, instead of the glimmer of the lamp, that these solemn sentences were written. At other moments, when the patient could not sleep, but was content to rest, wonderful scraps of conversation went on in that chamber of death. Meredith lay gaunt and wasted among his pillows—his great eyes filling the room, as the spectators sometimes thought; and by his bedside rose, sometimes the gigantic figure of Lauderdale, dimly visible by means of the faint night-light—sometimes Colin's young

softened face and air of tender compassion. It did not occur to any of the three to ask by what right they came together in relations so near and sacred. The sick man's brothers, had he possessed them, could not have watched him with more care, or with less doubt about his claim upon all their ministrations: but they talked with him as perhaps no brother could have talked—recognising the reality of his position, and even discussing it as a matter in which they too had the profoundest interest. The room was bare enough, and contained little comfort to English eyes—uncarpeted, with bare tiles underneath the feet, and scantily furnished with an old sofa, a chair or two, and a table. There were two windows, which looked out upon the Campagna which the dying man was to see no more, nor cared to see. But that great living picture, of no benefit to him, was the only one there; for poor Meredith had himself caused to be taken down from the wall a print of the Madonna, and the little cross with its basin for holy water underneath, which had hung at the head of his bed. He had even sent away a picture of the Crucifixion—a bad, yet not unimpressive copy. "I want no outward symbols," said the sick man; "there will be none where I am going," and this was the beginning of one of those strange talks by night.

"It's awfu' difficult to ken," said Lauderdale. "For my part it's a great wonder to me that there has never been any revelation worthy of credit out of that darkness. That poor fellow Dives, in the parable, is the only man I mind of that takes a Christian view of the subject. He would have sent one to tell. The miracle is, that nae man was ever permitted to come."

"Don't say so," said Meredith. "Oh, my dear friend! if you could but know the joy it would give me to bring you to Christ before I die—to see you accept and receive Him. Has not He come to seek and to save?"

"Callant," said the watcher, with a long drawn breath, "I've longer acquaintance with Him than you can have; and if I dinna believe in Him I would hang myself, and get to an explanation of all things. If it was not for Him, wherefore should I, that have nobody dependent on me, endure the mystery? But that's no answer to my question. He came to put a meaning in the world that has little enough signification without Him, but no to answer a' the questions that a human spirit can put to heaven and earth. I've heard of bargains made between them that were to die and them that had to live—"

"You put it in a strange way, Lauderdale," said the dying man; "most people would say, those who had to die. But what can any one want beyond what is revealed—Jerusalem the golden? How strange it is to think that a worm like me shall so soon be treading those shining streets, while you—you whom the world thinks so much better off—"

"Whisht," said Lauderdale, with a husky voice. "Do you no think it would be an awfu' satisfaction to us that stay behind if we could have but a glint of the shining streets you speak of? Many a long day we'll strain our eyes and try hard to see you there, but a' to little purpose. I'm no saying I would not take it on trust for myself, and be content with what God pleased; but it's hard to part with them that belong to us, and ken nothing about them—where they are, or how they are—"

"They are in Heaven! If they were children of God they are with Him," said the sick man, anxiously. "Lauderdale, I cannot bear to think that you do not believe—that perhaps I may not meet you there."

"Maybe no," said the philosopher; "there's the awfu' question. A man might go ranging about the shining streets (as you say) for ever, and never find them that belonged to him; or, if there's no geographical limits, there may be others harder to pass. It's awfu' little comfort I can get for my own

mind out of shining streets. How am I to picture you to myself, callant, when I take thoughts of you? I have the fancy in my mind to give you messages to friends I have away yonder; but how can I tell if you'll ever see them? It's no a question of believing or not believing; I put little faith in Milton, and none in the good books, from which two sources we draw a great part of our talk about Heaven. It's no even to ken if they're happy or no happy that troubles me. I've nae hesitation to speak of in leaving *that* in God's hand. It's but to have an inkling ever so slight where ye are, and how you are," said Lauderdale, unconsciously changing his pronouns, "and that ye keep thought of us that spend so many thoughts on you."

After this there was a little pause, which fell into the perfect stillness of the night outside, and held the little dim-lighted chamber in the midst of all the darkness, like the picture of a shadowy "interior," with two motionless figures, the living and the dying, painted upon the great gloom of night. Meredith, who, notwithstanding the superior intensity of his own thoughts, had been moved by Lauderdale's—and who, used as he was to think himself dying, yet perhaps heard himself thus unconsciously reckoned among the dead with a momentary thrill—was the first to speak.

"In all this I find you too vague," said the patient. "You speak about Heaven as if you were uncertain only of its aspect; you have no anxiety about the way to get there. My friend, you are very good to me—you are excellent, so far as this world goes; I know you are. But, oh, Lauderdale, think! Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Before you speculate about Heaven, ask yourself are you sure to get there?"

"Ay," said Lauderdale, vaguely, "it's maybe a wee like the question of the Sadducees—I'm no saying; and it's awfu', the dead blank of wisdom and knowledge that's put forth for a response—no any information to you; nothing but a quenching

of your flippant questions and impudent pretensions. No marrying nor giving in marriage there, and the curious fools baffled, but nae light thrown upon the darkness! I'll have to wait like other folk for my answer; but, if it's according to your new nature and faculties—which surely it must be—you'll not forget to give us a thought at times? If you feel a wee lonely at the first—I'm no profane, callant; you're but a man when a's done, or rather a laddie, and you'll surely miss your friends—dinna forget how long and how often we'll think of you."

"Shall you?" said the dying man. "I have given you nothing but trouble ever since I knew you, and it is more than I deserve. But there is One who is worthy of all your thoughts. When you think of me, O love Him, my dear friend, and so there will be a bond between us still."

"Ay," said Lauderdale once more. It was a word he used when his voice could not be trusted, and his heart was full. "Ay," he repeated, after a long pause, "I'll no neglect that grand bond. It's a bargain between you and me no to be broken. If ye were free for such an act, it would be awfu' friendly to bring me word how things are"—he continued, in a low tone, "though it's folly to ask, for if it had been possible it would have been done before now."

"It is God who must teach and not me," said the dying man. "He has other instruments—and you must seek Him for yourself, and let Him reveal His will to you. If you are faithful to God's service, He will relieve you of your doubts," said Arthur, who did not understand his friend's mind, but even at that solemn moment looked at him with a perplexed mixture of disapproval and compassion. And thus the silence fell again like a curtain over the room, and once more it became a picture faintly painted on the darkness, faintly relieved and lighted up by touches of growing light, till at length the morning came in full and fair, finding out as with a sudden surprise the ghostly

face on the pillow, with its great eyes closed in disturbed sleep, and by the bedside another face scarcely less motionless, the face of the man who was no unbeliever, but whose heart longed to know and see what others were content in vague generalities to tell of, and say they believed.

This was one of the conversations held in the dead of night in Meredith's room. Next evening it was Colin, reluctantly permitted by his faithful guardian to share this labour, who took the watcher's place; and then the two young men, who were so near of an age, but whose prospects were so strangely different, talked to each other after a different fashion. Both at the beginning of their career, and with incalculable futures before them, it was natural they should discuss the objects and purposes of life, upon which Meredith, who thought himself matured by the approach of death, had, as he imagined, so much advantage over his friend, who was not going to die.

"I remember once thinking as you do," said the dying man. "The world looked so beautiful! No man ever loved its vanities and its pomp more than I. I shudder sometimes to think what would have become of me if God had left me to myself—but He was more merciful. I see things in their true light now."

"You will have a great advantage over us," said Colin, trying to smile; "for you will always know the nature of our occupations, while yours will be a mystery to us. But we can be friends all the same. As for me, I shall not have many pomps and vanities to distract me; a poor man's son, and a Scotch minister does not fall in the way of such temptations."

"There are temptations to worldliness in every sphere," said Meredith. "You once spoke eagerly about going to Oxford, and taking honours. My dear friend, trust a dying man. There are no honours worth thinking of but the crown and the palm, which Christ bestows on them that love Him."

"Yes," said Colin; "but we are not all chosen for these. If I have to live, I must qualify myself the best I can for my work. I should like to be of a little use to Scotland, if that was possible. When I hear the poor people here singing their vespers——"

"Ah, Campbell! one word—let me speak," said his friend. "Alice showed me the poem you gave her. You don't mean it, I know; but let me beg you not to utter such sentiments. You seem to consent to the doctrine of purgatory, one of the worst delusions of the Church of Rome. There are no spirits in prison, my dear, dear friend. When I leave you, I shall be with my Saviour. Don't give your countenance to such inventions of the devil."

"That was not what I intended to say," said Colin, who had no heart for argument. "I meant that to see the habit of devotion of all these people, whom we call so ignorant, and to remember how little we have of that among our own people, whom we think enlightened, goes to my heart. I should like to do a priest's duty——"

"Again!" said Meredith. "Dear Campbell, you will be a minister; there is but one great High Priest."

"Yes," said Colin, "most true, and the greatest of all consolations. But yet I believe in priests inferior—priests who need be nothing more than men. I am not so much for teaching as you are, you know; I have so little to teach any man. With you who are going to the Fount of all knowledge it will be different. I can conceive, I can imagine how magnificent may be *your* work," the young man said, with a faltering voice, as he laid his warm young hand upon the fingers which were almost dead.

Meredith closed his hand upon that of his friend, and looked at him with his eyes so clear and awful, enlarged and lighted up with the prescience of what was to come. "If you do your work faithfully it will be the same work," he said. "Our

Master alone knows the particulars. If I might have perhaps to supplement and complete what you do on earth!—Ah, but I must not be tempted into vain speculations! Enough that I shall know His will and see Him as He is. I desire no more."

"Amen," said Colin; "and, when you are in your new career, think of me sometimes, worried and vexed as I know I shall be. We shall not be able to communicate then, but I know now beforehand what I shall have to go through. You don't know Scotland, Meredith. A man who tries for any new reformation in the Church will have to fight for trifles of detail which are not worth fighting for, and perhaps get both himself and his work degraded in consequence. You can know no such cares. Think of me sometimes when you are doing your work 'with thunders of acclaim.' I wonder—but you would think it a profanity if I said what I was going to say."

"What was it?" said Meredith, who, indeed, would not have been sorry had his friend uttered a profanity which might give him occasion to speak, for perhaps the last time, "faithfully" to his soul.

"I wonder," said Colin, whose voice was low, "whether our Master, who sees us both, though we cannot see each other, might tell you sometimes what your friend was doing. He, too, is a man. I mean no irreverence, Meredith. There were men for whom, above His tenderness for all, He had a special love. I should like to think it. I can know nothing of you; but then I am less likely to forget you, staying behind in this familiar world."

And the two youths again clasped hands, tears filling the eyes of the living one, but no moisture in the clear orbs of him who was about to die.

"Let us be content to leave it all in His hands," said Meredith. "God bless you, Colin, for your love; but think nothing of me; think of Him who is our first and greatest Friend."

And then again came silence and sleep, and the night throbbed silently round the lighted chamber and the human creatures full of thought; and again there took place the perennial transformation, the gradual rising of the morning light, the noiseless entrance of the day, finding out, with surprised and awful looks, the face of the dying. This is how the last nights were spent. Down below in the convent there was a good friar, who watched the light in the window, and pondered much in his mind whether he should not go thither with his crucifix, and save the poor young heretic in spite of himself; but the Frate was well aware that the English resented such interruptions, and did better for Arthur; for he carried the thought of him through all his devotions, and muttered under his breath the absolution, with his eyes fixed upon the lighted window, and prayed, if he had any credit in heaven, through the compassionate saints, the Blessed Virgin, and by the aid of Him whose image he held up towards the unseen sufferer, that the sins which God's servant had thus remitted on earth might be, even without the knowledge of the penitent, remitted in heaven. Thus Colin's belief in priests was justified without his knowing it; and perhaps God judged the intercession of Father Francisco more tenderly than poor Arthur would have done. And with these private proceedings, which the world was unaware of, night after night passed on until the night came which was to have no day.

They had all assembled in the room, in which it seemed before morning so great an event was to happen—all worn and tired out with watching; the evidences of which appeared upon Colin and Alice, though Lauderdale, more used to exertion, wore his usual aspect. As usual, Meredith lay very solemnly in a kind of pathetic youthful state in his bed; struggling for every breath, yet never forgetting that he lay there before heaven and earth, a monument as he said of God's grace, and an example of how a Christian could die. He called Alice, and the others would

have withdrawn; but this he would not permit. "We have no secrets to discuss," he said. "I am not able to say much now. Let my last words be for Christ. Alice, you are the last. We have all died of it. It is not very hard; but you cannot die in peace, as I do, unless you give yourself to Christ. These are my last words to my sister. You may not live long—you have not a moment to spare. Give yourself to Christ, my little Alice, and then your death-bed will be as peaceful as mine."

"Yes," said the docile sister, through her sobs, "I will never, never forget what you have said to me. Oh, Arthur, you are going to them all!"

"I am going to God," said the dying man; "I am going to my Lord and Saviour—that is all I desire to think of now."

And there was a momentary breathless pause. She had his hand in both of hers, and was crying with an utter despair and abandonment to which she had never given herself up before. "Oh, Arthur—papa!" the poor girl said, under her breath. If they had been less interested, or if the stillness had been a degree less intense, the voice was so low that the two other watchers could not have heard her. But the answer was spoken aloud.

"Tell him I forgive him, Alice. I can say so now. Tell him to repent while there is time. If you wish it, you can tell Colin and Lauderdale—they have been brothers to us. Come here, all of you," said Meredith. "Hear my last words. Nothing is of any importance but the love of Christ. I have tried everything in the world—its pleasures and its ambitions—and—But everything except Christ is vanity. Come to Him while it is called to-day. And now come and kiss me, Alice, for I am going to die."

"Oh, no, Arthur. Oh, Arthur, do not leave me yet!" cried the poor girl. Lauderdale drew her gently away, and signed to Colin to take the place by the bed. He drew her hand through his arm and led her softly into the great empty *salone*, where

there was no light except that of the moon, which came in in broad white bars at the side windows. "Whisht! it'll no be yet," said the kind guardian who had taken possession of Alice. No mother or lover could have been tenderer with the little forlorn creature in this hour which was the most terrible of all, He made her walk softly about with him, beguiling her awful suspense a little with that movement. "A little more strength, for his sake," said Lauderdale; "another trial—and then nobody shall stop your tears. It's for his sake; the last thing you can do for him."

And then the poor little sister gave utterance to a bitter cry, "If he would say something kind for papa, I could bear it," she said, smothering her painful sobs; and Lauderdale drew her closer on his arm, supporting and soothing her, and led her about, slowly and noiselessly, in the great empty room, lighted with those broad bars of moonlight, waiting till she had regained a little composure to return to the chamber of death.

Meredith lay silent for some time, with his great eyes gazing into the vacancy before him, and the last thrill of fever in his frame. He thought he was thus coming with all his faculties alert and vivid to a direct conscious encounter with the unknown might of death. "Get the book, Colin," he said, with a voice which yet possessed a certain nervous strength; "it is now time to write the conclusion"—and he dictated with a steady voice the date of his last postscript:—"Frascati, midnight, May 16th. —The last hour of my life——"

CHAPTER IX.

MEREDITH died the next day, after a struggle longer and harder than could have been anticipated, and very differently from the manner in which, when he dictated his last message to the world, he expected to die. Few human creatures are strong enough, except in books, to march thus solemnly and statelily to the edge of the grave. The last event itself was twenty-four hours later than the anxious watchers expected it to be, and wore them all out more utterly than any previous part of their patient's lingering illness. He dictated his postscript, lying in great exhaustion, but solemn calm, not without a certain pomp of conscious grandeur, victorious over death and the grave. "That great angel whom men call the last enemy is standing by my bedside," the dying man said, giving forth his last utterance slowly word by word. "In an hour I shall be clay and ashes. I send you, friends, this last message. Death is not terrible to those who love Christ. I feel a strength in me that is not my own. I had fears and doubts, but I have them no longer. The gates of heaven are opening. I close my eyes, for I can no longer see the lights of this world; when I open them again it will be to behold the face of my Lord. Amen. This I say to all the world with my last breath. For those who love Christ it is not hard to die."

Colin, who wrote the words, trembled over them with a weakness like a woman's; but Meredith's broken and interrupted voice was shaken only by the last pangs of mortality, not by any faltering of the spirit. "I tell you, Colin, it is not hard," he

said, and smiled upon his friend, and composed himself to meet the last encounter; but such was not the end. The long night lingered on, and the dying man dozed a little, and woke again less dignified and composed. Then came the weary morning, with its dreadful daylight which made the heart sick, and then a long day of dying, terrible to behold, perhaps not so hard to bear. The two who were his brothers at this dreadful moment exercised all their power to keep Alice out of the room where this struggle was going on, but the gentle little girl was a faithful woman, and kept her place. He had had his moment of conscious victory, but now in its turn the human soul was vanquished. He became unconscious of their consoling presence, conscious of nothing but the awful restlessness, the intolerable languor and yet more intolerable nervous strength which kept him alive in spite of himself; and then the veiled and abstracted spirit awoke to matters of which, when in full possession of his faculties, Arthur had made no mention. He began to murmur strange words as he lay tossing in that last struggle. "Tell my father," he said once or twice, but never finished the message. That death so clear and conscious, for which he had hoped, was not granted to him; and, when at last the deliverance came, even Alice, on her knees by the bedside, felt in her desolation a moment's relief. It was almost dawn of the second morning when they raised her up and led her tenderly away to Sora Antonia, the kind Italian woman, who waited outside. Colin was scarcely less overwhelmed than she. The young man sank down by the table where, on the previous night, he had been Arthur's secretary, and almost fainting dropped his head upon the book which still lay open there. Twenty-four hours only of additional hard labour added on to the ending life; but it looked as many years to the young inexperienced spirit which had thus, for the first time, followed another, so far as a spectator can, through the valley of the shadow of death.

Lauderdale, who knew better, and upon whose greater strength this dreadful strain of watching had made a less visible impression, had to do for Colin what the kind peasant woman was doing for the desolate sister—to take him away from the chamber of death, and make him lie down, and put aside altogether his own sensations on behalf of the younger and more susceptible sufferer. All that had to be done fell on Lauderdale; he made the necessary arrangements with a self-command which nothing disturbed, and, when he could satisfy himself that both the young worn-out creatures, who were his children for the moment, had got the momentary solace of sleep, as was natural, he threw himself into poor Arthur's arm-chair and pondered with a troubled countenance on all that might follow. There he too slept and dozed, as Sora Antonia went softly to and fro, moved with pity. She had said her rosary for Arthur many a morning, and had done all she could to interest in his behalf that good St. Antonio of Padua, who was so charitable, and perhaps might not be so particular about a matter of doctrine as St. Paul or St. Peter; for Sora Antonia was kind to the bottom of her heart, and could not bear to think of more than a thousand years or so of Purgatory for the poor young heretic. "The Signorino was English and knew no better," she said to her patron saint—and comforted herself with the thought that the blessed Antonio would not fail to attend to her recommendation, and that she had done the best she could for her lodger. From the room where Alice slept the deep sleep of exhaustion the good woman made many voyages into the silent *salone*, where the shutters were closed upon the bare windows, though the triumphant sun streamed in at every crevice. She looked at Lauderdale, who dozed in the great chair, with curious looks of speculation and inquiry. He looked old and grey, thus sleeping in the daylight, and the traces of exhaustion in such a face as his were less touching than the lines in Alice's gentle countenance or the

fading of Colin's brightness. He was the only member of the party who looked responsible to the eyes of Sora Antonia; and already she had a little romance in hand, and wondered much whether this uncle, or elder brother, or guardian, would be favourable to her young people. Thus, while the three watchers found a moment's sad rest after their long vigil, new hopes and thoughts of life already began to play about them unawares. The world will not stand still even to see the act of death accomplished; and the act of death itself, if Arthur was right in his hopes, had not that already opened its brighter side upon the solitary soul which had gone forth alone?

The day after everything was finally over was Sunday—the gayest and brightest of summer festal days. Colin and Lauderdale, who had on the day before carried their friend to his grave, met each other sadly at the table, where it was so strange to take up again the common thread of life as though Arthur Meredith had never had any share in it. It was Sunday under its brightest aspect; the village was very gay outside, and neither of them felt capable of introducing their sombre shadows into the flowery and sunny festa, the gaiety of which jarred upon their sadness; and they had no heart to go about their usual occupations within. When they had swallowed their coffee together, they withdrew from each other into different corners, and tried to read, which was the only employment possible. Lauderdale, for his part, in his listlessness and fatigue, went to rummage among some books which a former occupant had left, and brought from among them—the strangest choice for him to make—a French novel, a kind of production utterly unknown to him. The chances are, he had forgotten it was Sunday; for his Scotch prejudices, though he held them lightly in theory, still held him fast in practice. When, however, he had pored over it vaguely for half an hour (for reading French was a laborious amusement to the imperfectly instructed scholar), Colin was roused out of

studies which he, too, pursued with a very divided attention, by a sudden noise, and saw the little yellow volume spin through the air out of his friend's vigorous fingers, and drop ignominiously in a corner. "Me to be reading stuff like that!" said Lauderdale, with grim accents of self disgust; "and him maybe near to see what a fool is doing!" As he said this, he got up from his chair, and began to pace about the quiet, lonely room, violently endeavouring to recover the composure which he had not been able to preserve. Though he was older and stronger than the others, watching and grief had told upon his strength also; and, in the glory of the summer morning which blazed all round and about, the soul of this wayfaring man grew sick within him. Something like a sob sounded into the silence. "I'm no asking if he's happy," Lauderdale burst forth; "I cannot feel as if I would esteem him the same if he felt nothing but joy to get away. You're a' infidels and unbelievers alike, with your happiness and your heaven. I'm no saying that it's less than the supreme joy to see the face he hoped to see—but joy's no inconsistent with pain. Will you tell me the callant, having a heart as you know he had, can think of us mourning for him and no care? Dinna speak of such inhuman imaginations to me."

"No," said Colin, softly. "But worst of all would be to think he was here," the young man continued, after a pause, "unable to communicate with us anyhow, by whatsoever effort. Don't think so, Lauderdale; that is the most inhuman imagination of all."

"I'm no so clear of that," said the philosopher, subduing his hasty steps; "nae doubt there would be a pang in it, especially when there was information like that to bestow; but it's hard to tell, in our leemited condition, a' the capabilities of a soul. It might be a friend close by, and no yoursel', that put your best thought in your head, though you saw him not. I wouldna say that I would object to that. It's all a question of temperament, and, maybe, age," he continued, calming himself entirely down,

and taking a seat beside Colin in the window. "The like of you expects response, and has no conception of life without it; but the like of me can be content without response," said Colin's guardian; and then he regarded his companion with eyes in which the love was veiled by a grave mist of meditation. "I would not object to take the charge of you in such a manner," he said, slowly. "But it's awfu' easy to dream dreams,—if anything on this earth could but make a man *know*;"—and then there followed another pause. "He was awfu' pleased to teach," Lauderdale resumed, with an unsteady smile. "It's strange to think what should hinder him speaking now, when he has such news to tell. I never could make it out, for my part. Whiles my mind inclines to the thought that it must be a peaceable sleep that wraps them a' till the great day, which would account for the awfu' silence; but there's some things that go against that. This is what makes me most indignant at thae idiots with their spirit-rapping and gibberish. Does ony mortal with a heart within his bosom dare to think that, if Love doesna open their sealed lips, any power in the world can?" cried the philosopher, whose emotion again got beyond his control. He got up again, and resumed his melancholy march up and down the room. "It's an awfu' marvel, beyond my reach," he said, "when a word of communication would make a' the difference, why it's no permitted—if it were but to keep a heart from breaking here and there."

"Perhaps it is our own fault," said Colin; "perhaps flesh and blood shrinks more than we are aware of from such a possibility; and perhaps—" here the young man paused a little, "indeed, it is not perhaps. Does not God Himself choose to be our comforter?" said the youthful pre-destined priest; upon which the older and sadder man once more composed himself with a groan.

"Ay," said Lauderdale, "I can say nothing against that argument. I'm no denying it's the last and the greatest. I speak

the voice of a man's yearning—but I've no intention of contravening the truth. He's gone like many a one before him. You and me must bide our time. I'll say no more of Arthur. The best thing you can do is to read a chapter. If we canna hear of him direct, which is no to be hoped for, we can take as good a grip as possible of the Friend that stands between us. It's little use trying to forget—or trying no to think and inquire and question. There is but one thing in the world, so far as I can see, that a man can feel a kind of sure of. Callant, read a chapter," said Lauderdale, with a long sigh. He threw himself back, as he spoke, in the nearest chair, and Colin took his Bible dutifully to obey. The contrast between this request, expressed as any Scotch peasant would have expressed it, and the speculations which preceded it, did not startle Colin, and he had opened the book by instinct in the latter part of St. John's Gospel, when he was disturbed by the entrance of Alice, who came in softly from her room without any warning. Her long attendance on her brother had withdrawn the colour from her cheeks and the fulness from her figure so gradually, that it was only now in her mourning dress that her companions saw how pale and thin she had grown. Alice was not speculative, nor fanciful, nor addicted to undue exercise of the faculties of her own mind in any way. She was a dutiful woman, young and simple, and accepted God's will without inquiry or remonstrance. Though she had struggled long against the thought of Arthur's death, now that he *was* dead she recognized and submitted to the event which it was no longer possible to avert or change, with a tender and sweet resignation of which some women are capable. A more forlorn and desolate creature than Alice Meredith did not exist on the earth, to all ordinary appearance, at this moment; but, as she was not at all thinking of herself, that aspect of the case did not occur to her.

She came out of her room very softly, with a faint smile on

her face, holding some Prayer-books in her hands. Up to this sad day it had been their custom to read prayers together on the Sundays, being too far off Rome to make it practicable even for the stronger members of the party to go to church. Alice came up to Colin with her books in her hands—she said to him in a wistful whisper, "You will take his place," and pointed out to him silently the marks she had placed at the lessons and psalms. Then she knelt down between the two awed and astonished men, to say the familiar prayers which only a week ago Arthur himself had read with his dying voice. Though at times articulation was almost impossible to Colin, and Lauderdale breathed out of his deep chest an Amen which sounded like a groan, Alice did not falter in her profound and still devotions. She went over the well-known prayers word by word, with eye and voice stedfast and rapt in the duty which was at the same time a consolation. There are women of such sweet loyalty and submission of spirit, but neither Lauderdale nor Colin had met with them before. Perhaps a certain passiveness of intellect had to do with it, as well as Alice's steady English training and custom of self-suppression; but it made a wonderful impression upon the two who were now the sole companions and guardians of the friendless young woman, and gave her indeed for the moment an absolute empire over them, of which Alice was altogether unconscious, and of which, even had she known it, she could have made no further use. When the Morning Prayer was almost concluded it was she who indicated to Colin another mark in the Prayer-book, at the prayer for Christ's Church militant on earth; and they could even hear the whisper of her voice broken by an irrestrainable sob at the thanksgiving for all "Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear," which Colin read with agitation and faltering. When they rose from their knees, she turned from one to the other with her countenance for the first time disturbed. "You were very very good to him,"

she said, softly. "God will bless you for it," and so sank into sobbing and tears, which were not to be subdued any longer, yet were not passionate nor out of accordance with her docile looks. After that, Alice recovered her calm, and began to occupy herself with them as if she had been their mother. "Have you been out?" she said. "You must not stay in and make yourself ill." This was addressed specially to Colin. "Please go out and take a walk; it will do you a great deal of good. If it had not have been a great festa it would not have been so bad; but, if you go up to the Villa Conti, you will find nobody there. Go up behind the terrace, into the alleys where it is shady. There is one on the way to the Aldobrandini; you know it, Mr. Campbell. Oh go, please; it is such a beautiful day, it will do you good."

"And you?" said Colin, who felt in his heart an inclination to kneel to her as if she had been a queen.

"I shall stay at home to-day," said Alice. "I could not go out to-day; but I shall do very well. Sora Antonia will come in from mass presently. Oh, go out, please, and take a walk. Mr. Lauderdale, he will go if you tell him to go—you are both looking so pale."

"Come, Colin," said Lauderdale, "she shall have her pleasure done this day, at least, whatsoever she commands. If there was onything within my power or his—" said the philosopher, with a strange discord that sounded like tears in his voice; but Alice stopped him short.

"Oh yes," she said, softly, "it is very good of you to do it because I ask you. Mr. Campbell, you did not read the right lesson," she added, turning her worn face to Colin with a slight reproach.

"I read what I thought was better for us all, mourning as we are," said Colin, startled; upon which the sad little representative of law and order did her best to smile.

"I have always heard it said how wonderful it was how the lesson for the day always suited everybody's case," said Alice. "Arthur never would make any change for circumstances. He—he said it was as if God could ever be wanting," the faithful sister said, through her sobs; and then, again, put force upon herself:—"I shall be here when you come back," she said, with her faint smile; and so, like a little princess, sent them away. The two men went their way up the slope and through the little town, in their black coats, casting two tall, sombre shadows into the sunshine and gaiety of the bright piazza. There had been a procession that morning, and the rough pavement was strewed with sprigs of myrtle and box, and the air still retained a flavour of the candles, not quite obliterated by the whiff of incense which came from the open doors of the Cathedral, where even the heavy leathern curtain, generally suspended across the entrance, had been removed by reason of the crowd. People were kneeling even on the steps; peasants in their laced buskins, and Frascati women, made into conntesses or duchesses, at the least, by the long white veils which streamed to their feet. The windows were all hung with brilliant draperies in honour of the morning's procession and the afternoon's Tombola. It was one of the very chief of Italian holydays, a festal Sunday in May, the month of Mary. No wonder the two sad Protestant Scotchmen, with mourning in their dress and in their hearts, felt themselves grow sick and faint as they went dutifully to the gardens of the Villa Conti, as they had been commanded. They did not so much as exchange a word with each other till they had passed through all that sunshine and reached the identical alley, a close arcade, overarched and shut in by the dense foliage of ilex-trees, to which their little sovereign had directed them. There was not a soul there as she had prophesied. A tunnel scooped out of the damp, dewy soil could scarcely have been more absolutely shut in from the

sunshine, scarcely could have been stiller or cooler, or more withdrawn from the blazing noonday, with its noises and rejoicings, than this narrow sombre avenue. They strayed down its entire length, from one blue arch of daylight to the other, before they spoke; and then it was Lauderdale who broke the silence, as if his thoughts, generally so busy and so vagrant, had never got beyond Alice Meredith's last words.

"Another time, Colin," said the philosopher, "you'll no make ony changes in the lesson for the day. Whiles it's awfu' hard to put up with the conditions o' a leemited intellect; but whiles they're half divine. I'm no pretending to be reasonable. She kens no more about reason than—the angels, maybe—I admit it's a new development to me; but a woman like yon, callant, would keep a man awfu' steady in the course of his life."

"Yes," said Colin; and then with a strange premonition, for which he himself could not account, he added—"She would keep a man steady, as you say; but he would find little response in her—not that I regard her less respectfully, less reverentially than you do, Lauderdale," he went on, hurriedly, "but—"

"It wasna your opinion I was asking for," said the philosopher somewhat morosely. "She's like none of the women you and me ken. I'm doubtful in my own mind whether that dutiful and obedient spirit has ever been our ideal in our country. Intellect's a grand gift, callant, baith to man and woman; but you'll no fly in my face and assert that it's more than second best."

"I am not up to argument to-day," said Colin; and they walked back again the whole length of the avenue in silence. Perhaps a certain irritability, born of their mutual grief, was at the bottom of this momentary difference; but somehow, in the stillness, in the subdued leafy shade, which at first sight had been so congenial to his feelings, an indescribable shadow stole over Colin's mind—a kind of indistinct fear and reluctance,

which took no definite shape, but only crept over him like a mist over the face of the sun. His heart was profoundly touched at once by the grief and by the self command of Alice, and by her utter helplessness and dependence upon himself and his friend. Never before had he been so attracted towards her, nor felt so much that dangerous softening sentiment of pity and admiration, which leads to love. And yet—; the two walked back silently under the dark ilex-trees, and across the piazza, which was now thronged with a gay and many-coloured crowd. The brighter the scene grew around them, the more they shut themselves up in their own silence and sorrow, as was natural; and Colin at length began to recognise a new element, which filled him with vague uneasiness—an element not in the least new to the perplexed cogitations of his guardian and anxious friend.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN they entered the *salone* on their return, the first object which met their eyes was the stately figure of Sora Antonia in full holiday costume, lately returned from mass. She had still her fan and her rosary depending from her wrist—adjuncts almost equally necessary to devotion, as that is understood at Frascati—and was still arrayed in the full splendours of the veil, which, fastened over her hair, fell almost to her feet behind, and gave grace and dignity to her tall and stately person. Sora Antonia was a dependent of the family Savvelli; scarcely a servant, though she had once belonged to the prince's household. She had charge of the palace at Frascati, which was never occupied except by a solitary ecclesiastic, the prince's brother, for whom the first-floor was kept sacred. Even this sanctity, however, was sometimes invaded when a good chance offered of letting the *piano nobile* to some rich foreigner, which was the fate of all the other apartments in the house. Sora Antonia had charge of all the interests of the Savvelli in their deserted mansion. When the tenants did any damage she made careful note of it, and did not in any respect neglect the interests of her master; nor was she inconsiderate of her own, but regarded it as a natural duty, when it proved expedient, to make a little money out of the Forestieri. "They give one trouble enough, the blessed Madonna knows," the good woman said piously. But, notwithstanding these prudent cares, Sora Antonia was not only a very sensible woman according to her lights, but had a heart, and understood her duty to her neighbours. She made her salutations to the two friends when they

entered with equal suavity, but addressed her explanations to Colin, who was not only her favourite in right of his youth and good looks, but made out her meaning more easily than his companion. The crisis was an important one, and Sora Antonia conducted herself accordingly; as soon as she had made her salutations she resumed her seat, which in itself was an act requiring explanation, especially as the table had been already arranged for dinner, and this was the last day in the world on which the strangers were likely to desire society. Sora Antonia took matters with a high hand, and in case of opposition secured for herself at least the first word.

"Pardon, caro Signore mio," she said, "you are surprised to find me here. Very well; I am sorry to incommode the gentlemen, but I have to do my duty. The Signorina is very young, and she has no one to take care of her. The Signori are very good, very excellent, and kind. Ah yes, I know it—never was there such devotion to the poor sick friend; nevertheless, the Signori are but men, *senza complimenti*, and I am a woman who has been married and had children of my own, and know my duty. Until some proper person comes to take charge of the poor dear young lady, the Signori will pardon me, but I must remain here."

"Does the Signorina wish it?" asked Colin, with wondering looks, for the idea of another protector for Alice confounded him, he scarcely knew why.

"The Signorina is not much more than a child," said Sora Antonia, loftily. "Besides, she has not been brought up like an Italian young lady, to know what is proper. Poverina! she does not understand anything about it; but the Signori will excuse me—I know my duty, and that is enough."

"Oh yes, certainly," said Colin; "but then, in England, as you say, we have different ideas; and if the Signorina does not wish——"

Here, however, he was interrupted by Lauderdale, who, having tardily apprehended the purport of Sora Antonia's communication, took it upon himself to make instant response in the best Italian he could muster. "*Avete molto buono, molto buono!*" cried Lauderdale, intending to say that she was very kind, and that he highly approved, though a chronic confusion in his mind, as to which was which of the auxiliary verbs, made his meaning cloudy. "*Grazie, Abbiamo contento! Grazie,*" he added, with a little excitement and enthusiasm. Though he had used the wrong verb, Sora Antonia graciously comprehended his meaning. She was used to such little eccentricities of diction on the part of the Forestieri. She bowed her stately head to him with a look of approbation; and it would be vain to deny that the sense of having thus expressed himself clearly and eloquently in a foreign language conveyed a certain satisfaction to the mind of the philosopher.

"Bravo! The Signore will talk very well if he perseveres," said Sora Antonia, graciously; "not to say that his Excellency is a man of experience, and perceives the justice of what I but propose. No doubt, it will occupy a great deal of my time, but the other Forestieri have not arrived yet, and how can one expect the Madonna Santissima and the blessed St. Antonio to take so much trouble in one's concerns if one will not exert one's self a little for one's fellow-creatures? As the Signorina has not left her room yet, I will take away the inconvenience[1] for a few minutes. Scusa Signori," said Sora Antonia, and she went away with stately bearing and firm steps which resounded through the house, to take off her veil and put aside her rosary. She had seated herself again in her indoor aspect, with the "Garden of the Soul" in her hand, before Alice came into the room; and, without doubt, she made a striking addition to the

[1] "Levo l'incomodo," a homely expression of Italian politeness on leaving a room.

party. She was a Frascati woman born, and her costume consequently, was perfect—a costume not so brilliant in any of its details as that scarlet jacket of Albano, which is the most generally known of contadina dresses; but not less calculated to do justice to the ample bust and stately head of the Roman peasant. The dress itself, the actual gown, in this as in other Italian costumes, was an indifferent matter. The important particulars were the long and delicate apron of embroidered muslin, the *busto* made of rich brocade and shaped to the exact Frascati model, and the large, soft, snowy kerchief with embroidered corners, which covered her full shoulders—not to speak of the long heavy gold ear-rings and coral necklace which completed and enriched the dress. She sat apart and contemplated, if not the "Garden of the Soul," at least the little pictures in borders of lace-paper which were placed thickly between the leaves, while the melancholy meal was eaten at the table—for Sora Antonia had *educazione*, and had not come to intrude upon the privacy of her lodgers. Alice, for her part, made no remark upon the presence of this new guardian; she accepted it as she accepted everything else, as a matter of course, without even showing any painful sense of the circumstances which in Sora Antonia's opinion made this last precaution necessary. Her two companions, the only friends she seemed to have in the world, bore vicariously on her account the pain of such a visible reminder that she was here in a false position and had no legitimate protector; but Alice had not yet awaked to any such sense on her own behalf. She took her place at the table and tried to swallow a morsel, and interested herself in the appetite of the others as if she had been their mother. "Try to eat something; it will make you ill if you do not," poor Alice said, in the abstraction and dead calm of her grief. Her own feeling was that she had been lifted far away from them into an atmosphere of age and distance and a kind of

sad superiority; and to minister to some one was the grand condition under which Alice Meredith lived. As to the personal suffering, which was confined to herself, that did not so much matter; she had not been used to much sympathy, and it did not occur to her to look for it. Consequently, the only natural business which remained to her was to take a motherly charge of her two companions, and urge them to eat.

"You are not to mind me," she said, with an attempt at a smile, after dinner. "This is Sunday, to be sure; but, after to-day, you are just to go on as you used to do, and never mind. Thank you, I should like it better. I shall always be here, you know, when you come back from Rome, or wherever you wish to go. But you must not mind for me."

Lauderdale and Colin exchanged looks almost without being aware of it. "But you would like—somebody to be sent for—or something done?" said Lauderdale. He was a great deal more confused in having to suggest this than Alice was, who kept looking at him, her eyes dilated with weariness and tears, yet soft and clear as the eyes of a child. He could not say to her, in so many words, "It is impossible for you to remain with us." All he could do was to falter and hesitate, and grow confused, under the limpid, sorrowful look which she bent upon him from the distant heaven of her resignation and innocence. "You would like your friends—somebody to be written to," said Lauderdale; and then, afraid to have given her pain by the suggestion, went on hurriedly: "I'm old enough to be your father, and no a thought in my mind but to do you service," he said. "Tell me what you would like best. Colin, thank God! is strong, and has little need of me. I'll take you home, or do whatever you please; for I'm old enough to be your father, my poor bairn!" said the tender-hearted philosopher, and drew near to her, and put out his hand with an impulse of pitiful and protecting kindness which touched the heart of Alice, and yet filled her with

momentary surprise. She, on her own side, was roused a little, not to think of herself, but to remember what appeared to her a duty unfulfilled.

"Oh, Mr. Lauderdale, Arthur said I might tell you," said Alice. "Papa! you heard what he said about papa? I ought to write and tell him what has happened. Perhaps I ought to tell you from the beginning," she continued, after composing herself a little. "We left home without his consent—indeed, he did not know. For dear Arthur," said the poor girl, turning her appealing eyes from one to the other, "could not approve of his ways. He did something that Arthur thought was wrong. I cannot tell you about it," said Alice through her tears; "it did not make so much difference to me. I think I ought to write and tell him, and that Arthur forgave him at the last. Oh, tell me, please, what do you think I should do?"

"If you would like to go home, I'll take you home," said Lauderdale. "He did not mean ony harm, poor callant, but he's left an awfu' burden on you."

"Go home!" said Alice, with a slight shudder. "Do you think I ought—do you think I must? I do not care for myself; but Mrs. Meredith, you know—" she added with a momentary blush; and then the friends began to perceive another unforeseen lion in the way.

"Out of my own head," said Lauderdale, who took the whole charge of this business on himself, and would not permit Colin to interfere, "I wrote your father a kind of a letter. If you are able to hear the—the event—which has left us a' mourning—named in common words, I'll read you what I have written. Poor bairn, you're awfu' young and awfu' tender to have such affairs in hand! Are you sure you are able to bear it, and can listen to what I have said?"

"Ah, I have borne it," said poor Alice. "I cannot deceive myself, nor think Arthur is still here. What does it matter then

about saying it? Oh, yes, I can bear anything—there is only me to be hurt now, and it doesn't matter. It was very kind of you to write. I should like to know what you have said."

Colin, who could do nothing else for her, put forward the arm-chair with the cushions towards the table, and Sora Antonia put down the "Garden of the Soul" and drew a little nearer with her heavy, firm step, which shook the house. She comprehended that something was going on which would tax the Signorina's strength, and brought her solid, steady succour to be in readiness. The pale little girl turned and smiled upon them both, as she took the chair Colin had brought her. She was herself quite steady in her weakness and grief and loneliness. Sora Antonia was not wanted there; and Colin drew her aside to the window, where she told him all about the fireworks that were to be in the evening, and her hopes that after a while the Signorina would be able to "distract herself" a little and recover her spirits; to which Colin assented dutifully, watching from where he stood the pale looks of the friendless young woman—friendless beyond disguise or possible self-deception, with a stepmother whom she blushed to mention reigning in her father's house. Colin's thoughts were many and tumultuous as he stood behind in the window, watching Alice and listening to Sora Antonia's description of the fireworks. Was it possible that perhaps his duty to his neighbour required from him the most costly of all offerings, the rashest of all possible actions? He stood behind, growing more and more excited in the utter quiet. The thought that had dawned upon him under the ilex trees came nearer and grew more familiar, and as he looked at it he seemed to recognise all that visible machinery of Providence bringing about the great event which youth decides upon so easily. While this vision grew before his mind, Alice was wiping off the tears which obliterated Lauderdale's letter even to her patient eyes; for, docile and dutiful as she was, it was yet terrible to read in calm

distinct words, which put the matter beyond all doubt, the announcement of "what had happened." This is what Lauderdale had said:—

"SIR,—It is a great grief to me to inform you of an event for which I have no way of knowing whether you are prepared or not. Your son, Arthur Meredith, has been living here for the last three months in declining health, and on Thursday last died in great comfort and constancy of mind. It is not for me, a stranger, to offer vain words of consolation, but his end was such as any man might be well content to have, and he entered upon his new life joyfully, without any shadow on his mind. As far as love and friendship could soothe the sufferings that were inevitable, he had both; for his sister never left his bedside, and myself and my friend Colin Campbell were with him constantly, to his satisfaction. His sister remains under our care. I who write am no longer a young man, and know what is due to a young creature of her tender years; so that you may satisfy yourself she is safe until such time as you can communicate with me, which I will look for as soon as a reply is practicable, and in the meantime remain,

"Your son's faithful friend and mourner,

"W. LAUDERDALE."

Alice lingered over this letter, reading it, and crying, and whispering to Lauderdale a long time, as Colin thought. She found it easier, somehow, to tell her story fully to the elder man. She told him that Mrs. Meredith had "come home suddenly," which was her gentle version of a sad domestic history,—that nobody had known of her father's second marriage until the stepmother arrived, without any warning, with a train of children. Alice's mild words did not give Lauderdale any very lively picture of the dismay of the household at the unlooked-for

apparition, but he understood enough to condemn Arthur less severely than he had been disposed to do. This sudden catastrophe had happened just after the other misery of the bank failure, which had ruined so many; and poor Meredith had no alternative between leaving his sister to the tender mercies of an underbred and possibly disreputable stepmother, or bringing her with him when he retired to die; and Alice, though she still cried for "poor papa," recoiled a little from the conclusion of Lauderdale's letter. "I have enough to live upon," she said, softly, with an appealing glance at her companion. "If you were to say that I was quite safe, would not that be enough?" and it was very hard for Lauderdale to convince her that her father's judgment must be appealed to in such a matter. When she saw he was not to be moved on this point, she sighed and submitted; but it was clearly apparent that as yet, occupied as she was by her grief, the idea that her situation here was embarrassing to her companions or unsuitable for herself had not occurred to Alice. When she retired, under the escort of Sora Antonia, the two friends had a consultation over this perplexing matter; and Lauderdale's sketch—filled in, perhaps, a little from his imagination—of the home she had left, plunged Colin into deeper and deeper thought. "No doubt he'll send some answer," the philosopher said. "He may not be worthy to have the charge of her, but he's aye her father. It's hard to ken whether it's better or worse that she should be so unconscious of anything embarrassing in her position; which is a' the more wonderful, as she's a real honest woman, and no way intellectual nor exalted. You and me, Colin," said Lauderdale, looking up in his young companion's face, "must take good care that she does not find it out from us."

"Of course," said Colin, with involuntary testiness; "but I do not see what her father has to do with it," continued the young man. "She cannot possibly return to such a home."

"Her father is the best judge of that," said Lauderdale; "she canna remain with you and me."

And there the conversation dropped—but not the subject. Colin was not in love with Alice; he had, indeed, vague but bright in the clouds before him, an altogether different ideal woman; and his heart was in the career which he again saw opening before him—the life in which he meant to serve God and his country, and which at the present moment would admit of no rashly formed ties. Was it in consequence of these hindrances that this new thing loomed so large before Colin's inexperienced eyes? If he had longed for it with youthful passion, he would have put force on himself and restrained his longing; but the temptation took another shape. It was as if a maiden knight at the outset of his career had been tempted to pass by a helpless creature and leave her wrongs unredressed. The young Bayard could do anything but this.

CHAPTER XI.

In the meantime at least a fortnight must pass before they could expect an answer to Lauderdale's letter. During that time they returned to all their old habits, with the strange and melancholy difference, that Arthur, once the centre of all, was no longer there. Every day of this time increased the development of Colin's new thoughts, until the unknown father of Alice had grown, in his eyes, into a cruel and profligate tyrant, ready to drag his daughter home and plunge her into depraved society, without any regard for either her happiness or her honour. Colin had, indeed, in his own mind, in strictest privacy and seclusion of thought, indited an imaginary letter, eloquent with youthful indignation, to inform this unworthy parent that his deserted daughter had found a better protector; but he was very silent about these cogitations of his, and did not share them even with Lauderdale. And there were moments when Colin felt the seriousness of the position, and thought it very hard that such a necessity should meet him in the face at the beginning of his career. Sometimes in the sudden darkening, out of the rosy clouds which hung over the Campagna, the face of the impossible woman, the ideal creature—she who could have divined the thoughts in his mind and the movements in his heart before they came into being, would glance suddenly out upon him for an instant, and then disappear, waving a shadowy farewell, and leaving in his mind a strange blank, which the sight of Alice rather increased than removed. That ineffable mate and companion was never to be his, the young

man thought. True, he had never met her, nor come upon any trace of her footsteps, for Matty Frankland at her best never could have been she. But yet, as long as he was unbound by other tie or affection, this vision was the "not impossible She" to Colin as to all men; and this he had to give up—for Alice, dutiful and sweet Alice, forsaken by all friends and yet so steadfast in her gentle self-possession, whom it was not in the heart of man to be otherwise than tender of; she who had need of him, and whom his very nature bound him to protect and cherish—was not that woman. At other moments he thought of his own life, for which still so much training was necessary, and which he should have entered in the full freedom of his youth; and was profoundly aware of the incumbered and helpless trim in which he must go into the battle, obliged to take thought not of his work only, and the best means of doing it, but of those cares of living which lie so lightly on a young man alone.

There may be some of Colin's friends who will think the less of him for this struggle in his mind; and there may be many who will think with justice that, unless he could have offered love to Alice, he had no right to offer her himself and his life—an opinion in which his historian fully agrees. But then this gift, though less than the best, was a long way superior to anything else which, at the present moment, was likely to be offered to the friendless girl. If he could have laid at her feet the full heart, which is the only true offering under such circumstances, the chances are that Alice, in her simplicity and gentleness, would have been sadly puzzled what to do with that passionate and ungovernable thing. What he really could offer her—affection, tenderness, protection—was clearly comprehensible to her. She had no other idea of love than was included in those attributes and phases of it. These considerations justified Colin in the step which he contemplated—

or rather in the step which he did not contemplate, but felt to be necessary and incumbent upon him. It sometimes occurred to him how—if he had been prudent and taken Lauderdale's advice, and eschewed at the beginning that close connexion with Meredith and his sister, which he had entered into with his eyes open, and with a consciousness even that it might affect his life—this embarrassing situation might never have come into being; and then he smiled to himself, with youthful superiority, contemplating what seemed so plainly the meaning of Providence, and asking himself how he, by a momentary exercise of his own will, could have overthrown that distinct celestial intention? On the whole, it was comforting to think that everything had been arranged beforehand by agencies so very clear and traceable; and with this conclusion of the argument he left off, as near contented as possible, and not indisposed to enjoy the advantages which were palpably before him; for, though they were not the eyes he had dreamed of, there was a sweetness very well worthy of close study in Alice Meredith's eyes.

The days passed very quietly in this time of suspense. The society of the two strangers, who were more to her in her sorrow than all her kindred, supported the lonely girl more than she was aware of—more than any one could have believed. They were absent during the greater part of the day, and left her unmolested to the tears that would come, notwithstanding all her patience; and they returned to her in the evening with attention and cares to which she had never been accustomed, devoting two original and powerful minds, of an order at once higher and more homely than any which she had ever encountered, to her amusement and consolation. Alice had never known before what it was to have ordinary life and daily occurrences brightened by the thick-coming fancies, the tender play of word and thought, which now surrounded her. She

had heard clever talk afar off, "in society," and been awe-stricken by the sound of it; and she had heard Arthur and his friends uttering much fine-sounding language upon subjects not generally in her way; but she was utterly unused to that action of uncommon minds upon common things which gives so much charm to the ordinary intercourse of life. All they could think of to lighten the atmosphere of the house in which she sat in her deep mourning, absorbed for hours together in those thoughts of the dead to which her needlework afforded little relief, they did with devotion, suspending their own talk and occupations to occupy themselves with her. Colin read *In Memoriam* to her till her heart melted and relieved itself in sweet abundant tears; and Lauderdale talked and told her many a homely history of that common course of humanity, full of sorrows sorer than her own, which fills young minds with awe. Between them they roused Alice to a higher platform, a different atmosphere, than she had known before; and she raised herself up after them with a half-bewildered sense of elevation, not understanding how it was; and so the long days which were so hard, and which nothing in the world could save from being hard, brightened towards the end, not certainly into anything that could be called pleasure, but into a sad expansion and elevation of heart, in which faintly appeared those beginnings of profound and deep happiness which are not incompatible with grief, and yet are stronger and more inspiring than joy.

While this was going on, unconsciously to any one concerned, Sora Antonia, in her white kerchief and apron, sometimes knitting, sometimes with her distaff like a buxom Fate, sat and twisted her thread and turned her spindle a little behind yet not out of reach, keeping a wary eye upon her charge. She too interposed, sometimes with her own comments upon life and things in general, and took part in the conversation; and, whether it was that Sora Antonia's mind was really of a

superior order, or that the stately Roman speech threw a refining colour upon her narratives, it is certain that the interpellations of the Italian peasant fell without any sensible derogation into the strain of lofty yet familiar talk which was meant to wean Alice from her special grief. Sora Antonia told them of the other Forestieri who had lived like themselves in the Savelli palace; who had come for health and yet had died, leaving the saddest mourners—helpless widows and little children, heart-broken fathers and mothers, perhaps the least consolable of all. Life was such, she said solemnly, bowing her stately head. She herself, of a hardy race, and strong, as the Signori saw, had not she buried her children, for whom she would have gladly died? But the good God had not permitted her to die. Alice cried silently as she heard all this; she kissed Sora Antonia, who, for her part, had outlived her tears, and with a natural impulse turned to Colin, who was young, and in whose heart, as in her own, there must live a natural protest against this awful necessity of separation and misery; and thus it came to be Colin's turn to interpose, and he came on the field once more with *In memoriam*, and with other poems which were sweet to hear, and soothed her even when she only partially entered into their meaning. A woman has an advantage under such circumstances. By means of her sympathy and gratitude, and the still deeper feeling which grew unconsciously in her heart towards him who read, she came to believe that she too understood and appreciated what was to him so clear and so touching. A kind of spiritual magnetism worked upon Alice, and, to all visible appearance, expanded and enlarged her mind. It was not that her intellect itself grew, or that she understood all the beautiful imaginations, all the tender philosophies thus unfolded to her; but she was united in a singular union of affectionate companionship with those who did understand, and even to herself she appeared able to see, if not with her own

eyes, at least with theirs, the new beauties and solemnities of which she had not dreamt before.

This strange process went on day by day without any one being aware of it; and even Lauderdale had almost forgotten that their guardianship of Alice was only for the moment, and that the state of affairs altogether was provisionary and could not possibly continue, when an answer reached him to his letter. He was alone when he received it, and all that evening said nothing on the subject until Alice had retired with her watchful attendant; then, without a word of comment, he put it into Colin's hand. It was written in a stilted hand, like that of one unaccustomed to writing, and was not quite irreproachable even in its spelling. This was what Lauderdale's correspondent said:—

"SIR,—Your letter has had such a bad effect upon the health of my dear husband, that I beg you won't trouble him with any more such communications. If it's meant to get money, that's vain—for neither him nor me knows anything about the friends Arthur may have picked up. If he had stayed at home he would have received every attention. As for his ungrateful sister, I won't have anything to say to her. Mr. Meredith is very ill, and, for anything I know, may never rise from a bed of sickness, where he has been thrown by hearing this news so sudden; but I take upon me to let her know as he will have nothing to say to one that could behave so badly as she has done. I am always for making friends, but she knows she cannot expect much kindness from me after all that has happened. She has money enough to live on, and she can do as she pleases. Considering what her ingratitude has brought her dear father to, and that I may be left alone to manage everything before many days are past, you will please to consider that here is an end of it, and not write any more begging letters to me.

"JULIA MEREDITH."

This communication Colin read with a beating heart. It was so different from what he expected, and left him so free to carry out the dawning resolution which he had imagined himself executing in the face of tyrannical resistance, that he felt at first like a man who has been straining hard at a rope and is suddenly thrown down by the instantaneous stoppage of the pressure on the other side. When he had picked himself up, the facts of the case rushed on him distinct and unmistakeable. The time had now come when the lost and friendless maiden stood in the path of the true knight. Was he to leave her there to fight her way in the hard world by herself, without defence or protection, because, sweet and fair and pure as she was, she was not the lady of his dreams? He made up his mind at once with a thrill of generous warmth; but at the same time felt himself saying for ever and ever farewell to that ideal lady who henceforward, in earth or heaven, could never be his. All this passed through his mind while he was looking at the letter which already his rapid eye had read and his mind comprehended. "So there is an end of your hopes," said Colin. "Now we are the only friends she has in the world—as I have always thought."

"Softly," said Lauderdale. "Callants like you aye run away with the half of an idea. This is an ignorant woman's letter, that is glad to get rid of her. The father will mend, and then he'll take her out of our hands."

"He shall do nothing of the kind," said Colin, hotly. "You speak as if she was a piece of furniture; I look upon her as a sacred charge. We are responsible to Meredith for his sister's comfort and—happiness," said the young man, who during this conversation preferred not to meet his companion's eye.

"Ay!" said Lauderdale drily, "that's an awfu' charge for the like of you and me. It's more that I ever calculated on, Colin. To see her safe home, and in the hands of her friends——"

"Lauderdale, do not be so heartless; cannot you see that she has no friends?" cried Colin; "not a protector in the world except——"

"Callant, dinna deceive yourself," said Lauderdale; "it's no a matter for hasty judgment; we have nae right to pass sentence on a man's character. He's her father, and it's her duty to obey him. I'm no heeding about that silly woman's letter. Mr. Meredith will mend. I'm here to take care of you," said Colin's guardian. "Colin, hold your peace. You're no to do for a moment's excitement, for pity and ruth and your own tender heart, what you may regret all your life. Sit down and keep still. You are only a callant, too young to take burdens on yourself; there is but one way that the like of you can protect the like of her—and that is no to be thought of, as you consented with your own mouth."

"I am aware of that," said Colin, who had risen up in his excitement. "There is but one way. Matters have changed since we spoke of it first."

"I would like to know how far they have changed," said Lauderdale. "Colin, take heed to what I say; if it's love I'll no speak a word; I may disapprove a' the circumstances, and find fault with every step ye take; but if it's love——"

"Hush!" said Colin, standing upright, and meeting his friend's eye; "if it should happen to be my future wife we are speaking of, my feelings towards her are not to be discussed with any man in the world."

They looked at each other thus for a moment, the one anxious and scrutinizing, the other facing him with blank brightness, and a smile which afforded no information. Perhaps Lauderdale understood all that was implied in that blank; at all events, his own delicate sense of honour could not refuse to admit Colin's plea. He turned away, shaking his head, and groaning privately under his breath; while Colin, struck with compunction, having

shut himself up for an instant, unfolded again, that crisis being over, with all the happy grace of apology natural to his disposition. "You are not 'any man in the world,'" he said with a short laugh, which implied emotion. "Forgive me, Lauderdale; and now you know very well what I am going to do."

"Oh ay, I ken what you are going to do; I kent three months ago, for that matter," said the philosopher. "A man acts no from circumstances, as is generally supposed, but from his ain nature." When he had given forth this oracular utterance, Lauderdale went straight off to his room without exchanging another word with Colin. He was satisfied to a certain extent with such a mate for his friend, and belonged to too lowly a level of society to give profound importance to the inexpediency of early marriages—and he was fond of Alice, and admired her sweet looks and sweet ways, and respected her self-command and patience; nevertheless, he too sighed, and recognised the departure of the ideal woman, who to him as little as to Colin resembled Alice;—and thus it was understood between them how it was to be.

All this, it may be imagined, was little compatible with that reverential regard for womankind in general which both the friends entertained, and evidenced a security in respect to Alice's inclinations which was not altogether complimentary to her. And yet it was highly complimentary in a sense; for their security arose from their appreciation of the spotless unawakened heart with which they had to do. If Colin entertained little doubt of being accepted when he made his proposal, it was not because he had an overweening idea of himself, or imagined Alice "in love" with him according to the vulgar expression. A certain chivalrous, primitive sense of righteous and natural necessity was in his confidence. The forlorn maiden, knowing the knight to be honest and true, would accept his protection loyally and simply, without bewildering herself with dreams of

choice where no choice was; and having accepted would love and cleave as was her nature. To be sure there were types of woman less acquiescent; and we have already said that Alice did not bear the features of that ideal of which Colin had dreamed; but such was the explanation of his confidence. Alice showed little distress when she saw her stepmother's letter except on account of her father's illness; though even that seemed rather consolatory to her than otherwise, as a proof of his love for Arthur. As for Mrs. Meredith's refusal to interfere on her behalf, she was clearly relieved by the intimation; and things went on as before for another week or two, until Sora Antonia, who had now other tenants arriving and many occupations in hand, began to murmur a little over the watch which she would not relinquish. "Is it thus young ladies are left in England?" she asked, with a little indignation, "without any one to take care of them except the Signori, who, though amiable and excellent, are only men? or when may the lady be expected from England who is to take charge of the Signorina?" It was after this question had been put to him with some force one evening, that Colin proposed to Alice, who was beginning to lift her head again like a flower after a storm, and to show symptoms of awaking from the first heaviness of grief, to go out with him and visit those ilex avenues, which had now so many associations for the strangers. She went with a faint sense of pleasure in her heart through the slanting sunshine, looking wistfully through her black veil at the many cheerful groups on the way, and clinging to Colin's arm when a kind neighbour spoke to her in pity and condolence. She put up her veil when they came to the favourite avenue, where Lauderdale and Colin walked so often. Nothing could be more silent, more cool and secluded than this verdant cloister, where, with the sunshine still blazing everywhere around, the shade and quiet were profound and unbroken. They walked once or twice up and down, remarking now and then upon the

curious network of branches, which, out of reach of the sun, were all bare and stripped of their foliage—and upon the blue blaze of daylight at either opening, where the low arch of dark verdure framed in a span of brilliant Italian sky. Then they both became silent, and grew conscious of it; and it was at that moment, just as Alice for the first time began to remember the privileges and penalties of her womanhood, that Colin spoke,—

"I brought you here to speak to you," he said. "I have a great deal to say. That letter that Lauderdale showed you did not grieve you, did it? You must tell me frankly. Arthur made me one of your guardians, and, whatever you may decide upon, that is a sacred bond."

"Yes, oh yes," said Alice, with tears, "I know how kind you both are. No, it did not grieve me, except about papa. I was rather glad, if I may say so, that she did not send for me home. It is not—a—home—like what it used to be," said Alice; and then, perhaps because something in Colin's looks had advertised her of what was coming; perhaps because of the awakening sense of her position sprang up in a moment, after long torpor—a sudden change came upon her face. "I have given you a great deal of trouble," she said; "I am like somebody who has had a terrible fall—as soon as I come to myself I will go away. It is very wrong of me to detain you here."

"You are not detaining us," said Colin, who, notwithstanding, was a little startled and alarmed; "and you must not talk of going away. Where would you go? Are not we your friends —the friends you know best in Italy? You must not *think* of going away."

But even these very words thus repeated acted like an awakening spell upon Alice. "I cannot tell what I have been thinking of," she said. "I suppose it is staying indoors and forgetting everything. I do not seem to know even how long it is. Oh yes, you are my kindest friends. Nobody ever was so good to

me; but, then, you are only—gentlemen!" said Alice, suddenly withdrawing her hand from Colin's arm, and blushing over all her pallid face. "Ah! I see now how stupid I have been to put off so long. And I am sure I must have detained you here."

"No," said Colin, "do not say so; but I have something more to say to you. You are too young and too delicate to face the world alone, and your people at home are not going to claim you. I am a poor man now, and I never can be rich, but I would protect you and support you if you would have me. Will you trust me to take care of you, Alice, not for this moment, but always? I think it would be the best thing for us both."

"Mr. Campbell, I don't understand you," said Alice, trembling and casting a glance up at him of wistful surprise and uncertainty. There was an eager, timid inquiry in her eyes beside the bewilderment. She seemed to say, "What is it you mean? Is *that* what you mean?" and Colin answered by taking her hand again and drawing it through his arm.

"Whether you will have me or not," he said, "there is always the bond between us which Arthur has made sacred, and you must lean on me all the same. I think you will see what I mean if you consider it. There is only one way that I can be your true protector and rdian, and that is if you will consent to marry me, Alice. Will you? You know I have nothing to offer you; but I can work for you, and take care of you, and with me you would not be alone."

It was a strange way of putting it, certainly—very different from what Colin had intended to say, strangely different from the love-tale that had glided through his imagination by times since he became a man; but he was very earnest and sincere in what he said, and the innocent girl beside him was no critic in such matters. She trembled more and more, but she leaned upon him and heard him out with anxious attention. When he

had ended, there was a pause, during which Colin, who had not hitherto been doubtful, began himself to feel anxious; and then Alice once more gave a wistful, inquiring look at his face.

"Don't be angry with me," she said; "it is so hard to know what to answer. If you would tell me one thing quite truly and frankly—Would it not do you a great deal of harm if this was to happen as you say?——"

"No," said Colin. When he said the word he could not help remembering, in spite of himself, the change it would make in his young prospects, but the result was only that he repeated his negative with more warmth. "It can do me only good," said Colin, yielding to the natural temptations of the moment, "and I think I might do something for your happiness too. It is for you to decide—do not decide against me, Alice," said the young man; "I cannot part with you now."

"Ah!—" said Alice with a long breath. "If it only would not do you any harm," she added a moment after, once more with that inquiring look. The inquiry was one which could be answered but in one way, and Colin was not a man to remain unmoved by the wistful, sweet eyes thus raised to him, and by the tender dependence of the clinging arm. He set her doubts at rest almost as eloquently, and quite as warmly, as if she had indeed been that woman who had disappeared among the clouds for ever; and led her home to Sora Antonia with a fond care, which was very sweet to the forlorn little maiden, and not irksome by any means to the magnanimous knight. Thus the decisive step was taken in obedience to the necessities of the position, and the arrangements (as Colin had decided upon them) of Providence. When he met Lauderdale and informed him of the new event, the young man looked flushed and happy, as was natural in the circumstances, and disposed of all the objections of prudence with great facility and satisfaction to himself. It was a moonlight night, and Colin and his friend went out to the

loggia on the roof of the house, and plunged into a sea of discussion, through which the young lover steered triumphantly the frailest bark of argument that ever held water. But, when the talk was over, and Colin, before he followed Lauderdale downstairs, turned round to take a parting look at the Campagna, which lay under them like a great map in the moonlight, the old apparition looked out once more from the clouds, pale and distant, and again seemed to wave to him a shadowy farewell. "Farewell! farewell! not in heaven nor in earth shall you ever find me," sighed the woman of Colin's imagination, dispersing into thin white mists and specks of clouds; and the young man went to rest with a vague sense of loss in his heart. The sleep of Alice was sweeter than that of Colin on this first night of their betrothal; but at that one period of existence, it often happens that the woman, for once in her life, has the advantage. And thus it was that the event, foreseen by Lauderdale on board the steamer at the beginning of their acquaintance, actually came to pass.

CHAPTER XII.

THIS important decision, when at last finally settled, necessitated other steps more embarrassing and difficult than anything that could be discussed in the ilex avenue. Even Sora Antonia's protection ceased to be altogether satisfactory to the suddenly-awakened mind of Alice, who at the same time was so unaccustomed to think or act for herself that she knew not what to do in the emergency. If Colin had been the kind of man who would have decided for her at once, and indicated what he thought she ought to do, Alice was the kind of woman to act steadily and bravely upon the indication. But, unfortunately, Colin did not understand how to dictate to a woman, having known most intimately of all womankind his mother, who was treated after an altogether different fashion; and Lauderdale, though sufficiently aware of the embarrassing nature of their position, belonged, notwithstanding his natural refinement, to a class which sets no great store by punctilio. Now that everything was settled between the "young folk," Alice's unprotected state did not distress him so much as formerly. The marriage, which must take place immediately, was already in his eyes a sufficient shelter for the solitary girl; and the indecorum of the whole business no longer occurred to him. As for Colin, he, as was natural, regarded with a certain excitement the strange step he was about to take, not knowing what anybody would think of it, nor how he was to live with his bride, nor what influence an act so unsuitable to his circumstances would have upon his rospects and position. It was of a piece with the rashness and

visionary character of the whole transaction, that Alice's money, which she had herself recurred to as "enough to live upon," never entered into the calculations of the young man who was going to marry on his scholarship, without being at all convinced in his own mind that his scholarship could be held by a married man. A married man!—the title had an absurd sound as applied to himself, even in his own ears. He was just over one-and-twenty, and had not a penny in the world. But these considerations, after all, had not half so much effect upon him as the thought of his mother's grave countenance when she should read his next letter, and the displeasure of his father, who perhaps already regarded with a not altogether satisfied eye the spectacle of a son of his gone abroad for his health. If Colin could but have made sure of the nature of the reception he was likely to meet with at Ramore, prudential considerations of any other character would have had but a momentary weight; but at present, amid his other perplexities, the young man felt a certain boyish confusion at the thought of asking his mother to receive and recognise his wife. However, the important letter had been written, and was on its way, and he could only hope that his previous letters had prepared the household for that startling intimation. Apart from Ramore, the matter had a less serious aspect; for Colin, who had been poor all his life, no more believed in poverty than if he had been a prince, and had a certain instinctive certainty of getting what he needed, which belonged to his youth. Besides, he was not a poor gentleman, hampered, and helpless, but knew, at the worst, that he could always work for his wife.

At the same time, in the midst of all the seriousness of the position—with all his tender affection for Alice, and reverence for her helplessness, and even notwithstanding that inexpressible blank and sense of disappointment in his heart which even his affection could not quite neutralize,—a curious sense of humour,

and feeling that the whole matter was a kind of practical joke on a grand scale, intruded into Colin's ideas from time to time, and made him laugh, and then made him furious with himself; for Alice, to be sure, saw no joke in the matter. She was, indeed, altogether wanting in a sense of humour, if even her grief would have permitted her to exercise it, and was sufficiently occupied by the real difficulties of her position, secluding herself in Sora Antonia's apartments, and wavering in an agony of timidity and uncertainty over the idea of leaving that kind protector and going somewhere else, even though among strangers, in order to obey the necessary proprieties. She had not a soul to consult about what she should do except Sora Antonia herself and Lauderdale, neither of whom now thought it necessary to suggest a removal on the part of either of the young people; and though thoughts of going into Rome, and finding somebody who would give her shelter for a week or two till Colin's arrangements were complete, hovered in the mind of Alice, she had no courage to carry out such an idea, being still in her first grief, poor child, although this new excitement had entered into her life.

As for Colin, affairs went much less easily with him when he betook himself to the English clergyman to ask his services. The inquiries instituted by this new judge were of a kind altogether unforeseen by the thoughtless young man. To be sure, a mourning sister is not usually married a few weeks after her brother's death, and the questioner was justified in thinking the circumstance strange. Nor was it at all difficult to elicit from Colin a story which, viewed by suspicious and ignorant eyes, threw quite a different colour on the business. The young lady was the daughter of Mr. Meredith of Maltby, as the clergyman, who had laid Arthur in his grave, was already aware. She was young, under age, and her father had not been consulted about her proposed marriage; and she was at present entirely in the hands and under the influence of this young Scotchman, who, though

his manners were considered irreproachable by Miss Matty Frankland, who was a critic in manners, still lacked certain particulars in his general demeanour by which the higher class of Englishmen are distinguished. He took more interest in things in general, and was more transparent, more expressive than he would probably have been had he been entirely Alice's equal; and he was slightly wanting in calmness and that soft haze of impertinence which sets off good breeding—in short, he had not the full ring of the genuine metal; and a man who lived in Rome, and was used to stories of adventurers and interested marriages, not unnaturally jumped at the conclusion that Colin (being a Scotchman beside, and consequently the impersonation, save the mark! of money-getting) was bent upon securing to himself the poor little girl's fortune. Before the cross-examination was done Colin began somehow to feel himself a suspicious character; for it is astonishing what an effect there is in that bland look of superior penetration and air of seeing through a subject, however well aware the person under examination may be that his judge knows nothing about it. Then the investigator turned the discussion upon pecuniary matters, which after all was the branch of examination for which Colin was least prepared.

"Miss Meredith has some fortune, I presume?" he said. "Is it at her own disposal? for on this, as well as on other matters, it appears to me absolutely necessary that her father should be consulted."

"I have already told you that her father has been consulted," said Colin, with a little vexation, "and you have seen the answer to my friend's letter. I have not the least idea what her fortune is, or if she has any. Yes, I recollect she said she had enough to live upon; but it did not occur to me to make any inquiries on the subject," said the young man; which more than ever confirmed his questioner that this was not a member of the higher class with whom he had to deal.

"And you?" he said. "Your friends are aware, I presume —and your means are sufficient to maintain——"

"I?" said Colin, who with difficulty restrained a smile, "I have not very much; but I am quite able to work for my wife. It seems to me, however, that this examination is more than I bargained for. If Miss Meredith is satisfied on these points, that is surely enough—seeing, unfortunately, that she has no one to stand by her——"

"I beg your pardon," said the clergyman, "it is the duty of my office to stand by her. I do not see that I can carry out your wishes—certainly not without having a conversation with the young lady. I cannot say that I feel satisfied;—not that I blame you, of course,—but you are a very young man, and your feelings, you know, being involved—however, my wife and myself will see Miss Meredith, and you can call on me again."

"Very well," said Colin, getting up; and then, after making a step or two to the door, he returned. "I am anxious to have everything concluded the earliest possible moment," he said. "Pray do not lose any time. She is very solitary, and has no proper protector," Colin continued, with an ingenious flush on his face. He looked so young, so honest snd earnest, that even experience was shaken for the moment by the sight of Truth. But then it is the business of experience to fence off Truth, and defy the impressions of Nature,—and so the representative of authority, though shaken for a moment, did not give in.

"By the bye, I fear I did not understand you," he said. "You are not living in the same house? Considering all the circumstances, I cannot think that proper. Either she should find another home, or you should leave the house,—any gentleman would have thought of that," said the priest severely, perhaps by way of indemnifying himself for the passing sentiment of kindness which had moved him. Colin's face grew crimson at these words. The idea flashed upon himself for the

first time, and filled him with shame and confusion; but the young man had so far attained that perfection of good breeding which is only developed by contact with men, that the reproof, which was just, did not irritate him,—a fact which once more made the clergyman waver in his opinion.

"It is very true," said Colin, confused, yet impulsive; "though I am ashamed to say I never thought of it before. We have all been so much occupied with poor Arthur. But what you say is perfectly just, and I am obliged to you for the suggestion. I shall take rooms in Rome to-night."

Upon which the two parted with more amity than could have been expected; for Colin's clerical judge was pleased to have his advice taken so readily, as was natural, and began to incline towards the opinion that a young man who did not resent the imputation of having failed in a point which "any gentleman would have thought of," but confessed without hesitation that it had not occurred to him, could be nothing less than a gentleman. Notwithstanding, the first step taken by this sensible and experienced man was to write a letter by that day's post to Mr. Meredith of Maltby, informing him of the application Colin had just made. He knew nothing against the young man, the reverend gentleman was good enough to say,—he was very young and well-looking, and had a good expression, and might be unexceptionable; but still, without her father's consent, Mr. Meredith might rest assured *he* would take no steps in the business. When he had written this letter, the clergyman summoned his wife and took the trouble of going out to Frascati to see Alice, which he would not have done had he not been a just and kind man; while at the same time his heart was relenting to Colin, whom the clerical couple met in the street, and who took off his hat when he encountered them, without the least shadow of resentment. It is so long since all this happened that the name of the clergyman thus temporarily

occupying the place of the chaplain at Rome has escaped recollection, and Colin's historian has no desire to coin names or confuse identities. The gentleman in question was, it is supposed, an English rector taking his holiday. He went out to Frascati, like an honourable and just person as he was, to see what the solitary girl was about, thus left to the chances of the world, and found Alice in the great *salone* in her black dress, under charge of Sora Antonia, who sat with her white handkerchief on her ample shoulders, twirling her spindle, and spinning, along with her thread, many a tale of chequered human existence, for the amusement of her charge; who, however, for the first time in her life, had begun to be unconscious of what was said to her, and to spend her days in strains of reverie all unusual to Alice—mingled dreams and intentions, dim pictures of the life that was to be, and purposes which were to be carried out therein. Sora Antonia's stories, which required no answer, were very congenial to Alice's state of mind; and now and then a word from the narrative fell into and gave a new direction to her thoughts.

From all this she woke up with a little start when the English visitors entered, and it was with difficulty she restrained the tears which came in a choking flood when she recognised the clergyman. He had seen Arthur repeatedly during his illness, and had given him the sacrament, and laid him in his grave, and all the associations connected with him were too much for her, although after Arthur's death the good man had forgotten the poor little mourning sister. When she recovered, however, Alice was much more able to cope with her reverend questioner than Colin had been—perhaps because she was a woman; perhaps because she had more of the ease of society; perhaps because in this matter at least her own feelings were more profound and unmixed than those of her young *fiancé*. She composed herself with an effort when he told her the object of

his visit, recognising the necessity of explanation, and ready to give all that was in her power.

"No; papa does not know," said Alice, "but it is because he has taken no charge of me—he has left me to myself. I should not have minded so much if you had been of our county, for then you would have understood; but you are a clergyman, and Mrs.——"

"I am a clergyman's wife," the lady said, kindly; "anything you say will be sacred to me."

"Ah," said Alice, with a little impatient sigh; and she could not help looking at the door, and longing for Colin, who was coming no more, though she did not know that; for the girl, though she was not clever, had a perception within her, such as never would have come to Colin, that, notwithstanding this solemn assurance, the fact that her visitor was a clergyman's wife would not prevent her story from oozing out into the common current of English talk in Rome;—but, notwithstanding, Alice, whose ideas of her duty to the world were very clear, knew that the story must be told. She went on accordingly very steadily, though with thrills and flushes of colour coming and going—and the chances are that Colin's ideal woman, could she have been placed in the same position, would not have acquitted herself half so well.

"It will be necessary to tell you everything from the beginning, or you will not understand it," said Alice. "Papa did not do exactly as Arthur thought right in some things; and though I did not think myself a judge, I—I took Arthur's side; and then Mrs. Meredith came to Maltby suddenly with the children. It was a great surprise to us, for we did not know till that moment that papa had married again. I would rather not say anything about Mrs. Meredith," said Alice, showing a little agitation, "but Arthur did not think she was a person whom I could stay with; and, when he had to leave himself, he

brought me with him. Indeed, I wanted very much to come. I could not bear that he should go away by himself; and I should have died had I been left there with papa, and everything so changed. I wrote after we left, but papa would not answer my letter, nor take any notice of us. I am very sorry, but I cannot help it. That is all. I suppose you heard of Mrs. Meredith's letter to Mr. Lauderdale. My aunt is in India—so I could not go to her; and all the rest are dead; that is why I have stayed here."

"It is very sad to think you should be so lonely," said the clergyman, "and it is a very trying position for one so young. Still there are families in Rome that would have received you; and I think, my dear Miss Meredith—you must not suppose me harsh—it is only your good I am thinking of; I think you should yourself have communicated with your father."

"I wrote to Aunt Mary," said Alice. "I told her everything. I thought she would be sure to advise me for the best. But papa would not answer the letter I wrote him after we left home, and he refuses to have anything to do with me in Mr. Lauderdale's letter. I do not understand what I can do more."

"But you have not waited to be advised," said the English priest, whose wife had taken the poor little culprit's hand, and was whispering to her, "Compose yourself, my dear," and "We are your friends," and "Mr. —— only means it for your good," with other such scraps of consolation. Alice scarcely needed the first exhortation, having, in a large degree, that steady power of self-control which is one of the most valuable endowments in the world. "You have not waited for your Aunt's advice," continued the clergyman. "Indeed, I confess it is very hard to blame you; but still it is a very serious step to take, and one that a young creature like you should not venture upon without the advice of her friends. Mr. Campbell

also is very young, and you cannot have known each other very long."

"All the winter," said Alice, with a faint colour, for affairs were too serious for ordinary blushing; "at least all the spring ever since we left England. And it has not been common knowing," she added, with a deepening flush. "He and Mr. Lauderdale were like brothers to Arthur—they nursed him night and day; they nursed him better than I did," said the poor sister, bursting forth into natural tears. "The people we have known all our lives were never so good to us. He said at the very last that they were to take care of me; and they have taken care of me," said Alice, among her sobs, raised for a moment beyond herself by her sense of the chivalrous guardianship which had surrounded her, "as if I had been a queen."

"My dear child, lean upon me," said the lady sitting by; "don't be afraid of us; don't mind crying, it will be a relief to you. Mr. —— only means it for your good; he does not intend to vex you, dear."

"Certainly not, certainly not," said the clergyman, taking a little walk to the window, as men do in perplexity; and then he came back and drew his seat closer, as Alice regained the mastery over herself. "My dear young lady, have confidence in me. Am I to understand that it is from gratitude you have made up your mind to accept Mr. Campbell? Don't hesitate. I beg of you to let me know the truth."

The downcast face of Alice grew crimson suddenly to the hair; and then she lifted her eyes, not to the man who was questioning her, but to the woman who sat beside her. Those eyes were full of indignant complaint and appeal. "Can you, a woman, stand by and see the heart of another woman searched for its secret?" That was the utterance of Alice's look; and she made no further answer, but turned her head partly away, with an offended pride which sat strangely and yet not unbe-

comingly upon her. The change was so marked that the reverend questioner got up from his chair again almost as confused as Alice, and his wife, instinctively replying to the appeal made to her, took the matter into her own hands.

"If you will wait for me below, George, I will join you by-and-by," said this good woman. "Men must not spy into women's secrets." And "I have daughters of my own," she added softly in Alice's ear. Let us thank heaven, that, though the number of those be few who are able or disposed to do great things for their fellows, the number is many who are ready to respond to an actual call for sympathy when it is made to them, and to own the universal kindred. It was not an everlasting friendship that these two English women, left alone in the bare Italian chamber, formed for each other. The one who was a mother did not receive the orphan permanently into her breast, neither did the girl find a parent in her new friend. Yet for the moment nature found relief for itself; they were mother and child, though strangers to each other. The elder woman heard with tears, and sympathy, and comprehension, the other's interrupted tale, and gave her the kiss which in its way was more precious than a lover's. "You have done nothing wrong, my poor child," the pitying woman said, affording an absolution more valuable than any priest's to the girl's female soul; and as she spoke there passed momentarily through the mind of the visitor a rapid, troubled enumeration of the rooms in her "apartment," which involved the possibility of carrying this friendless creature home with her. But that idea was found impracticable almost as soon as conceived. "I wish I could take you home with me, my dear," the good woman said, with a sigh; "but our rooms are so small; but I will talk it all over with Mr. ——, and see what can be done; and I should like to know more of Mr. Campbell after all you tell me; he must be a very superior young man. You may be sure

we shall be your friends, *both your friends*, whatever happens. I should just like to say a word to the woman of the house, and tell her to take good care of you, my dear, before I go."

"Sora Antonia is very kind," said Alice.

"Yes, my dear, I am sure of it; still she will be all the more attentive when she sees you have friends to take care of you," said the experienced woman; which was all the more kind on her part as her Italian was very limited, and a personal encounter of this description was one which she would have shrunk from in ordinary circumstances. But when she joined her husband it was with a glow of warmth and kindness about her heart, and a consciousness of having comforted the friendless. "If it ever could be right to do such a thing, I almost think it would be in such a case as this," she said with a woman's natural leaning to the romantic side; but the clergyman only shook his head. "We must wait, at all events, for an answer from Mr. Meredith," he said; and the fortnight which ensued was not a cheerful one for Alice.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE can be no doubt that the clergyman was right in suggesting that Colin should leave Frascati, and that the strange little household which had kept together since Arthur's death, under the supervision of Sora Antonia, was in its innocence in utter contradiction of all decorum and the usages of society. It was true besides that Alice had begun to be uneasy upon this very point, and to feel herself in a false position; nevertheless, when Lauderdale returned alone with a note from Colin, and informed her that they had found rooms in Rome, and were to leave her with Sora Antonia until the arrangements were made for the marriage, it is inconceivable how blank and flat the evening felt to Alice without her two knights. As she sat over her needlework her sorrow came more frequently home to her than it had ever done before—her sorrow, her friendlessness, and a vague dread that this great happiness, which had come in tears, and which even now could scarcely be separated from the grief which accompanied it, might again fly away from her like a passing angel. Sora Antonia was indifferent company under these circumstances; she was very kind, but it was not in nature that an elderly peasant woman could watch the changing expressions of a girl's face, and forestall her tears, and beguile her weariness like the two chivalrous men who had devoted themselves to her amusement and occupation. Now that this rare morsel of time, during which she had been tended "like a queen," was over, it seemed impossible to Alice that it ever could be again. She who was not clever, who was nothing but

Arthur's sister, how could she ever expect again to be watched over and served like an enchanted princess? Though, indeed, if she were Colin's wife—! but since Colin's departure and the visit of the clergyman, that possibility seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer—she could not tell why. She believed in it when her lover came to see her, which was often enough; but, when he was absent, doubt returned, and the bright prospect glided away, growing more and more dim and distant. She had never indulged in imagination, to speak of, before, and the few dreams that had possessed her heart had been dreams of Arthur's recovery—fantastic hopeless visions of those wondrous doctors and impossible medicines sometimes to be met with in books. But now, when her own position began to occupy her, and she found herself standing between hopes and fears, with such a sweet world of tenderness and consolation on one side, and so unlovely a prospect on the other, the dormant imagination woke up, and made wild work with Alice. Even in the face of her stepmother's refusal to have anything to do with her, the spectre of Mrs. Meredith coming to take her home was the nightmare of the poor girl's existence. This was what she gained by the clergyman's attention to the proprieties of the situation; but there was at least the comfort of thinking that in respect to decorum all was now perfectly right.

As for Colin, he, it must be confessed, bore the separation better; for he was not at all afraid of Mrs. Meredith, and he had a great many things to learn and do, and, when he paid his betrothed a visit, it was sweet to see the flush of unmistakeable joy in her face, and to feel that so fair a creature sat thinking of him in the silence, referring everything to him, ready to crown him with all the hopes and blossoms of her youth. And then, but for her sake, Colin, to tell the truth, was in no such hurry to be married as his clerical censor supposed. The weeks that might have to elapse before that event could be concluded

were not nearly so irksome to him as they ought to have been; and, even though he began to be irritated by the ambiguous responses of the clergyman, he was not impatient of the delay itself, but found the days very interesting, and, on the whole, enjoyed himself; which, to be sure, may give some people an unfavourable impression of Colin's heart, and want of sympathy with the emotions of her he looked upon as his bride. At the same time, it is but just to say that he was not aware of these emotions—for Alice said nothing about her fears; and his love for her, which was genuine enough in its way, was not of the nature of that love which divines everything, and reads the eye and the heart with infallible perception. He did not suffer, like Alice, from fears that his dawning happiness was too great, and could never come true; for, though he had fully accepted his position, and even with the facility of youth had found pleasure in it, and found himself growing fonder every day of the sweet and tranquil creature to whom he became day by day more completely all in all, this kind of calm domestic love was unimpassioned, and not subject to the hopes and fears, the despairs and exultations of more spontaneous and enthusiastic devotion. So, to tell the truth, he endured the separation with philosophy, and roamed about all day long with many a thought in his mind, through that town which is of all towns in the world most full of memories, most exciting and most sorrowful. Colin, being Scotch, was not classical to speak of, and the Cæsars had but a limited interest for him; but, if the ancient tutelary deities were worn out and faded, the shrine to which pilgrims had come for so many ages was musical with all the echoes of history, and affecting beyond description or comparison. And in Papal Rome the young priest had an interest altogether different from that of a polemical Protestant or a reverential High-Churchman. Colin was a man of his age, tolerant and indulgent to other people's opinions, and apt to

follow out his own special study without pausing to consider whether the people among whom he pursued it were without spot or blemish in matters of doctrine. The two friends spent a great deal of time in the churches; not at the high mass, or sweet-voiced vespers, where irreverent crowds assembled, as in a concert-room, to hear Mustafa sing, but in out-of-the-way chapels, where there were no signs of *festa*; in the Pantheon, in churches where there were no great pictures nor celebrated images, but where the common people went and came unconscious of any spectators; and many and strange were the discussions held by the two Scotchmen over the devotions they witnessed—devotions ignorant enough, no doubt, but real, and full of personal meaning. It was Rome without her glorious apparel, without her grandeur and melodies,—Rome in very poor vestments, not always clean, singing out of tune, and regarding with eyes of intensest supplication such poor daubs of saints and weak-eyed Madonnas as would have found no place in the meanest exhibition anywhere in the world. Strangely enough, this was the aspect in which she had most interest for the two friends.

"It would be awfu' curious to hear the real thoughts these honest folk have in their minds," said Lauderdale. "I'm no much of the idolatry way of thinking mysel'. It may come a wee that way in respect to Mary. The rest of them are little more than friends at court so far as I can see, and it's no unnatural feeling. If you take the view that a' natural feelings are like to be wrong to start with, that settles the question; but if, on the other hand—"

"I don't believe in idolatry under any circumstances," said Colin, hotly; "nobody worships a bad picture. It is the something represented by it, never to be fully expressed, and of which, indeed, a bad picture is almost more touching than a good one—"

"Keep quiet, callant, and let other folk have a chance to speak," said Lauderdale; "I'm saying there's an awfu' deal of reasonableness in nature if you take her in the right way. I'm far from being above that feeling mysel'. No that I have ony acquaintance with St. Cosmo and St. Damian and the rest; but I wouldna say if there was ony rational way of getting at the ear of one of them that's gone—even if it was Arthur, poor callant—that I wouldna be awfu' tempted to bid him mind upon me when he was near the Presence Cha'amer. I'm no saying he had much wisdom to speak of, or was more enlightened than myself; and there's no distinct evidence that at this moment he's nearer God than I am; but I tell you, callant, nature's strong—and, if I kent ony way of communication, there's nae philosophy in the world would keep me from asking, if he was nigh the palace gates and could see Him that sits upon the throne, that he should mind upon me."

"You may be sure he does it without asking," said Colin—and then, after a moment's pause, "Your illustration comes too close for criticism. I know what you mean; but then the saints as they flourish in Rome have nothing to do with Scotland," said the young man. "It would be something to get the people to have a little respect for the saints; but, as to saying their prayers to them, there is little danger of that."

"The callant's crazy about Scotland," said Lauderdale; "a man that heard you and kent no better might think ye were the king of Scotland in disguise, with a scheme of Church reform in your hand. If you're ever a minister you'll be in hot water before you're well placed. But, Colin, it's an awfu' descent from all your grand thoughts. You'll have to fight with the presbytery about organs and such like rubbish—and when you're to stand, and when you're to sit; that's what ambitious callants come to in our kirk. You were like enough for such a fate at any time, but you're certain of it now with your English wife."

"Well," said Colin, "it is no worse than the fight about candles and surplices in England; better, indeed, for it means something; and, if I fight on that point, at least I'll fight at the same time for better things."

"It's aye best no to fight at all," said the philosopher, "though that's no a doctrine palatable to human nature so far as I have ever seen. But it's aye awfu' easy talking; you're no ready for your profession yet; and how you are ever to be ready, and you a married man——"

"Stuff!" said Colin; "most men are married; but I don't see that *that* fact hinders the business of the world. I don't mean to spend all my time with my wife."

"No," said Lauderdale with a momentary touch of deeper seriousness—and he paused and cast a side glance at his companion as if longing to say something; but it happened at that moment, either by chance or intention, that Colin turned the full glow of his brown eyes upon his friend's face, looking at him with that bright but blank smile which he had seen before, and which imposed silence more absolutely than any prohibition. "No," said Lauderdale, slowly changing his tone; "I'll no say it was that I was thinking of. The generality of callants studying for the kirk in our country are no in your position. I'm no clear in my own mind how it's come to pass—for a young man that's the head of a family has a different class of subjects to occupy his mind; and as for the Balliol scholarship"—said the philosopher regretfully; "but that's no what I'm meaning. You'll have to provide for your own house, callant, before you think of the kirk."

"Yes, I have thought of all that," said Colin. "I think Alice will get on with my mother. She must stay there, you know, and I will go down as often as I can during the winter. What do you mean by making no answer? Do you think she will not like Ramore? My mother is fit company for a queen," said the

young man with momentary irritation; for, indeed, he was a little doubtful in his own mind how this plan would work.

"I've little acquaintance with queens," said Lauderdale; "but I'm thinking history would tell different tales if the half of them were fit to be let within the door where the Mistress was. That's no the question. It's clear to me that your wife will rather have your company than your mother's—which is according to nature, though you and me may be of a different opinion. If you listen to me, Colin, you'll think a' that over again. It's an awfu' serious question. I'm no saying a word against the kirk; whatever fools may say, it's a grand profession; there's nae profession so grand that I ken of; but a man shouldna begin a race with burdens on his back and chains on his limbs. You'll have to make your choice between love and it, Colin; and since in the first place you've made choice of love——"

"Stuff!" said Colin; but it was not said with his usual lightness of tone, and he turned upon his friend with a subdued exasperation which meant more than it expressed. "Why do you speak to me of love and——nonsense," cried Colin, "what choice is there?" and then he recollected himself, and grew red and angry. "My love has Providence itself for a second," he said; "if it were mere fancy you might speak; but, as for giving up my profession, nothing shall induce me to do that. Alice is not like a fanciful fool to hamper and constrain me. She will stay with my mother. Two years more will complete my studies, and then——" here Colin paused of himself, and did not well know what to add; for, indeed, it was then chiefly that the uttermost uncertainty commenced.

"And then—" said Lauderdale, meditatively. "It's an awfu' serious question. It's ill to say what may happen then. What I'm saying is no pleasure to me. I've put mair hope on your head than any man's justified in putting on another man. Ye were the ransom of my soul, callant," said the philosopher, with

momentary emotion. "It was you that was to *be;* nothing but talk will ever come out of a man like me—and it's an awfu' consolation to contemplate a soul that means to live. But there's more ways of living—ay, and of serving God and Scotland—than in the kirk. No man in the world can fight altogether in the face of circumstance. I would think it a' well over again, if I were you."

"No more," said Colin, with all the more impatience that he felt the truth of what his friend was saying. "No more; I am not to be moved on that subject. No, no, it is too much; I cannot give up my profession," he said, half under his breath, to himself; and, perhaps, at the bottom of his soul, a momentary grudge, a momentary pang, arose within him at thought of the woman who could accept such a sacrifice without even knowing it, or feeling how great it was. Such, alas, was not the woman of Colin's dreams; yet so inconsistent was the young man in his youth, that ten minutes after, when the two walked past the Colosseum on their way to the railway, being bound to Frascati (for this was before the days when the vulgar highway of commerce had entered within the walls of Rome), a certain wavering smile on his lip, a certain colour on his cheeks, betrayed as plainly that he was bound on a lover's errand, as if it had been said in words. Lauderdale, whose youthful days were past, and who was at all times more a man of one idea, more absolute and fixed in his affections, than Colin, could understand him less on this point than on any other; but he saw how it was, though he did not attempt to explain how it could be, and the two friends grew silent, one of them delivered by sheer force of youthfulness and natural vigour from the anxieties that clouded the other. As they approached the gate, a carriage, which had been stopped there by the watchful ministers of the Dogana, made a sudden start, and dashed past them. It was gone in a moment, flashing on in the sunshine at the utmost speed which a reckless Italian

coachman could get out of horses which did not belong to him; but in that instant, both the bystanders started, and came to a sudden pause in their walk. "Did you hear anything?" said Colin. "What was it?" and the young man turned round, and made a few rapid strides after the carriage; but then Colin stopped short, with an uneasy laugh at himself. "Absurd," he said; "all English voices sound something alike," which was an unlover-like remark. And then he turned to his friend, who looked almost as much excited as himself.

"I suppose that's it," said Lauderdale, but he was less easily satisfied than Colin. "I cannot see how it could be her," he said, slowly; "but——. Yon's an awfu' speed if there's no reason for it. I'm terrible tempted to jump into that machine there, and follow," the philosopher added, with a stride towards a crazy little one-horse carriage which was waiting empty at the gate.

"It is I who should do that," said Colin; and then he laughed, shaking off his fears. "It is altogether impossible and absurd," the young man said. "Nonsense! there are scores of English girls who have voices sufficiently like her's to startle one. I have thought it was she half-a-dozen times since I came to Rome. Come along, or we shall lose the train. Nothing could possibly bring her into Rome without our knowledge; and nothing, I hope," said the young lover, who was in little doubt on that branch of the subject, "could make her pass by *me*."

"Except her father," said Lauderdale, to which Colin only replied by an impatient exclamation as they went on to the train. But, though it was only a momentary sound, the tone of a voice, that had startled them, it was with extreme impatience and an uneasiness which they had tried to hide from each other that they made their way to Frascati. To be sure Colin amused himself for a little by the thought of a pretty speech with which he could flatter and flutter his gentle *fiancée*, telling her her voice was in the air, and he heard it everywhere; and then he burst

forth into "Airy tongues that syllable men's names," to the consternation of Lauderdale. "But then she did not syllable any name," he added, laughing; "which is a proof positive that it can have been nothing." His laugh and voice were, however, full of excitement and uneasiness, and betrayed to Lauderdale that the suggestion he had made began to work. The two mounted the hill to Frascati from the station with a swiftness and silence natural to two Scotchmen at such a moment, leaving everything in the shape of carriage behind them. When they reached the Palazzo Savvelli, Colin cleared the long staircase at a bound for anything his companion saw who followed him more slowly, more and more certainly prescient of something having happened. When Lauderdale reached the *salone*, he found nobody there save Sora Antonia, with her apron at her eyes, and Colin, sunk into Arthur's chair, reading a letter which he held in both his hands. Colin's face was crimson, his hands trembling with excitement and passion. The next moment he had started to his feet and was ready for action. "Read it, Lauderdale," he said, with a choking voice; "you may read it; it has all come true; and in the meantime I'm off to get a vettura," said the young man, rushing to the door. Before his friend could say a word, Colin was gone, tearing frantically down the stairs which he had come up like lightning; and in this bewildering moment, after the thunderbolt had fallen, with Sora Antonia's voice ringing in his ear as loudly and scarce more intelligibly than the rain which accompanies a storm, Lauderdale picked up poor Alice's letter, which was blotted with tears.

"Papa has come to fetch me," wrote Alice. "Oh, Colin, my heart is broken! He says we are to go instantly, without a moment's delay; and he would not let me write even this if he knew. Oh, Colin, after all your goodness and kindness, and love that I was not worthy of!—oh, why did anybody ever inter-

fere? I do not know what I am writing, and I am sure you will never be able to read it. Never so long as I live shall I think one thought of anybody but you; but papa would not let me speak to you—would not wait to see you, though I told him you were coming. Oh Colin, good-bye, and do not think it is me—and tell Mr. Lauderdale I shall never forget his kindness. I would rather, far rather, die than go away. Always, always, whatever any one may say, your own poor Alice, who is not half nor quarter good enough for you."

Such was the hurried utterance of her disappointment and despair which Alice had left behind her ere she was forced away; but Sora Antonia held another document of a more formal description, which she delivered to Lauderdale with a long preface, of which he did not understand a word. He opened it carelessly; for, the fact being apparent, Lauderdale, who had no hand in the business on his own account, was sufficiently indifferent to any compliments which the father of Alice might have to pay to himself.

"Mr. Meredith regrets to have the sentiments of gratitude with which he was prepared to meet Mr. Lauderdale, on account of services rendered to his son, turned into contempt and indignation by the base attempt on the part of Mr. Lauderdale's companion to ensnare the affections of his daughter. Having no doubt whatever that when removed from the personal coercion in which she has been held, Miss Meredith will see the base character of the connexion which it has been attempted to force upon her, Mr. Meredith will, in consideration of the services above mentioned, take no legal steps for the exposure of the conspiracy which he has fortunately found out in time to defeat its nefarious object; but begs that it may be fully understood that his leniency is only to be purchased by an utter abstinence from any attempt

to disturb Miss Meredith, or bring forward the ridiculous pretensions of which she is too young to see the utterly interested and mercenary character."

A man does not generally preserve his composure unabated after reading such an epistle, and Lauderdale was no more capable than other men of dissembling his indignation. His face flushed with a dark glow, more burning and violent than anything that had disturbed his blood for years; and it was as well for the character of the grave and sober-minded Scotsman that nobody but Sora Antonia was present to listen to the first exclamation that rose to his lips. Sora Antonia herself was in a state of natural excitement, pouring forth her account of all that had happened with tears and maledictions, which were only stopped by Colin's shout from the foot of the staircase for his friend. The impatient youth came rushing upstairs when he found no immediate response, and swept the older man with him like a whirlwind. "Another time, another time," he cried to Sora Antonia, "I must go first and bring the Signorina back," and Colin picked up both the letters, and rushed down, driving Lauderdale before him to the carriage which he had already brought to the door; and they were driving off again, whirling down hill towards the Campagna, before either had recovered the first shock of this unlooked-for change in all their plans. Then it was Lauderdale who was the first to speak.

"You are going to bring the Signorina back," he said with a long breath. "It's a fool's errand, but I'll no say but I'll go with you. Colin, it's happened as was only natural. The father has got better, as I said he would. I'm no blaming the father"—

"Not after *this?*" said Colin, who had just read in a blaze of indignation Mr. Meredith's letter.

"Hout," said the philosopher, "certainly not after that;" and

he took it out of Colin's hand and folded it up and tore it into a dozen pieces. "The man kens nothing of me. Callant," said Lauderdale, warming suddenly, "there is but one person to be considered in this business. You and me can fend for ourselves. Pain and sorrow cannot but come on her as things are, but nothing is to be done or said that can aggravate them, or give her more to bear. You're no heeding what I say. Where are you going now, if a man might ask?"

"I am going to claim my bride," said Colin, shortly. "Do you imagine I am likely to abandon her now?"

"Colin," said his friend anxiously, "you'll no get her. I'm no forbidding you to try, but I warn you not to hope. She's in the hands of her natural guardian, and at this moment there's nae power on earth that would induce him to give her to you. He's to be blamed for ill speaking, but I'm no clear that he's to be blamed for this."

"I wish you would not talk," said Colin roughly, and opened Alice's little letter again, and read it and put it to his lips. If he had never been impassioned before he was so now; and so they went on, dashing across the long level Campagna roads, where there was nothing to break the sunshine but here and there a nameless pile of ruins.

The sunshine began to fall low and level on the plain before they reached the gates. "One thing at least is certain—he cannot take her out of Rome to-night," said Colin. It was almost the only word that was spoken between them until they began their doubtful progress from one hotel to another, through the noisy resounding streets.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Now we have found them let me face them by myself," said Colin, to whom the interval of silence and consideration had been of use. They were both waiting in the hall of one of the hotels facing towards the Piazza del Popolo, to which they had at last tracked Mr. Meredith, and Lauderdale acquiesced silently in Colin's decision. The young man had already sent up his card, with a request that he might see not Alice but her father. After a considerable time, the servant who had taken it returned with an abrupt message that Mr. Meredith was engaged. When he had sent up a second time, explaining that his business was urgent, but with the same effect, Colin accompanied his third message with a note, and went with his messenger to the door of the room in which his adversary was. There could be no doubt of the commotion produced within by this third application. Colin could hear some one pacing about the room with disturbed steps, and the sound of a controversy going on, which, though he was too far off to hear anything that was said, still reached him vaguely in sound at least. When he had waited for about five minutes, the clergyman, whom he had not in the least thought of or expected to see, made his appearance cautiously at the door. He did not attempt to admit the young man, but came up to him on tiptoe, and took him persuasively, almost caressingly, by the arm. "My good friend, my excellent young friend," said the puzzled priest, with a mixture of compunction and expostulation which in other circumstances would have amused Colin, "let us have a little conversation. I am sure you are much too generous and considerate

to add to the distress of—of——" But here the good man recollected just in time that he had pledged himself not to speak of Alice, and made a sudden pause. "There in that room," he went on, changing his tone, and assuming a little solemnity, "is a sorrowful father, mourning for his only son, and driven almost out of his senses by illness and weakness, and a sense of the shameful way in which his daughter has been neglected—not his fault, my dear Mr Campbell. You cannot have the heart to increase his sufferings by claims, however well founded, which have been formed at a time——"

"Stop," said Colin, "it is not my fault if he has not done his duty to his children; I have no right to bear the penalty. He has cast the vilest imputations upon me—"

"Hush, hush, I beg of you," said the clergyman, "my excellent young friend—"

Colin laughed in spite of himself. "If I am your excellent friend," he said, "why do you not procure me admission to tell my own story? Why should the sight of me distress your sorrowing father? I am not an ogre, nor an enemy, but his son's friend; and up to this day, I need not remind you," said the young man with a rising colour, "the only protector, along with my friend Lauderdale, whom his daughter has had. I do not say that he may not have natural objections to give her to a poor man," said Colin, with natural pride; "but, at all events, he has no reason to hurry her away by stealth, as if I had not a right to be told why our engagement is interrupted so summarily. I will do nothing to distress Alice," the young man went on, involuntarily lingering by the door, which was not entirely closed; "but I protest against being treated like a villain or an adventurer—"

"Hush, hush, hush," cried the unlucky peacemaker, putting out his hand to close the unfastened door; and before he could do so, Mr. Meredith appeared on the threshold, flushed and

furious. "What are you else, sir, I should like to know," cried the angry British father, "to drag an unprotected girl into such an entanglement without even a pretence of consulting her friends; to take advantage of a deathbed for your detestable fortune-hunting schemes? Don't answer me, sir! Have you a penny of your own? have you anything to live on? That's the question. If it was not for other considerations, I'd indict you. I'd charge you with conspiracy; and even now, if you come here to disturb my poor girl——. But I promise you, you shall see her no more," the angry man continued. "Go, sir, and let me hear no more of you. She has a protector now."

Colin stood a moment without speaking after Mr. Meredith has disappeared, closing the door violently after him.

"I have not come to distress Alice," said the young man. He had to repeat it to himself to keep down the hot blood that was burning in his veins; and as for the unfortunate clergyman, who was the immediate cause of all this, he kept his position by the door in a state of mind far from enviable, sorry for the young man, and ashamed of the old one, and making inarticulate efforts to speak and mediate between them. But the conference did not last very long outside the closed door. Though it did not fortunately occur to Colin that it was the interference of his present companion which had originated this scene, the young man did not feel the insult the less from the deprecatory half-sympathy offered to him. "It is a mistake—it is a mistake," said the clergyman, "Mr. Meredith will discover his error. I said I thought you were imprudent, and indeed wrong; but I have never suspected you of interested motives—never since my first interview with the young lady;—but think of her sufferings, my dear young friend; think of her," said the mediator, who was driven to his wits' end. As for Colin, he calmed himself down a little by means of pacing about the corridor—the common resource of men in trouble.

"Poor Alice," he said, "if I did not think of her, do you think I should have stood quietly to be insulted? But look here—the abuse of such a man can do no harm to me, but he may kill her. If I could see her it might do some good.—Impossible? Do you suppose I mean to see her clandestinely, or to run away with her, perhaps? I mean," said Colin, with youthful sternness, "that if I were permitted to see her I might be able to reconcile her a little to what is inevitable. Of course he is her father. I wish her father were a chimney-sweep instead;—but it is she I have to think of. Will you try to get me permission to see her?—only for ten minutes, if you like—in your presence, if that is necessary; but I must say one word to her before she is carried away."

"Yes, yes, it is very natural—very natural," said the peace-maker; "I will do all I can for you. Be here at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning; the poor dear young lady must have rest after her agitation. Don't be afraid; I am not a man to deceive you; they do not leave till the afternoon for Civita Vecchia. You shall see her; I think I can promise that. I will take the responsibility on myself."

Thus ended Colin's attempt to bring back the Signorina, as he said. In the morning he had reached the hotel long before the hour mentioned, in case of an earlier departure; but everything was quiet there, and the young man hovered about, looking up at the windows, and wondering which might be the one which inclosed his little love, with sentiments more entirely lover-like than he had ever experienced before. But, when the hour of his appointment came, and he hurried into the hotel, he was met by the indignant clergyman, who felt his own honour compromised, and was wroth beyond measure. Mr. Meredith had left Rome at dawn of day, certainly not for Civita Vecchia, leaving no message for any one. He had pretended, after hot resistance, to yield to the kind-hearted priest's petition, that the

lovers might say farewell to each other, and this was the way he had taken of balking them. It was now the author of the original mischief who felt himself insulted and scorned, and his resentment and indignation were louder than Colin's, whose mind at first lost itself in schemes of following, and vain attempts to ascertain the route the party had taken. Lauderdale, coming anxious but steady to the scene of action half an hour afterwards, found his friend absorbed in this inquiry, and balancing all the chances between the road by Perugia and the road by Orvieto, with the full intention of going off in pursuit.

It was then his careful guardian's turn to interfere. He led the youth away, and pointed out to him the utter vanity of such an undertaking. Not distance or uncertainty of road, but her father's will, which was likely to be made all the more rigorous by pursuit, parted Alice from her young protector and bridegroom; and if he followed her to the end of the world, this obstacle would still remain as unremoveable as ever. Though he was hot-headed and young, and moved by excitement, and indignation, and pity, to a height of passion which his love for Alice by itself would never have produced, Colin still could not help being reasonable, and he saw the truth of what was said to him. At the same time, it was not natural that the shock which was so great and sudden should be got over in a moment. He felt himself insulted and outraged, in the first place; and the other side of the question was almost equally mortifying; for he knew the relief that would be felt by all his friends when the sudden end of his unwelcome project was made known to them. The Ramore household had given a kind of passive acquiescence in what seemed inevitable —but Colin was aware they would all be very glad at home when the failure was known—and it was a failure, howsoever the tale might be told. Thus the original disappointment was aggravated by stings of apprehended ridicule and jocular

sympathy, for to no living soul, not even to his mother, would Colin have confessed how great a share in his original decision Alice's helpless and friendless position had, nor the sense of loss and bondage with which he had often in his secret heart regarded the premature and imprudent marriage which he had lived to hear stigmatised as the scheme of a fortune-hunter. It was thus that the very generosity of his intentions gave an additional sting at once to the insult and the sympathy. After a day or two, his thoughts of Alice as the first person to be considered, and the deep sense of the terrible calamity it was to her, yielded a little to those thoughts of himself and all the humiliating accompaniments of a change so unlooked for. During this period his temper became, even by Lauderdale, unbearable; and he threw aside everything he was doing, and took to silence and solitary rambles, in utter disgust with the shortsightedness and injustice of the world.

But after that unhappy interval it has to be confessed that the skies suddenly cleared for Colin. The first symptom of revival that happened to him came to pass on a starry, lovely May night, when he had plunged into the darkness of the lonely quarter about the Colosseum alone, and in a state of mind to which an encounter with the robbers supposed to haunt these silent places would have been highly beneficial. But it chanced that Colin raised his moody eyes to the sky, suddenly and without any premeditation, and saw the moon struggling up through a maze of soft white clouds, parting them with her hands as they threw themselves into baffling airy masses always in her way; and suddenly, without a moment of preface, a face—the face—the image of the veiled woman, who was not Alice, and to whom he had bidden farewell, gleamed out once more through the clouds, and looked Colin in the eyes, thrilling him through and through with a guilty astonishment. The moment after was the hardest of all Colin's struggle; and he rushed home

after it tingling all over with self-contempt and burning indignation, and plunged into a torrent of talk when he found his friend, by way of forgetting himself, which struck Lauderdale with the utmost surprise. But next day Colin felt himself somehow comforted without knowing how; and then he took to thinking of his life, and work which now, even for the sake of Alice, if nothing else, he must pursue with determined energy; and then it seemed to him as if every moment was lost that kept him away from home. Was it for Alice? Was it that he might offer her again the perfected mind and settled existence to which his labours were to lead him? He said so to himself as he made his plans; but yet unawares a vision of deeper eyes came gleaming upon him out of the clouds. And it was with the half-conscious thrill of another existence, a feeling as of new and sweeter air in the sails, and a widening ocean under the keel, that Colin rose up after all those varying changes of sentiment were over, and set his face to the north once more.

"It's awfu' strange to think it's the last time," said Lauderdale, as they stood together on the Pincian Hill, and watched the glowing colours of the Roman sunset. "It's little likely that you and me will ever see St. Peter yonder start up black into the sun like that, another time in our lives. It's grander than a' their illuminations, though it's more like another kind of spirit than an angel. And this is Rome! I dinna seem ever to have realized the thought before. It's awfu' living and life-like, callant, but it's the graves we'll mind it by. I'm no meaning kings and Cæsars. I'm meaning them that come and never return. Testaccio's hidden out of sight, and the cypress trees," said the philosopher; "but there's mony an eye that will never lose sight of them even at the other end of the world. I might have been going my ways with an awfu' different heart, if it hadna been for the mercy of God."

"Then you thought I should die?" said Colin, to whom, in

the stir of his young life, and the words were solemn and strange to say; "and God *is* merciful—yet Meredith is lying yonder, though not me."

"Ay," said Lauderdale, and then there was a long pause. "I'm no offering ony explanation," said the philosopher. "It's a question between a man and his Maker—spirit to spirit. It's an awfu' mystery to us, but it maun be made clear and satisfying to them that go away. For me, I'll praise God," he said abruptly, with a harsh ring in his voice; and Colin for the first time knew assuredly that his faithful guardian had thought nothing better than to bring him here to die. They went into the church on the hill, where the nuns were singing their sweet vespers, as they descended for the last time through the dusky avenues, listening as they went to the bells ringing the Ave Maria over all the crowded town; and there came upon Colin and his friend in different degrees that compunction of happiness which is the soul of thanksgiving. Others,—how many!—have stood speechless in dumb submission on that same spot and found no thanks to say; and it was thus that Colin, after all the events that made these four months so important in his life, entered upon a new period of his history, and took his farewell of Rome.

CHAPTER XV.

"It's hard to ken what to say," said the Mistress, going to the window for the hundredth time, and looking out wistfully upon the sky which shone dazzling over the Holy Loch with the excessive pathetic brightness of exceptional sunshine. "I canna make out for my part if he's broken-hearted or no, and a word wrong just at a moment like this would be hard on the callant. It's a wonderful mercy it's such a bonnie day. That's aye a blessing both to the body and the mind."

"Well, it's you that Colin takes after," said the farmer of Ramore, with an undertone of dissatisfaction; "so there's no saying but what the weather may count for something. I've lost understanding for my part of a lad that gangs abroad for his health, and gets himself engaged to be married. In my days, when marriage came into a man's head, he went through with it, and there was an end of the subject. For my part, I dinna pretend to understand your newfangled ways."

"Eh, Colin, dinna be so unfeeling," said the Mistress, roused to remonstrance. "You were like to gang out of your mind about the marriage when you thought it was to be; and now you're ready to sneer at the poor laddie, as if he could help it. It's hard when his ain friends turn against him after the ingratitude he's met wi', and the disappointment he's had to bear."

"You may trust a woman for uphaudin' her son in such like nonsense," said big Colin. "The only man o' sense among them that I can see was yon Mr. Meredith that took the lassie

away. What the deevil had Colin to do with a wife, and him no a penny in his pouch? But in the meantime yonder's the steamboat, and I'm gaun down to meet them. If I were you I would stop still here. You're no that strong," said the farmer, looking upon his wife with a certain secret tenderness. "I would stop still at hame if I were you. It's aye the best welcome for a callant to see his mother at her ain door."

With which big Colin of Ramore strode down to the beach, where his sons were launching their own boat to meet the little steamer by which Colin was coming home. His wife looked after him with mingled feelings as he went down the brae. He had been a little hard upon Colin for these six months past, and had directed many a covert sarcasm at the young man who had gone so far out of the ordinary course as to seek health in Italy. The farmer did not believe in any son of his needing such an expedient; and, in proportion as it seemed unnecessary to his own vigorous strength, and ignorance of weakness, he took opportunity for jeers and jests which were to the mother's keen ears much less good-natured than they seemed to be. And then he had been very angry on the receipt of Colin's letter announcing his intended marriage, and it was with difficulty Mrs. Campbell had prevented her husband from sending in return such an answer as might have banished Colin for ever from his father's house. Now all these clouds had blown past, and no harm had come of them, and he was coming home as of old. His brothers were launching the boat on the beach, and his father had gone down to meet the stranger. The Mistress stood at her door, restraining her eagerness and anxiety as best she could, and obeying her husband's suggestion, as women do so often, by way of propitiating him, and bespeaking tenderness and forbearance for her boy. For indeed the old times had passed away, with all their natural family gladness, and union clouded by no sense of difference. Now it was a man of inde-

pendent thoughts, with projects and pursuits of his own differing from theirs, and with a mind no doubt altered and matured by those advantages of travel which the Mistress regarded in her ignorance with a certain awe, who was coming back to Ramore. Colin had made so many changes, while so few had occurred at home; and even a bystander, less anxious than his mother, might have had reason to inquire and wonder how the matured and travelled son would look upon his unprogressive home.

It was now the end of September, though Colin had left Rome in May; but then his Scholarship was intended to give him the advantage of travel, and specially that peculiar advantage of attendance at a German University which is so much prized in Scotland. He had accordingly passed the intervening months in a little German town, getting up the language and listening to lectures made doubly misty by imperfect understanding of the tongue. The process left Colin's theological ideas very much where it found them—which is to say, in a state of general vagueness and uncertainty; but then he had always the advantage of being able to say that he studied at Dickofptenberg. Lauderdale had left his friend, after spending, not without satisfaction, his hundred pounds, and was happily re-established in the "honourable situation" which he had quitted on Colin's account; and the young man was now returning home alone, to spend a little time with his family before he returned to his studies. The Mistress watched him land from the boat, with her heart beating so loudly in her ears that no other sound was audible; and Colin did not lose much time in ascending the brae where she stood awaiting him. "But you should not have left your father," Mrs. Campbell said, even in the height of her happiness. "He's awfu' proud to see you home, Colin, my man!" Big Colin, however, was no way displeased in his own person by his son's desertion. He came up leisurely after him, not without a thrill of conscious satisfaction. The farmer was

sufficiently disposed to scoff aloud at his son's improved looks, at his beard, and his dress, and all the little particulars which made a visible difference between the present Colin and the awkward country lad of two years ago; but in his heart he made involuntary comparisons, and privately concluded that the minister's son was far from being Colin's equal, and that even the heir and pride of the Duke would have little to boast of in presence of the farmer's son of Ramore. This—though big Colin would not for any earthly inducement have owned the sentiment—made him regard his son's actions and intentions unawares with eyes more lenient and gracious. No contemptible weakness of health or delicacy of appearance appeared in the sunburnt countenance, so unexpectedly garnished by a light-brown, crisp, abundant beard—a beard of which, to tell the truth, Colin himself was rather proud, all the more as it had by rare fortune escaped that intensification of colour which is common to men of his complexion. The golden glitter which lighted up the great waves of brown hair over his forehead had not deepened into red on his chin, as it had done in Archie's young but vigorous whiskers. His complexion, though not so ruddy as his brother's, had the tone of perfect health and vigour, untouched by any shade of fatigue, or weakness. He was not going to be the "delicate" member of the family, as the farmer, with a certain contempt, had foreboded; for, naturally, to be delicate included a certain weakness of mind as well as of body to the healthful dwellers in Ramore.

"You'll find but little to amuse you here after a' your travels," the farmer said. "We're aye busy about the beasts, Archie and me. I'll no say it's an elevating study, like yours; but it's awfu' necessary in our occupation. For my part, I'm no above a kind o' pride in my cattle; and there's your mother, she's set her shoulder to the wheel and won a prize."

"Ay, Colin," said the Mistress, hastening to take up her part

in the conversation, "it's aye grand to be doing something. And it's no' me but Gowan that's won the prize. She was aye a weel-conditioned creature, that it was a pleasure to have onything to do with; but there's plenty of time to speak about the beasts. You're sure you're weel and strong yourself, Colin, my man? for that's the first thing now we've got you hame."

"There doesna look much amiss with him," said the farmer, with an articulate growl. "Your mother's awfu' keen for somebody to pet and play wi'; but there's a time for a' thing; and a callant, even, though he's brought up for a minister, maun find out when he's a man."

"I should hope there was no doubt of that," said Colin. "I'm getting on for two-and-twenty, mother, and strong enough for anything. Thanks to Harry Frankland for a splendid holiday; and now I mean to settle down to work."

Here big Colin again interjected an inarticulate exclamation. "I ken little about your kind of work," said the discontented father; "but, if I were you, when I wanted a bit exercise I would take a hand at the plough, or some wise-like occupation, instead of picking fools out of canals—or even out of lochs, for that matter," he added, with a subdued thrill of pride. "Sir Thomas is aye awfu' civil when he comes here; and, as for that bonnie little creature that's aye with him, she comes chirping about the place with her fine English, as if she belonged to it. I never can make out what she and your mother have such long cracks about."

"Miss Frankland?" said Colin, with a bright look of interest. The Mistress had been so much startled by this unexpected speech of her husband, that she turned round upon Colin with an anxious face, eager to know what effect an intimation so sudden might have upon him. For the farmer's wife believed in true love and in first love with all her heart, and had never been able to divest herself of the idea that it was partly pique and

disappointment in respect to Miss Matty which had driven her son into so hasty an engagement. "Is she still Miss Frankland?" continued the unsuspicious Colin. "I thought she would have been married by this time. She is a little witch," the young man said with a conscious smile—"but I owe her a great many pleasant hours. She was always the life of Wodensbourne. Were they here this year?" he asked; and then another thought struck him. "Hollo! it's only September," said Colin; "I ought to ask, Are they here now?"

"Oh, ay, Colin, they're here now," said the Mistress, "and couldna be more your friends if you were one of the family. I'm no clear in my mind that thae two will ever be married. No that I ken of any obstacle—but, so far as I can see, a bright bonny creature like that, aye full of life and spirit, is nae match for the like of him."

"I do not see that," said the young man who once was Matty Frankland's worshipper. "She is very bright, as you say; but he is the more honest of the two. I used to be jealous of Harry Frankland," said Colin, laughing; "he seemed to have everything that was lacking to me; but I have changed my mind since then. One gets to believe in compensations," said the young man; and he shut his hand softly where it rested on the table, as if he felt in it the tools which a dozen Harry Franklands could have made no use of. But this thought was but dimly intelligible to his hearers, to one of whom, at least, the word "jealous" was limited in its meaning; and, viewed in this light, the sentiment just expressed by Colin was hard to understand.

"I'm no fond of what folk call compensations," said the Mistress. "A loss is aye a loss, whatever onybody can say. Siller that's lost may be made up for, but naething more precious. It's aye an awful marvel to me that chapter about Job getting other bairns to fill the place o' the first. I would

rather have the dead loss and the vacant place," said the tender woman, with tears in her eyes, "than a' your compensations. One can never stand for another—it's awfu' infidelity to think it. If I canna have happiness, I'll be content with sorrow; but you're no to speak of compensations to me."

"No," said Colin, laying his hand caressingly on his mother's; "but I was not speaking of either love or loss. I meant only that for Harry Frankland's advantages over me, I might, perhaps, have a little balance on my side. For example, I picked him out of the canal, as my father says," the young man went on laughing; "but never mind the Franklands; I suppose I shall have to see them, as they are here."

"Weel, Colin, you can please yourself," said his father. "I'm no a man to court the great, but an English baronet, like Sir Thomas, is aye a creditable acquaintance for a callant like you; and he's aye awfu' civil as I was saying; but the first thing to be sure of is what you mean to do. You have had the play for near a year, and it doesna appear to me that tutorships, and that kind of thing, are the right training for a minister. You'll go back to your studies, and go through with them without more interruptions, if you'll be guided by me."

But at this point Colin paused, and had a good many explanations to give. His heart was set on the Balliol scholarship, which he had once given up for Matty's sake; and now there was another chance for him, which had arisen unexpectedly. This it was which had hastened his return home. As for his father, the farmer yielded with but little demur to this proposal. A clear Scotch head, even when it begins to lose its sense of the ideal, and to become absorbed in "the beasts," seldom deceives itself as to the benefits of education; and big Colin had an intense secret confidence in the powers of his son. Honours at Oxford, in the imagination of the Scotch farmer, were a visionary avenue leading to any impossible altitude. He made a little

resistance for appearance sake, but he was in reality more excited by the idea of the conflict—first, for the scholarship itself; then for all possible prizes and honours to the glory of Scotland and Ramore—than was Colin himself.

"But after a year's play you're no qualified," he said, with a sense of speaking ironically, which was very pleasant to his humour. "A competition's an awfu' business; your rivals that have aye been keeping at it will be better qualified than you."

At which Colin smiled, as his father meant him to smile, and answered, "I am not afraid," more modestly a great deal than the farmer in his heart was answering for him; but then an unexpected antagonist arose.

"I dinna pretend to ken a great deal about Oxford," said the Mistress, whose brow was clouded; "but it's an awfu' put-off of time as far as I can see. I'm no fond of spending the best of life in idle learning. Weel, weel, maybe its no idle learning for them that can spare the time; but for a lad that's no out of the thought of settling for himself and doing his duty to his fellow-creatures—I was reading in a book no that long ago," said Colin's mother, "about thae fellowships and things; and of men so misguided as to stay on and live to be poor bachelor bodies, with their Greek and their Latin, and no mortal use in this world. Eh, Colin, laddie, if that was a' that was to come of you!—"

"You're keen to see your son in a pulpit, like the rest of the silly women," said the farmer; "for my part, I'm no that bigoted to the kirk; if he could do better for himsel'——"

But at this juncture the Mistress got up with a severe countenance, laying aside the stocking she was knitting. "Oh, Colin, if you wouldn't be so worldly!" cried the anxious mother. "I'm no one that's aye thinking of a callant bettering himself. If he's taken arles in one service, would you have him desert and gang over to another? I canna bear for my part to see broken threads; be one thing or be another, but dinna melt away and be nothing

at a'," the indignant woman concluded abruptly, moving away to set things in order in the room before they all retired for the night. It was the faint, far-off, and impossible idea of her son settling down into one of the Fellowships of which Mrs. Campbell had been reading which moved her to this little outburst. Her authority probably was some disrespectful novel or magazine article, and this was all the respect she had, in her ignorance, for the nurseries of learning.

Her husband got up in his turn with mingled complacency and derision, as came natural to him. "Leave the callant to himself, Jeanie. He kens what he's doing; that's to say, he has an awfu' ambition considering that he's only your son and mine," said big Colin of Ramore; and he went out to take a last look at his beasts with a thrill of secret pride which he would not for any reward have expressed in words. He was only a humble Westland farmer looking after his beasts, and she was but his true wife, a helpmeet no way above her natural occupations; but there was no telling what the boy might be, though he was only "your son and mine." As for Colin the younger, he went up to his room half an hour later, after the family had made their homely thanksgiving for his return, smiling in himself at the unaccountable contraction of that little chamber, which he had once shared with Archie without finding it too small. Many changes and many thoughts had come and gone since he last lay down under its shelving roof. Miss Matty who had danced away like a will-o'-the-wisp, leaving no trace behind her; and Alice who had won no such devotion, yet whose soft shadow lay upon him still; and then there was the death-bed of Meredith, and his own almost death-bed at Wodensbourne, and all the thoughts that belonged to these. Such influences and imaginations mature a man unawares. While he sat recalling all that had passed since he left this nest of his childhood, the Mistress tapped softly at his door, and came in upon him with

wistful eyes. She would have given all she had in the world for the power of reading her son's heart at that moment, and, indeed, there was little in it which Colin would have objected to reveal to his mother. But the two human creatures were constrained to stand apart from each in the bonds of their individual nature —to question timidly and answer vaguely, and make guesses which were all astray from the truth. The Mistress came behind her son and laid one hand on his shoulder, and with the other caressed and smoothed back the waves of brown hair of which she had always been so proud. "Your hair is just as long as ever, Colin," said the admiring mother; "but it's no a' your mother's now," she said with a soft, little sigh. She was standing behind him that her eyes might not disconcert her boy, meaning to woo him into confidence and the opening of his heart.

"I don't know who else cares for it," said Colin; and then he too was glad to respond to the unasked question. "My poor Alice," he said; "if I could but have brought her to you, mother— She would have been a daughter to you."

Mrs. Campbell sighed. "Eh, Colin, I'm awfu' hard-hearted," she said; "I canna believe in ony woman ever taking *that* place; I'm awfu' bigoted to my ain. But she would have been dearly welcome for my laddie's sake; and I'm real anxious to hear how it a' was. It was but little you said in your letters; and a' this night I've been wanting to have you to mysel', and to hear all that there was to say."

"I don't know what there is to say," said Colin; "I must have written all about it. Her position, of course, made no difference to my feelings," he went on, rather hotly, like a man who in his own consciousness stands somewhat on his defence; "but it made us hasten matters. I thought if I could only have brought her home to you——"

"It was aye you for a kind thought," said the Mistress; "but

she would have had little need of the auld mother when she had the son; and Colin, my man, is it a' ended now?"

"Heaven knows!" said Colin with a little impatience. "I have written to her through her father, and I have written to her direct, and all that I have had from her is one little letter, saying that her father had forbidden all further intercourse between us, and bidding me farewell; but——"

"But," said the Mistress, "it no of her own will; she's faithful in her heart? And if she's true to you, you'll be true to her? Isna that what you mean?"

"I suppose so," said Colin; and then he made a little pause. "There never was any one so patient and so dutiful," he said. "When poor Arthur died, it was she who forgot herself to think of us. Perhaps even this is not so hard upon her as one thinks."

"Eh, but I was thinking first of my ain, like a heartless woman as I am," said his mother. "I was thinking it was hard on *you*."

He did not turn round his face to her as she had hoped; but her keen eyes could see the heightened colour which tinged even his neck and his forehead. "Yes," said Colin; "but for my part," he added, with a little effort, "it is chiefly Alice I have been thinking of. It may seem vain to say so—but she will have less to occupy her thoughts than I shall have, and—and the time may hang heavier. You don't like me to go to Oxford, mother?" This question was said with a little jerk, as of a man who was pleased to plunge into a new subject; and the Mistress was far too close an observer not to understand what her son meant.

"I like whatever is good for you, Colin," she said; "but it was aye in the thought of losing time. I'm no meaning real loss of time. I'm meaning I was thinking of mair hurry than there is. But you're both awfu' young, and I like whatever is for your good, Colin," said the tender mother. She kept folding

back his heavy locks as she spoke, altogether disconcerted and at a loss, poor soul; for Colin's calmness did not seem to his mother quite consistent with his love; and the possibility of a marriage without that foundation was to Mrs. Campbell the most hideous of all suppositions. And then, like a true woman as she was, she went back to her little original romance, and grew more confused than ever.

"I'm maybe an awfu' foolish woman," she said, with an attempt at a smile, which Colin was somehow conscious of, though he did not see it, "but, even if I am, you'll no be angry at your mother. Colin, my man, maybe it's no the best thing for you that thae folk at the castle should be here?"

"Which folk at the castle?" said Colin, who had honestly forgotten for the moment. "Oh, the Franklands! What should it matter to me?"

This time he turned round upon her with eyes of unabashed surprise, which the Mistress found herself totally unprepared to meet. It was now her turn to falter, and stammer, and break down.

"Eh, Colin, it's so hard to ken," said the Mistress. "The heart's awfu' deceitful. I'm no saying one thing or another; for I canna read what you're thinking, though you are my ain laddie; but if you were to think it best no to enter into temptation—"

"Meaning Miss Matty?" said Colin; and he laughed with such entire freedom that his mother was first silenced and then offended by his levity. "No fear of that, mother; and then she has Harry, I suppose, to keep her right."

"I'm no so clear about that," said Mrs. Campbell, nettled, notwithstanding her satisfaction, by her son's indifference; "he's away abroad somewhere; but I would not say but what there might be another," she continued, with natural *esprit du corps*, which was still more irritated by Colin's calm response,—

"Or two or three others," said the young man; "but, for all that, you are quite right to stand up for her, mother; only I am not in the least danger. No, I must get to work," said Colin; "hard work, without any more nonsense; but I'd like to show those fellows that a man may choose to be a Scotch minister though he is Fellow of an English college—"

The Mistress interrupted her son with the nearest approach to a scream which her Scotch self-control would admit of. "A Fellow of an English college," she said in dismay, "and you troth-plighted to an innocent young woman that trusts in you, Colin! That I should ever live to hear such words out of the mouth of a son of mine!"

And, notwithstanding his explanations, the Mistress retired to her own room, ill at ease, and with a sense of coming trouble. "A man that's engaged to be married shouldna be thinking of such an awfu' off-put of time," she said to herself; "and ah, if the poor lassie is aye trusting to his coming, and looking for him day by day!" This thought took away from his mother half the joy of Colin's return. Perhaps her cherished son, too, was growing "worldly," like his father, who thought of the "beasts" even in his dreams. And, as for Colin himself, he, too, felt the invisible curb upon his free actions, and chafed at it in the depths of his heart when he was alone. With all this world of work and ambition before him, it was hard to feel upon his proud neck that visionary rein. Though Alice had set him free in her little letter, it was still in her soft fingers that this shadowy bond remained. He had not repudiated it, even in his most secret thoughts; but, as soon as he began to act independently, he became conscious of the bondage, and in his heart resented it. If he had brought her home, as he had intended, to his father's house, his young dependent wife, he probably would have felt much less clearly this sense of having forestalled the future, and mortgaged his very life.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE Balliol Scholarship was, however, too important a reality to leave the young candidate much time to consider his position—and Colin's history would be too long, even for the patience of his friends, if we were to enter into this part of his life in detail. Everybody knows he won the scholarship; and, indeed, neither that, nor his subsequent career at Balliol, are matters to be recorded, since the chronicle has been already made in those popular University records which give their heroes a reputation, no doubt temporary, but while it lasts of the highest possible flavour. He had so warm a greeting from Sir Thomas Frankland that it would have been churlish on Colin's part had he declined the invitations he received to the Castle, where, indeed, Miss Matty did not want him just at that moment. Though she was not the least in the world in love with him, it is certain that between the intervals of her other amusements in that *genre*, the thought of Colin had often occurred to her mind. She thought of him with a wonderful gratitude and tenderness sometimes, as of a man who had actually loved her with the impossible love—and sometimes with a ring of pleasant laughter, not far removed from tears. Anything "between them" was utterly impossible, of course—but, perhaps, all the more for that, Miss Matty's heart, so much as there was remaining of it, went back to Colin in its vacant moments, as to a green spot upon which she could repose herself, and set down her burden of vanities for the time. This very sentiment, however, made her little inclined to have him at the Castle, where there was at present a party

staying, including, at least, one man of qualifications worthy a lady's regard. Harry and his cousin had quarrelled so often that their quarrel at last was serious, and the new man was cleverer than Harry, and not so hard to amuse; but it was difficult to go over the well-known ground with which Miss Frankland was so familiar in presence of one whom she had put through the process in a still more captivating fashion, and who was still sufficiently interested to note what she was doing, and to betray that he noted it. Colin, himself, was not so conscious of observing his old love in her new love-making as she was conscious of his observation; and, though it was only a glance now and then, a turn of the head, or raising of the eyes, it was enough to make her awkward by moments, an evidence of feeling for which Miss Matty could not forgive herself.

Thus it happened that Colin was not thrown into temptation in the way his mother dreaded. The temptation he was thrown into was one of a much more subtle character. He rushed at his work, and the preparations for his work, with all the energy of his character; he felt himself free to follow out the highest visions of life that had formed themselves among his youthful dreams. He thought of the new study on which he was about to enter, and the honours upon which he already calculated in his imagination, as but stepping stones to what lay after, and offered himself up with a certain youthful effusion and superabundance to his Church and his country, for which he had assuredly something to do more than other men. And then, when Colin had got so far as this, and was tossing his young head proudly in the glory of his intentions, there came a little start and shiver, and that sense of the curb, which had struck him first after his confidence with his mother, returned to his mind. But the bondage seemed to grow more and more visionary as he went on. Alice had given him up, so to speak; she was debarred by her father from any correspondence with him, and

might, for anything Colin knew, gentle and yielding as she was, be made to marry some one else by the same authority; and, though he did not discuss the question with himself in words, it became more and more hard to Colin to contemplate the possibility of having to abridge his studies and sacrifice his higher aims to the necessity of getting "settled in life." If he were "settled in life" to-morrow, it could only be as an undistinguished Scotch minister, poor, so far as money was concerned, and with no higher channel either to use or fame; and, at his age, to be only like his neighbours was of all things the most irksome to him.

Those neighbours, or at least the greater part of them, were good fellows enough in their way. So far as a vague general conception of life and its meaning went, they were superior as a class in Colin's opinion to that other clerical class represented by the gentle curate of Wodensbourne, whose soul was absorbed in the restoration of his Church, and the fit states of mind for the Sundays after Trinity; but there were also particulars in which, as a class, they were wonderfully inferior to that mild and gentlemanly Anglican. As for Colin, he had not formed his ideal on any curate, or even bishop, of the wealthier Church. Like other fervent young men, an eager discontent with everything he saw lay at the bottom of his imaginations; and it was the development of Christianity—"more chivalrous, more magnanimous, than that of modern times"—that he thought of. A dangerous condition of mind, no doubt; and the people round him would have sneered much at Colin and his ambition had he put it into words; but, after all, it was an ideal worth contemplating which he presented to himself.

In the midst of such thoughts, and of all the future possibilities of life, it was a little hard to be suddenly stopped short, and reminded of Mariana in her moated grange, sighing, "He does not come." If he did come, making all the unspeak-

able sacrifices necessary to that end, as his mother seemed to think he should, the probabilities were that the door of the grange would be closed upon him; and who could tell but that Alice, always so docile, might be diverted even from the thought of him by some other suitor presented to her by her father? Were Colin's hopes to be sacrificed to her possible faith, and the possible relenting of Mr. Meredith? And, alas! amid all the new impulses that were rising within him, there came again the vision of that woman in the clouds, whom as yet, though he had been in love with Matty Frankland, and had all but married Alice Meredith, Colin had never seen. She kissed her shadowy hand to him by times out of those rosy vapours that floated among the hills when the sun had gone down, and twilight lay sweet over the Holy Loch—and beckoned him on, on, to the future and the distance where she was. When the apparition had glanced out upon him after this old fashion, Colin felt all at once the jerk of the invisible bridle on his neck, and chafed at it; and then he shut his eyes wilfully, and rushed on faster than before, and did his best to ignore the curb. After all, it was no curb if it were rightly regarded. Alice had released, and her father had rejected him, and he had been accused of fortune-hunting, and treated like a man unworthy of consideration. So far as external circumstances went, no one could blame him for inconstancy, no one could imagine that the engagement thus broken was, according to any code of honour, binding upon Colin; but yet—

This was the uncomfortable state of mind in which he was when he finally committed himself to the Balliol Scholarship, and thus put off that "settling in life" which the Mistress thought due to Alice. When the matter was concluded, however, the young man became more comfortable. At all events, until the termination of his studies, no decision, one way or other, could be expected from him; and it would still be two

years before Alice was of the age to decide for herself. He discussed the matter—so far as he ever permitted himself to discuss it with any one—with Lauderdale, who managed to spend the last Sunday with him at Ramore. It was still only October, but winter had begun betimes, and a sprinkling of snow lay on the hills at the head of the loch. The water itself, all crisped and brightened by a slight breeze and a frosty sun, lay dazzling between its banks, reflecting every shade of colour upon them—the russet lines of wood with which their little glens were outlined, and the yellow patches of stubble, or late corn, still unreaped, that made lights of the landscape, and relieved the hazy green of the pastures, and the brown waste of withered bracken and heather above. The wintry day, the clearness of the frosty air, and the touch of snow on the hills, gave to the Holy Loch that touch of colour which is the only thing ever wanting to its loveliness; a colour cold, it is true, but in accordance with the scene. The waves came up with a lively cadence on the beach, and the wind blew showers of yellow leaves in the faces of the two friends as they walked home together from church. Sir Thomas had detained them in the first place, and after him the minister, who had emerged from his little vestry in time for half an hour's conversation with his young parishioner, who was something of a hero on the Holy Loch—a hero, and yet subject to the inevitable touch of familiar depreciation which belongs to a prophet in his own country. The crowd of church-goers had dispersed from the roads when the two turned their faces towards Ramore. Perhaps by reason of the yew-trees under which they had to pass, perhaps because this Sunday, too, marked a crisis, it occurred to both of them to think of their walk through the long ilex avenues of the Frascati villa, the Sunday after Meredith's death. It was Lauderdale, as was natural, who returned to that subject the first.

"It's a wee hard to believe that it's the same world," he said, "and that you and me are making our way to Ramore, and not to yon painted cha'amer, and our friend, with her distaff in her hand. I'm whiles no clear in my mind that we were ever there."

At which Colin was a little impatient, as was natural. "Don't be fantastic," he said. "It does not matter about Sora Antonia; but there are other things not so easily dropped;" and here the young man paused and uttered a sigh, which arose half from a certain momentary longing for the gentle creature to whom his faith was plighted, and half from an irksome sense of the disadvantages of having plighted his faith.

"Ay," said Lauderdale, "I'm no fond myself of dropping threads like that. There's nae telling when they may be joined again, or how; but if it's ony comfort to you, Colin, I'm a great believer in sequences. I never put ony faith in things breaking off clean in an arbitrary way. Thae two didna enter your life to be put out again by the will of an old fool of a father. I'll no say that I saw the requirements of Providence just as clear as you thought you did, but I canna put faith in an ending like what's happened. You and her are awfu' young. You have time to wait."

"Time to wait," repeated Colin in his impatience; "there is something more needed than time. Mr. Meredith has returned me my last letter with a request that I should not trouble his daughter again. You do not think a man can go on in the face of that?"

"He's naething but a jailor," said Lauderdale; "you may be sure that *she* is neither art nor part in that. When the time comes we'll a' ken better; and here, in the meantime, you are making another beginning of your life."

"It appears to me I am always making beginnings," said Colin. "It was much such a day as this when Harry Frank-

land fell into the loch—that was a kind of beginning in its way. Wodensbourne was a beginning, and so was Italy—and now—It appears life is made up of such."

"You're no so far wrong there," said Lauderdale; "but it's grand to make the new start like you, with a' heaven and earth on your side. I've kent them that had to set their face to the brae with baith earth and heaven against them—or so it seemed. It's ill getting new images," said the philosopher meditatively. "I wonder who it was first found out that life was a journey. It's no an original idea nowadays, but its aye awfu' true. A man sets out with a hantle mair things than he needs, *impedimenta* of a' kinds; but he leaves the maist of them behind afore he's reached the middle of the road. You've an awfu' body of opinions, callant, besides other things to dispose of. I'm thinking Oxford will do you good for that. You're no likely to take up with their superfluities, and you'll get rid of some of your ain."

"I don't know what you call superfluities," said Colin. "I don't think I am a man of many opinions. A few things are vital and cannot be dispensed with—and these you are quite as distinct upon as I can be. However, I don't go to Oxford to learn that."

"I'm awfu' curious to ken in a general way," said Lauderdale, "what you are going to Oxford to learn. You're no a bad hand at the classics, callant. I would like to ken what it was that you were meaning to pay three good years of life to learn."

Upon which Colin laughed, and felt without knowing why, a flush come to his cheek. "If I should prefer to win my spurs somewhere else than at home," said the young man lightly, "should you wonder at that? Beside, the English universities have a greater reputation than ours—and in short——"

"For idle learning," said Lauderdale with a little heat; "not for the science of guiding men, which, so far as I can see, is

what you're aiming at. No that I'm the man to speak ony blasphemy against the dead languages, if the like of that was to be your trade; but for a Scotch parish, or maybe a Scotch presbytery—or in the course of time, if a' goes well, an Assembly of the Kirk——"

"Stuff!" cried Colin; "What has that to do with it? Besides," the young man said with a laugh, half of pride, half of shame, "I want to show these fellows that a man may win their honours and carry them back to the old Church, which they talk about in a benevolent way, as if it was in the South Sea Islands. Well, that is my weakness. I want to bring their prizes back here, and wear them at home."

"The callant's crazy," said Lauderdale, but the idea was sufficiently in accord with his national sentiments to be treated with indulgence; "it might maybe be spoiling the Egyptians," he added grimly, "but, as for ony good to us— You're like a' young creatures, callant; you're awfu' fond of the *impedimenta*. But you may change your mind two or three times over between this and that."

"You have very little respect for my constancy, Lauderdale," said Colin; and then he felt irritated with himself for the word he had used. "In what respect do you suppose I can change my mind?" he asked with a little impatience; and Colin lifted his eyes full upon his friend's face, as he had learned to do when there was question of Alice—though certainly it could not be supposed that there was any question of Alice in the present case.

"Whisht, callant," said Lauderdale; "I've an awfu' trust in your constancy. It's one o' the words I like best in the English language, or in the Scotch either for that matter. It's a kind of word that canna be slipped over among a crowd, but craves full saying and a' its letters sounded. As I was saying," he continued, changing his tone, "I'm a great believer in sequences; there's

mony new beginnings, but there's nae absolute end short of dying, which is aye an end for this world, so far as a man can see. And, next to God and Christ, which are the grand primitive necessities, without which no man can take his journey, I'm aye for counting true love and good faith. I wouldna say but what a' the rest were more or less *impedimenta*," said Lauderdale; "but that's no the question under discussion. You might change your mind upon a' the minor matters, and no be inconstant. For example, you might be drawn to the English kirk after three years; or you might come to think you were destined for nae kirk at all, but for other occupations in this world; and, as for me, I wouldna blame you. As long as you're true to your Master—and next to yoursel'—and next to them that trust you," said Colin's faithful counsellor; "and of that I've no fear."

"I did not think of setting the question on such a solemn basis," said Colin with an amount of irritation which annoyed himself, and which he could not subdue; "however, time will show; and here we are at Ramore." Indeed he was rather glad to be so near Ramore. This talk of constancy exasperated him, he could not tell how; for, to be sure, he meant no inconstancy. Yet, when the sunset came again, detaching rosy cloudlets from the great masses of vapour, and shedding a mist of gold and purple over the hills—and when those wistful stretches of "daffodil sky" opened out over the western ramparts of the Holy Loch—Colin turned his eyes from the wonderful heavens as if from a visible enemy. Was not she there as always, that impossible woman, wooing him on into the future, into the unimaginable distance where somewhere she might be found any day waiting him? He turned his back upon the west, and went down of his own will to the dark shade of the yew-trees, which were somehow like the ilex alleys of the sweet Alban hills; but even there he carried his impa-

tience with him, and found it best on the whole to go home and give himself up to the home talk of Ramore, in which many matters were discussed unconnected with the beasts, but where this one fundamental question was for the present named no more.

CHAPTER XVII.

COLIN'S career at Oxford does not lie in the way of his present historian, though, to be sure, a few piquant particulars might be selected of the way in which a pair of young Scotch eyes, with a light in them somewhat akin to genius, but trained to see the realities of homely life on the Holy Loch, regarded the peculiar existence of the steady, artificial old world, and the riotous but submissive new world, which between them form a university. Colin who, like most of his countrymen, found a great deal of the "wit" of the community around him to be sheer nonsense, sometimes agreeable, sometimes much the reverse, had also like his nation a latent but powerful sense of humour, which, backed by a few prejudices, and stimulated a little by the different manners current in the class to which he himself belonged, revealed to him many wonderful absurdities in the unconscious microcosm which felt itself a universe;—a revelation which restored any inequality in the balance of affairs, and made the Scotch undergraduate at his ease in his new circumstances. For his own part, he stood in quite a different position from the host of young men, most of them younger than himself, by whom he found himself surrounded. They were accomplishing without any very definite object the natural and usual course of their education—a process which everybody had to go through, and which, with more or less credit, their fathers, brothers, friends, and relatives had passed through before them. Life beyond the walls of the University had doubtless objects more

interesting than the present routine; but there was no such immediate connexion between those objects and that routine as Colin had been accustomed to see in his Scotch college.

As for Colin himself, he was aiming at a special end, which made his course distinct for him among his more careless companions; he was bent on the highest honours attainable by hard work and powers much above the average; and this determination would have acted as a moral shield to him against the meaner temptations of the place, even if he had not already been by disposition and habits impervious to them. The higher danger—the many temptations to which Colin, like other young men, was exposed, of contenting himself with a brilliant unproductive social reputation—was warded off from him by the settled determination with which he entered upon his work. For Scotch sentiment is very distinct on this question; and Colin understood perfectly that, if he returned with only a moderate success, his *Alma Mater* would be utterly disgusted with her pet student, and his reputation would fall to a considerably lower ebb than if he had been content to stay at home. He came upon that tranquil academic scene in the true spirit of an invader; not unfriendly—on the contrary, a keen observer of everything, an eager and interested spectator of all the peculiar habitudes of the foreign country—but chiefly bent upon snatching the laurel, as soon as that should be possible, and carrying home his spoil in triumph. He entered Oxford, in short, as the Czar Peter, had he been less a savage, might have been supposed to establish himself in the bosom of the homely English society of his time, seeing, with eyes brightened by curiosity and the novelty of the spectacle, various matters in a ridiculous light which were performed with the utmost gravity and unconsciousness by the accustomed inhabitants; and, on the other hand, discovering as many particulars from which he might borrow some advantage to his own people. Certainly, Czar Peter, who

was at once an absolute monarch and the most enlightened man of his nation, stood in a somewhat different position from the nameless Scotch student, between whom and other Scotch students no ordinary observer could have discovered much difference; but the aspirations of young men of Colin's age are fortunately unlimited by reason, and the plan he had conceived of working a revolution in his native Church and country, or, at least, aiming at that to the highest extent of his powers, was as legitimate, to say the least, as the determination to make a great fortune, with which other young men of his nation have often confronted the world.

Colin frequented the Oxford churches as he had frequented those in Rome, with his paramount idea in his mind, and listened to the sermons in them with that prevailing reference to the audience which he himself looked forward to, which gave so strange an aspect to much that he heard. To be sure, it was not the best way to draw religious advantage for himself from the teachings he listened to; but yet the process was not without its benefits to the predestined priest. He seemed to himself to be looking on while the University preacher delivered his dignified periods, not to the actual assembly, but to a shrewd and steady Scotch congregation, not easily moved either to reverence or enthusiasm, and with a national sense of logic. He could not help smiling to himself when, in the midst of some elaborate piece of reasoning, the least little step aside landed the speaker upon that quagmire of ecclesiastical authority which with Colin's audience would go far to neutralize all the argument. The young man fancied he could see the elders shake their heads, and the rural philosophers remark to each other "He maun have been awfu' ill off for an argument afore he landed upon yon." And, when the preacher proceeded to "our Church's admirable arrangements," and displayed with calm distinctness the final certainty that perfection had been absolutely

attained by that venerated mother, the young Scotchman felt a prick of contradiction in his heart on his own account as well as that of his imaginary audience. He thought to himself that the same arguments employed on behalf of the Church of Scotland would go a long way towards unsettling the national faith, and smiled within himself at the undoubting assumption which his contradictory northern soul was so far from accepting. He was not a bad emblem of his nation in this particular, at least. He consented without a remonstrance to matters of detail, such as were supposed, by anybody who had curiosity enough to inquire into the singular semi-savage religious practices of Scotland, to be specially discordant to the ideas of his country; but he laughed at "our Church's admirable arrangements" in such a manner as to set the hair of the University on end. The principles of apostolic succession and unbroken ecclesiastical descent produced in this daring young sceptic, not indignation nor argument, which might have been tolerated, but an amused disregard which was unbearable. He was always so conscious of what his Scotch audience, buried somewhere among the hills in the seclusion of a country parish, would think of such pretensions, and laughed not at the doctrine so much as at the thought of their reception of it. In this respect the young Scotchman, embodying his country, was the most contradictory of men.

He was not very much more satisfactory in the other region, where the best of Anglicans occasionally wander, and where men who hold with the firmest conviction the doctrine of apostolic succession sometimes show a strange degree of uncertainty about things more important. Colin's convictions were vague enough on a great many matters which were considered vital on the Holy Loch; and perhaps he was not a much more satisfactory hearer in his parish church at home than he was in Oxford when there was question of the descendants of the apostles. But amidst this sea of vague and undeveloped thought, which was

not so much doubt as uncertainty, there stood up several rocks of absolute faith which were utterly impervious to assault. His mind was so far conformed to his age that he could hear even these ultimate and fundamental matters canvassed by the calm philosophers about him, without any undue theological heat or passion of defence; but it soon became evident that on these points the young Scotchman was immovable, a certainty which made him an interesting study to some of his companions and teachers. It would be foolish to say that his faith procured for him that awe and respect which the popular mind takes it for granted a company of sceptics must always feel for the one among them who retains his religious convictions. On the contrary, Colin's world was amused by his belief. It was, itself to start with, a perfectly pious, well-conducted world, saying its prayers like everybody else, and containing nothing within its placid bosom which in the least resembled the free-thinkers of ancient days. The Church was not the least in the world in danger from that mild fraternity, to which every kind of faith was a thing to be talked about, to evolve lines of thought upon, and give rise to the most refined, and acute, and charming conversation. But, as for Colin, they regarded him with amused observation as a rare specimen of the semi-cultivated, semi-savage intelligence which is always so refreshing to a society which has refined itself to a point somewhat beyond nature. He was "a most interesting young man," and they found in him "a beautiful enthusiasm," an "engaging simplicity." As for Colin, he was quite aware of the somewhat unfounded admiration with which he was regarded, and smiled in his turn at his observers with a truer consciousness of the humour of the position than they could possibly have who saw only half of it; but he kept his shrewd Scotch eyes open all the time, and half unconsciously made himself acquainted with a great many new developments of that humanity which was to be the material of all the labours

of his life. He had it in his power to remark the exact and delica e points at which Anglicanism joined on to the newer fashion of intellectualism, and to note how a morsel of faith the less might be now and then conciliated and made up for by a morsel of observance the more. And, at the same time, he became aware of the convenient possibility of dividing a man, and making him into two or three different "beings," as occasion required; so that the emotional being—having sundry natural weaknesses, such as old association and youthful habit, and a regard to the feelings of others, not to speak of the affectionate prejudices of a good Churchman—was quite free to do his daily service at chapel, and say his prayers, even at the very moment when the intellectual being was busy with the most delicate demonstration that prayer in a universe governed by absolute law was an evident absurdity and contradiction of all reason. Colin for his part looked on at this partition, and smiled in his turn. He was not shocked, as perhaps he ought to have been; but then, as has been said, he too was a man of his age, and found many things which were required by absolute orthodoxy unnecessary *impedimenta*, as Lauderdale had called them.

But, with all this, the young man had never been able to cut himself in half, and he could not learn to regard the process as one either advantageous or even honourable now.

Such, apart from the work which was necessary in obedience to his grand original impulse, were the studies he pursued in Oxford. At the same time he had another occupation in hand, strangely out of accord at once with those studies and with his own thoughts. This was the publication of poor Meredith's book, the "Voice from the Grave," at which he had laboured to the latest moment of his life. In it was represented another world, an altogether contradictory type of existence. Between Colin's intellectual friends, to whom the "Hereafter" was a curious and interesting but altogether baffling subject of investiga-

tion, and the dying youth who had gone out of this world in a dauntless primitive confidence of finding himself at once in the shining streets and endless sunshine of the New Jerusalem, the difference was so great as to be past counting. As for the young editor, his view of life was as different from Meredith's as it was from that of his present companions. The great light of heaven was to Colin, as to many others, as impenetrable as the profoundest darkness; he could neither see into it, nor permit himself to make guesses of what was going on beyond; and, consequently, he had little sympathy with the kind of piety which regards life as a preparation for death. Sometimes he smiled, sometimes he sighed over the proofs as he corrected them; sometimes, but for knowing as he did the utter truthfulness with which the dead writer had set forth his one-sided and narrow conception of the world, Colin would have been disposed to toss into the fire those strange warnings and exhortations. But when he thought of the young author, dead in his youth, and of all the doings and sayings of those months in which they lived together, and, more touching still, of those conversations that were held on the very brink of the grave, and at the gate of heaven, his heart smote him. And then his new friends broke in upon him, and discussed the book with opinions so various that Colin could but admire and wonder. One considered them a curious study of the internal consciousness, quite worthy the attention of a student of mental phenomena. Another was of opinion that such stuff was the kind of nutriment fit for the uneducated classes, who had strong religious prejudices, and no brains to speak of. When Colin found his own sentiments thrown back to him in this careless fashion, he began to see for the first time the conceit and self-importance of his judgment; and many discussions followed, as might be supposed.

"When religion becomes a matter of self-interest," said one of the young men met in his rooms on one such occasion, "I don't

see any attraction in it. I don't understand what you can see in this rubbish, Campbell. Inflated humbug and sordid calculations——"

"Hush!" said Colin, with a sparkle in his eyes, "the writer was of the kind of man that saints were once made of—and I believe in saints for my part."

"Well, yes," said his interlocutor; "I don't mean to be vulgar: one can't help to a certain extent believing in saints—though our wise fathers you know thought otherwise." Perhaps the young speaker would not have thought it necessary to be civil to them, if it had not been that a former generation had made fun of the saints.

"And as for self-interest," said Colin, "I don't see how a man can have an altogether generous and patronizing love for God. A child's love for his father is always interested in a kind of way. The love that has no self-regard in it, is pity or patronage rather than love."

"Oh, love!" said Colin's friend, who had not been altogether thinking of that; and then another speaker broke in.

"For my part, it is the emotional aspect of religion that chiefly interests me," he said; "in a philosophical point of view, you know. But the only way you can influence the masses is by working on their feelings. It would be different, of course, with a set of fellows like you."

"We are superior to that sort of thing," said Colin. "Perhaps we have no feelings. When a man becomes a Don, I don't see what use he has for such superfluities."

"You are going to be a Don yourself, I suppose," said some one. "You are sure of your Fellowship, of course."

Upon which Colin smiled with the pleasant arrogance of his age. "Something better than that," he said. "I am not the kind of stuff that Dons are made of. I am going home to Scotland to the Kirk."

Though his friends were all aware of this magnanimous intention, they could not but open their eyes at every new repetition of it.

"If you have set your heart on being a parson," one of his companions said, "go into the Church, at least. Hang it! Campbell, don't go and bind yourself to a conventicle," said his anxious acquaintance; "a man has always a chance of doing something in the Church."

"That is precisely my idea," said Colin, "though you fellows seem to think it the last possibility. And, besides, it is the only thing I can do. I can't be a statesman, as you have the chance of being, and I have not an estate to manage. What else would you have me do?"

"My dear fellow," said another of his friends, "you are as sure of your Fellowship as any man ever was. Go in for literature, and send your old Kirk to Jericho—a fellow like you has nothing to do in such a place. One knows the sort of thing precisely; any blockhead that can thump his pulpit, and drone out long prayers—"

"Many thanks for your advice," said Colin; "but I prefer my own profession. Literature is all very well when a man is born to it, but life is better than literature at its best; and my own trade should be good for something, if any profession ever was."

"Well, now, taking it at the very best, how much do you you think you are likely to have a-year?—a hundred and fifty perhaps? No, I don't mean to say that's final;—but, of course, a thoughtful fellow like you takes it into consideration," said Colin's adviser; "everything is badly paid now-a-days—but, at all events, there are chances. If a man is made of iron and brass, and has the resolution of an elephant, he may get to be something at the Bar, you know, and make a mint of money. And, even in the Church, to be sure, if he's harmless and civil, something worth having may come in his way; but you are neither civil nor

harmless, Campbell. And, by Jove! it's not the Church you are thinking of, but the Kirk, which is totally different. I've been in Scotland," continued the Mentor, with animation; "it's not even one Kirk, which would be something. But there's one at the top of the hill and one at the bottom, and I defy any man to tell which is which. Come, Campbell, don't be a Quixote—give it up!"

"You might as well have told my namesake to give up the Queen's service after he had lost a battle," said Colin. "Though I don't suppose Sir Colin ever did lose a battle, by the way. I tell you I am not the sort of stuff for a Don—the atmosphere is too much rarified up here—I can't breathe in it. Men who come of my race must work or die."

"I can't say that I feel the force of the alternative," said Colin's friend. "A man must think; it is the first condition of existence; but as for the other two— What have you in common with the unreasoning multitude?" asked the young philosopher. There were plenty of voices to take the other side of the question, but Colin's mind was not political to speak of, and he had no inclination to take the democratic side.

"A few things," Colin said, with a smile, "that don't exist among the Illuminati. For instance, ignorance and want and some other human attributes; and we can help each other on down below, while you are thinking it all out above. The worst is that we will probably find time to live and die before you come to any conclusion. Let us talk it over ten years hence," said this young prince of the future, with royal confidence. And this was how a great many such conversations came to an end.

Ten years was like to be an eventful period to the young men who were standing on the verge of life; but they all made very light of it, as was natural. As for Colin, he did not attempt to make out to himself any clear plan of what he attempted to do

and to be in ten years. Certainly, he calculated upon having by that time reached the highest culmination of which life was capable. He meant to be a prince in his own country without, at the same time, following anything for his own glory or advantage; for in reality, the highest projects that could move the spirit of a man were in Colin's mind. He had no thought of becoming a popular preacher, or the oracle of a coterie. What he truly intended indeed was not quite known to himself, in the vague but magnificent stirrings of his ambition. He meant to take possession of some certain corner of his native country, and make of it an ideal Scotland, manful in works and stedfast in belief; and he meant from that corner to influence and move all the land in some mystical method known only to the imagination. Such are the splendid colours in which fancy, when sufficiently lively, can dress up even such a sober reality as the life of a Scotch minister. While he planned this he seemed to himself so entirely a man of experience, ready to smile at the notions of undisciplined youth, that he succeeded in altogether checking and deceiving his own inevitable good sense —that watchful monitor which warns even an imaginative mind of its extravagance. This was the great dream which, interrupted now and then by lighter fancies, had accompanied Colin more or less clearly through all his life. And now the hour of trial was about to come, and the young man's ambition was ready to accomplish itself as best it might.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It is unnecessary to say that Colin won the prize on which he had set his heart. The record is extant in the University, to save his historian trouble; and, to be sure, nobody can be supposed to be ignorant on so important a point—at least nobody who is anybody and has a character to support. He took a double first-class—as he had set his heart on doing—and thereby obtained, as some great man once said in a speech, an equal standing to that of a duke in English society. It is to be feared that Colin did not experience the full benefits of his elevation; for, to be sure, such a dukedom is of a temporary character, and was scarcely likely to survive beyond his year. But the prize when it was won, and all the long details of the process of winning it, were not without their effect upon him. Colin, being still young and inexperienced, had. indeed, the idea that the possessor of such a distinction needed but to signify his august will, and straightway every possible avenue of advancement would open before him. But for that idea, the pride of carrying home his honours, and laying them at the feet of his native church and country, would have been much lessened; and, to tell the truth, when the moment of triumph came, Colin yielded a little to the intoxication, and lent his thoughts, in spite of himself, to those charmed voices of ambition which, in every allegory that ever was invented, exercise their siren influence on the young man at the beginning of his career. He waited to be wooed at that eventful moment. He had a vague idea at the bottom of his heart that the State and the Church, and the Bar and the Press,

would all come forward open-armed to tempt the hero of the year; and he had nobly determined to turn a deaf ear to all their temptations, and cling to his natural vocation, the profession to which he had been destined from his cradle with a constancy to which the world could not fail to do honour. Colin accordingly took possession of his honours with a little expectation, and waited for the siren-voices. When they did not come, the young man was a little astonished, a little mortified and cast down for the moment. But after that, happily, the absurdity of the position struck him. He burst into sudden laughter in his rooms, where he sat in all the new gloss of his fame and dignity, with much congratulation from his friends, but no particular excitement on the part of the world. Great Britain, as it appeared, for the moment, was not so urgently in want of a new Secretary of State as to contest the matter with the anonymous Scotch parish which had a claim upon the young man as its minister; and neither the *Times* nor the *Quarterly Review* put forth any pretensions to him. And University life, to which he might have had a successful *entrée*, did not exercise any charm upon Colin. A tutorship, though with unlimited prospect of pupils, or even a final hope of reaching the august elevation of Master, was not the vocation on which he had set his heart. The consequence was, as we have said, that the new Fellow of Balliol remained expectant for some time, then began to feel mortified and disappointed, and finally arose, with a storm of half-indignant laughter, to find that, after all, his position was not vitally changed by his success.

This was a strange, and perhaps in some respects a painful, discovery for a young man to make. He had distinguished himself among his fellows as much as a young soldier who had made himself the hero of a campaign would have distinguished himself among his; but this fact had very little effect upon his entry into the world. If he had been the Duke's son, his first-class

glories would have been a graceful addition to the natural honours of his name, and perhaps might have turned towards him with favour the eyes of some of those great persons who hold the keys of office in their hands. But Colin was only the farmer of Ramore's son, and his prize did him no more good than any other useless laurel—except indeed that it might have helped him to advancement in the way of pupils, had that been Colin's *rôle*. But, considering how honourable a task it is to rear the new generation, it is astonishing how little enthusiasm generally exists among young men for that fine and worthy office. Colin had not the least desire to devote himself henceforward to the production of other first-class men—though, doubtless, that would have been a very laudable object of ambition; and, notwithstanding his known devotion to the "Kirk," as his Oxford friends liked to call it, the young man was, no doubt, a little disappointed to find himself entirely at liberty to pursue his vocation. To be sure, Colin's "set" still remonstrated against his self-immolation, and assured him that with his advantages fabulous things might be done. But the young Scotsman was too clear-sighted not to see that a great many of his congratulating friends had a very faint idea what to do with themselves, though some of them were but a step or or two beneath him in honours. And, in the meantime, Colin felt quite conscious that the world gave no sign of wanting him, nor even availed itself of the commonest opportunities of seeking his invaluable services. A man who takes such a discovery in good part, and can turn back without bitterness upon his original intentions, is generally a man good for something; and this is precisely what, with much less flourish of trumpets than at the beginning, Colin found it necessary to do.

But he was not sorry to pay a visit to Wodensbourne, where he was invited after his victory, and to take a little time to think it all over. Wodensbourne had always been a kind of

half-way house. It stood between him and his youthful life, with its limited external circumstances and unlimited expectations—and that other *real* life—the life of the man, wonderfully enlarged in outward detail, and miraculously shrunk and confined in expectation—which, by the force of contrast, young as he was, seemed to make two men of Colin. It was there first that he had learned to distinguish between the brilliant peasant-firmament of Ramore, full of indistinct mists of glory, underneath which everything was possible—an atmosphere in which poor men rose to the steps of the throne, and princesses married pages, and the world was still young and fresh and primitive; and that more real sky in which the planets shone fixed and unapproachable, and where everything was bound by bonds of law and order, forbidding miracle. The more Colin had advanced, the more had he found advancement impossible according to the ideas entertained of it in his original sphere; and it was at Wodensbourne that he had first made this grand discovery. It was there he had learned the impossibility of the fundamental romance which at the bottom of their hearts most people like to believe in;—of that love which can leap over half a world to unite two people and to make them happy ever after, in spite not only of differences of fortune but of the far larger and greater differences by which society is regulated. Colin was on perfectly pleasant terms with Miss Matty by this time, and did not hide from himself how much he owed to her,—though perhaps she, who owed to him a momentary perception of the possibility which she had proved to his heart and understanding to be impossible, would have been but little grateful had she been made aware of the nature of his indebtedness. But now, having made still another discovery in his life, the young man was pleased to come to Wodensbourne to think over it, and make out what it meant. And the Franklands were, as always, very kind to Colin. Miss Matty, who had had a great many nibbles

in the interval, was at length on the eve of being married. And Harry, who had nothing particular to do, and who found Wodensbourne stupid now that he was not to marry his cousin, was abroad, nobody seemed exactly to know where; and various things, not altogether joyful, had happened in the family, since the far-distant age when Colin was the tutor, and had been willing for Miss Matty's sake to resign everything, if it should even be his life.

"It will be a very nice marriage," said Lady Frankland. "I will not conceal from you, Mr. Campbell, that Matty has been very thoughtless, and given us a great deal of anxiety. It is always so much more difficult, you know, when you have the charge of a girl who is not your own child. One can say anything to one's own child; but your niece, you know—and, indeed, not even your own, but your husband's niece——"

"But I am sure Miss Frankland is as much attached to you," said Colin, who did not like to hear Matty blamed, "as if——"

"Oh yes," said Lady Frankland; "but still it is different. You must not think I am the least vexed about Harry. I never thought her the proper person for Harry. He has so much feeling, though strangers do not see it; and if he had been disappointed in his wife after they were married, fancy what my feelings would have been, Mr. Campbell. I was always sure they never would have got on together; and you know, when that is the case, it is so much better to break off at once."

"What is that you are saying about breaking off at once?" said Miss Matty, who came into the room at that moment. "It must be Mr. Campbell who is consulting you, aunt. I thought he would have asked *my* advice in such a case. I do believe my lady has forgotten that there ever was a time when she was not married and settled, and that is why she gives you such cruel advice. Mr. Campbell, I am much the best counsellor, and I beg of you, don't break it off at once!" said Miss Matty, looking

up in his face with eyes that were half mocking and half pathetic. She knew very well it was herself whom my lady had been talking of—which made her the more disposed to send back the arrow upon Colin. But Matty, after all, was a good deal disconcerted—more disconcerted than he was, when she saw the sudden flush that came to Colin's face. Naturally, no woman likes to make the discovery that a man who has once been her worshipper has learned to transfer his affections to somebody else. When she saw that this chance shaft had touched him, she herself was conscious of a sudden flush—a flush which had nothing whatever to do with love, but proceeded from the indescribable momentary vexation and irritation with which she regarded Colin's desertion. That he was her adorer no longer was a fact which she had consented to; but Miss Matty experienced a natural movement of indignation when she perceived that he had elevated some one else to the vacant place. "Oh, if you look like that, I shall think it quite unnecessary to advise," she said, with a little spitefulness, lowering her voice.

"What do I look like?" said Colin with a smile; for Lady Frankland had withdrawn to the other end of the room, and the young man was perfectly disposed to enter upon one of the half-mocking, half-tender conversations which had given such a charm to his life of old.

"What do you look like?" said Miss Matty. "Well, I think you look a great deal more like other people than you used to do; and I hate men who look like everybody else. One can generally tell a woman by her dress," said the young lady pensively; "but most men that one meets in society want to have little lables with their names on them. I never can tell any difference between one and another for my part."

"Then perhaps it would clear the haze a little if I were to name myself," said Colin. "I am Colin Campbell of Ramore, at your ladyship's service—once tutor to the learned and witty

Charley, that hope of the house of Wodensbourne—and once also your ladyship's humble boatman and attendant on the Holy Loch."

"Fellow of Balliol, double-first—Coming man, and reformer of Scotland," said Miss Matty with a laugh. "Yes, I recognise you; but I am not my ladyship just yet. I am only Matty Frankland for the moment, Sir Thomas's niece, who has given my lady a great deal of trouble. Oh, yes; I know what she was saying to you. Girls who live in other people's houses know by instinct what is being said about them. Oh, to be sure, it is quite true; they have been very, very kind to me; but, don't you know, it is dreadful always to feel that people are kind. Ah! how sweet it used to be on the Holy Loch. But you have forgotten one of your qualifications, Mr. Campbell; you used to be a poet as well as tutor. I think, so far as I was concerned, it was the former capacity which you exercised with most applause. I have a drawer in my desk full of certain effusions; but, I suppose, now you are a Fellow of Balliol you are too dignified for that."

"I don't see any reason why I should be," said Colin; "I was a great deal more dignified, for that matter, when I was eighteen, and a student at Glasgow College, and had very much more lofty expectations than now."

"Oh, you always were devoted to the Kirk," said Miss Matty; "which was a thing I never could understand—and now less than ever, when everybody knows that a man who has taken such honours as you have, has everything open to him."

"Yes," said Colin; "but then what everybody knows is a little vague. I should like to hear of any one thing that really is open to me except taking pupils. Of course," said the young man, with dignity, "my mind is made up long ago, and my profession fixed; but for the good of other people in my position

—and for my own good as well," Colin added with a laugh—"for you know it is pleasant to feel one's-self a martyr, rejecting every sort of advantage for duty's sake."

"Oh, but of course it is quite true," said Matty; "you *are* giving up everything—of course it is true. You know you might go into Parliament, or you might go into the Church, or you might—I wish you would speak to my uncle about it; I suppose he knows. For my part, I think you should go into Parliament; I should read all your speeches faithfully, and always be on your side."

"That is a great inducement," said Colin. "With that certainty one could face a great many obstacles. But, on the other hand, when I have settled down somewhere in my own parish, you can come and hear me preach."

"That will not be half so interesting," said Miss Matty, making a little *moue* of disdain; "but, now, tell me," she continued, sinking her voice to its most confidential tone, "what it was that made you look so?—you know we are *very* old friends," said Miss Matty, with the least little tender touch or pathos; "we have done such quantities of things together—rowed on the Holy Loch, and walked in the woods, and discussed Tennyson, and amused Sir Thomas—you *ought* to tell me your secrets; you don't know what a good *confidante* I should be; and if I know the lady—— But, at all events, you must tell me what made you look so?" she said, with her sweetest tone of inquisitive sympathy, the siren of Colin's youth.

"Perhaps—when you have explained to me what it means to look *so*," said Colin; "after being buried for three years one forgets that little language. And then I am disposed to deny ever having looked *so*," he went on, laughing; but, notwithstanding his laugh, Colin was much more annoyed than became his reasonable years and new dignities to feel once more that absurd crimson rising to his hair. The more he laughed the

higher rose that guilty and conscious colour; and, as for Miss Matty, she pointed her little pink finger at him with an air of triumph.

"There!" she said, "and you dare to pretend that you never looked *so!* I shall be quite vexed if you don't tell me. If it was not something very serious," said Miss Matty, "you would not change like *that*."

"Here is Sir Thomas; he will never accuse me of looking *so*, or changing like *that*—and it is a guest's first duty to make himself agreeable to his host, is it not?" said Colin, who was rather glad of Sir Thomas's arrival. As for Matty, she was conscious that Lady Frankland had given her what she would have called "a look" before leaving the room, and that her uncle regarded her with a little anxiety as he approached. Decidedly, though she liked talking to Colin, it was necessary to be less confidential. "I won't say *au revoir*," she said, shrugging her pretty shoulders; "you know what you said about that once upon a time, when you were a poet." And then Matty felt a little sorry for herself as she went away. "They might know, if they had any sense, that it does not matter in the least what I say to *him*," the young lady said to herself; but then she was only suffering the natural penalty of a long course of conquest, and several good matches sacrificed, and matters were serious this time, and not to be trifled with. Miss Matty accordingly gave up her researches into Colin's secret; but not the less regarded with a certain degree of lively despite, the revelation out of the clouds of that unknown woman at thought of which Colin blushed. "I daresay it is somebody quite stupid, who does not understand him a bit," she said to herself, taking a little comfort from the thought—for Matty Frankland was not a model woman, desiring only the hero's happiness; and a man who is sufficiently insensible to console himself under such circumstances with another

attachment, deserves to have his inconstancy punished, as everybody will allow.

To tell the truth, Colin, though guiltless of any breach of allegiance towards Matty, was punished sufficiently for his second attempt at love. He had heard nothing of Alice all these three years, but, notwithstanding, had never ceased to feel upon his neck that invisible bridle which restrained him against his will. Perhaps, if the woman of his imagination had ever fairly revealed herself, the sight would have given him courage to break for ever such a visionary bond, and to take possession of his natural liberty; but she contented herself with waving to him those airy salutations out of the clouds, and with now and then throwing a glance at him out of the eyes of some passer-by, who either disappeared at once from his sight, or turned out upon examination to be utterly unlike that not impossible She; and Colin had two sentinels to keep watch upon his honour in the forms of his mother and Lauderdale, both of whom believed in Love, and did not know what inconstancy meant. He said to himself often enough that the struggle in his heart was not nconstancy; but then he was not a man who could admit to them, or even to himself, that the bond between him and Alice was a great and tender pity, and not love. She had been on the eve of becoming his wife—she might be his wife still for anything he knew to the contrary—and Colin, who in this respect was spotless as any Bayard, would not, even to his dearest friends, humiliate by such a confession the woman whose love he had once sought.

And now the time had almost come when he could in reality "settle in life." His Scotch parish came nearer and nearer, in the natural course of affairs, without any dazzling obstacles and temptations between it and himself, as he had once hoped; and Alice was of age by this time; and honour seemed to demand that, now when his proposal really meant something, he should

offer to her the possibility of confirming her early choice. But somehow Colin was not at all anxious to take this step; he hung back, and nursed the liberty which still remained to him, and longed, in spite of himself, towards the visionary creature of his dreams, who was not Alice. Accordingly, he had two rather troublesome matters to think over at Wodensbourne, and occupied a position which was made all the more vexatious because it was at the same time amusing and absurd. His mind had been made up from the beginning as to his future life, as he truly said; but then he had quite intended it to be a sacrifice which he made out of his supreme love for his Church and his country. He meant to have fought his way back to the venerable mother through every sort of brilliant temptation; and to carry his honours to her with a disinterested love which he should prove by leaving behind him still higher honours and ambitions; whereas, in reality, the world was permitting him to return very quietly to his native country as if it was the most natural thing in the world. The disappointment was perhaps harsher in its way than if Colin had meant to avail himself of those splendid imaginary chances; and it did not make it any the less hard to bear that he himself saw the humour of the situation, and could not but laugh grimly at himself.

Perhaps Colin will suffer in the opinion of the readers of this history when we add that, notwithstanding the perplexing and critical character of the conjuncture, and notwithstanding the other complication in his history in regard to Alice, he employed his leisure at Wodensbourne, after the interview we have recorded, in writing[1] verses for Miss Matty. It was true

[1] Underneath we give the last copy of nonsense-verses which Colin was seduced into writing, though the chief interest they possess is chronological, as marking the end of the period of life in which a man can express himself in this medium. As for Miss Matty, to tell the truth, she received them with less of her usual good grace than might have been desired; for, though in her own person she was perfectly reconciled to the

she had challenged him to some such task, but still it was undoubtedly a weakness on the part of a man with so much to think of. Truth, however, compels his historian to confess to this frivolity. As he strayed about the flat country, and through the park, the leisure in which he had intended to think over his position only betrayed him into this preposterous idleness; for, to be sure, life generally arranges itself in its own way

loss of his devotion, and quite safe in entertaining the mildest sentiments of friendship for him, still she was naturally vexed a little to see how he had got over it—which was a thing not to be expected, nor perhaps desired. This however, was the calm and self-controlled tone of Colin's farewell:—

"Be it softly, slowly said,
With a smile and with a sigh,
While life's noiseless hands untie
Links that youth has made—
Not with sorrow or with tears:
With a sigh for those sweet years,
Drawing slow apart the while;
For those sweetest years a smile.

Thus farewell! The sound is sweet
Parting leaves no sting behind:
One bright chamber of the mind
Closing gracious and complete.
Softly shut the silent door;
Never shade can enter more—
Safe, for what is o'er can last;
Somewhat sad, for it is past.

So farewell! The accents blend
With sweet sounds of life to be;
Never could there dawn for me
Hope of any dearer end.
Dear it is afar to greet
The bright path before thy feet,
Thoughts that do thy joy no wrong
Chiming soft the even-song,
Till morn wakes the bridal bell
Fair and sweet, farewell! farewell!"

without much help from thinking—but one cannot succeed in writing a farewell to a first love, for which one retains a certain kindness, without a due attention to one's rhymes: and this was the sole result, as far as anybody was aware, of Colin's brief but pleasant holiday at Wodensbourne.

CHAPTER XIX.

It is so difficult a matter to tell the story of a man's life without wearying the audience, that we will make a leap over all the circumstances of Colin's probation in Scotland, though they were sufficiently amusing. For, naturally, the presbytery of Glen-Diarmid—in which district the Holy Loch, Colin's native parish, is situated—were a little at a loss what to make of a Fellow of Balliol when he offered himself for licence. To be sure, they made a long pause over the fact of his Fellowship, which implied that he was a member of the Church of England; but the presbytery permitted Colin to be heard in defence, and he had friends among them, and had sufficient skill with his weapons to perplex and defeat any rising antagonist. Besides, it was not in the nature of a country presbytery in this tolerant age to be otherwise than a little proud of the academical honours which the young neophyte bore. "If we accept any lout who comes up for licence, and refuse a lad of his attainments, what do you suppose the world will think of us?" said one of the more enlightened members of the clerical court, forgetting, as was natural, that the world concerned itself very little with the doings of the presbytery of Glen-Diarmid. "It's safe to leave all that to the objectors when he comes to be placed," said another of Colin's judges, more wary than his brother; "if he's not sound, you may trust it to them to find that out,"—and the young man was accordingly endued with the preliminary privileges of preacher, and licensed to exercise his gift. Colin had made friends all along the road of his life, as some men

are happy enough to do, and had many who would have been pleased to do him a service, and one, as it happened, who at this juncture could; and so it befell, that, a very short time after, the second and more serious trial to which the prudent presbyter had referred, came into the life of the young preacher. He was presented, as people say in Scotland, to the parish of Afton, in the county, or, as the natives prefer to call it, the kingdom of Fife. It was a good living enough, making up, when the harvest was of average productiveness, and wheat steady, rather more than three hundred pounds a year—and more than that when the harvest was bad, and the price of corn high; and there was an excellent manse, not much inferior to an English parsonage, and a compact little comfortable glebe, of which a minister of agricultural tastes might make something if he chose; and, above all, there were "heritors" of good conditions, and a university town, of small dimensions, but wealthy in point of society, within reach—all of which points seemed to to Colin's English friends a fabulous combination of advantages to be found in a Scotch parish.

Colin, however, did not fully describe the horrible gulf which lay between him and his benefice to anybody out of Scotland; for he was not the man to betray the imperfections of his beloved country, even while he suffered from them. His historian, however, does not require to exercise so much delicacy; and, as Colin's case was exactly the same as that of any other young clergyman in the Church of Scotland, there is no betrayal of confidence involved. Between him and that haven there was a channel to cross before which the boldest might have quailed. The parish of Afton was a large parish, and there were seven hundred and fifty people in it who had a right to "object" to Colin. They had a right to object, if they liked, to his looks, or his manners, or his doctrines, or the colour of his hair; they had a right to investigate all his life,

and make a complaint at "the bar of the presbytery"—which meant, at the same time, in all the local newspapers, eager for any kind of gossip—that he had once been guilty of bird's-nesting, or had heard the midnight chimes at some unguarded moment of his youth. When Colin entered the pulpit for the first time in the parish to which he was presented, he made his appearance there not to instruct the congregation, but to be inspected, watched, judged, and finally objected to—and all the process was vigorously enforced in his case. For, to be sure, there were several things to be remarked in this young man—or, as the people of Afton expressed it, "this new laud"—which were out of the way, and unlike other people. He was a lad that had not found Scotch education good enough for him, but had gone to England for at least part of his training. To be sure, he had partly made up for this by taking the highest honours possible, and coming out of the contest in a manner creditable to Scotland—which was a point in his favour. And then his prayers (which was odd, as Colin was decidedly a liturgist) were wanting in those stock expressions which, more pertinacious than any liturgy, haunt the public prayers of the ordinary ministers of the Church of Scotland; and his sermons were short and innocent of divisions, and of a tenor totally unlike what the respectable parishioners had been used to hear. Some of the shrewder elders were of opinion that this or that expression "might mean onything"—a conclusion in which there was a certain truth; for Colin, as we have said, was not perfectly clear on all points as to what he believed. If he was not altogether heterodox on the subject of eternal punishment, for example, he was, to say the least, extremely vague; and, indeed, he deserted doctrinal ground altogether as often as he could, and took refuge in life and its necessities in a way which, doubtless, had its effect on the uninstructed multitude, but was felt to be meagre and unsatisfactory by the theologians of the

parish. Two or three public meetings were held on the subject before it was time to lodge the final objections against the "presentee;" and Colin himself, who was living at St. Rule's, within a few miles of the theatre of war, naturally found those meetings, and the speeches thereat, which appeared in the *Fife Argus*, much less amusing than an impartial spectator might have done.

And then the same enlightened journal contained all sorts of letters on the subject—letters in which "An Onlooker" asked whether the Rev. Mr. Campbell, who was presentee to the parish of Afton, was the same Mr. Campbell who had passed a spring at Rome three or four years before, and had been noted for his leaning to the Papacy and its superstitious observances; while, on the other hand, "A Fife Elder" implored the parishioners to take notice that the man whom an Erastian patron—not himself a member of the Church, and perhaps unaware how dearly the spiritual privileges purchased by the blood of their martyred forefathers are regarded by Scotsmen—thus endeavoured to force upon them, was notoriously a disciple of Heward, and belonged to the most insidious school of modern infidelity. It was the main body of the opposing army which made such attacks; but there was no lack of skirmishers, who treated the subject in a lighter manner, and addressed the obliging editor in a familiar and playful fashion:—"Sir,—Having nothing better to do last Sunday morning, I strayed into the parish church of Afton, with the intention of worshipping with the congregation; but you may judge of my surprise when I observed ascending the pulpit-stairs a young gentleman presenting all the appearance of a London swell or a cavalry officer, with a beard upon which it was evident he had spent more time than on his sermon"—wrote a witty correspondent; while another indignant Scot demanded solemnly, "Is it to be tolerated that our very pulpits should be invaded by the scum

of the English Universities, inexperienced lads that make a hash of the Prayer-book, and preach sermons that may do very well on the other side of the Tweed, but won't go down here?"

Such were the pleasant effusions with which Colin's friend at St. Rule's amused his guest at breakfast. They were very amusing to a spectator safely established in the Elysian fields of a Scotch professorship, and beyond the reach of objections; but they were not amusing, to speak of, to Colin; and the effect they produced upon the household at Ramore may be faintly imagined by the general public, as it will be vividly realized by such Scotch families as have sons in the Church. The Mistress had said to herself, with a certain placid thankfulness, "It's little they can have to say about my Colin, that has been aye the best and the kindest." But when she saw how much could be made of nothing, the indignation of Colin's mother did not prevent her from being wounded to the heart. "I will never mair believe either in justice or charity," she said, with a thrill of wrath in her voice which had never before been heard at Ramore; "him that was aye so true and faithful—him that has aye served his Master first, and made no account of this world!" And, indeed, though his mother's estimation of him might be a little too favourable, it is certain that few men more entirely devoted to their work than Colin had ever taken upon them the cure of souls. That, however, was a matter beyond the ken of the congregation and parish of Afton. There were seven hundred and fifty communicants, and they had been well trained in doctrine under their late minister, and had a high character for intelligence; and, when an opportunity thus happily arrived for distinguishing themselves, it was not in human nature to neglect it. Had not West Port worried to the point of extinction three unhappy men whom the Crown itself had successively elevated to the unenviable distinction of presentee? The Afton case now occupied the newspapers as the West Port

case had once occupied them. It combined all the attractions of a theological controversy and a personal investigation; and, indeed, there could have been few better points of view for observing the humours of Scotch character and the peculiarities of rural Scotch society of the humbler levels; only that, as we have before said, the process was not so amusing as it might have been to Colin and his friends.

"Me ken, Mr. Heward?" said the leading weaver of Afton; "no, I ken nothing about him. I'm no prepared to say what he believes. For that matter (but this was drawn out by cross-examination), I'm no just prepared to say at a moment's notice what I believe myself. I believe in the Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism. No, I cannot just say that I've ever read the Confession of Faith—but eh, man, you ken little about parish schools if you think I dinna ken the Catechism. Can I say 'What is Effectual Calling?' I would like to know what right you have to ask me. I'll say it at a proper time, to them that have a title to ask. I'm here to put in my objections against the presentee. I'm no here to say my questions. If I was, may be I would ken them better than you."

"Very well; but I want to understand what you know about Mr. Heward," said the counsel for the defence.

"I've said already I ken naething about Mr. Heward. Lord bless me! it's no a man, it's a principle we're thinking of. No, I deny that; it's no an oath. 'Lord bless me!' is a prayer, if you will be at the bottom o't. We've a' muckle need to say that. I say the presentee is of the Heward school of infidelity; that's the objection I'm here to support."

"But, my friend," said a member of the presbytery, "it is necessary that you should be more precise. It is necessary to say, you know, that Mr. Heward rejects revelation; that he——"

"Moderator, I call my reverend brother to order," said another

minister; "the witness is here to give evidence about Mr. Campbell. No doubt he is prepared to show us how the presentee has proved himself to belong to the Heward school."

"Oh ay," said the witness; "there's plenty evidence of that. I took notes mysel' of a' the sermons. Here's one of them. It's maybe a wee in my ain words, but there's nae change in the sense,—'My freends, it's aye best to look after your ain business: it's awfu' easy to condemn others. We're all the children of the Heavenly Father. I have seen devotion among a wheen poor uninstructed Papists that would put the best of you to shame'—No, that's no what I was looking for; that's the latitudinarian bit."

"I think it has been said, among other things," said another member of the presbytery, "that Mr. Campbell had a leaning towards papal error; it appears to me that the witness's note is almost a proof of that."

"Moderator," said Colin's counsel, "I beg to call your attention to the fact that we are not discussing the presentee's leaning towards papal error, but his adherence to the Heward school of infidelity, whatever that may be. If the witness will inform us, or if any of the members of the court will inform us, what Mr. Heward believes, we will then be able to make some reply to this part of the case."

"I dinna ken naething about Mr. Heward," said the cautious witness. "I'm no prepared to enter into ony personal question. It's no the man but the principle that we're heeding, the rest of the objectors and me."

"The witness is perfectly right," said a conscientious presbyter; "if we were tempted to enter into personal questions there would be no end to the process. My friend, the thing for you to do in this delicate matter is to lead proof. No doubt the presentee has made some statement which has led you to identify him with Mr. Heward. He has expressed some doubts,

for example, about the origin of Christianity or the truth of revelation—"

"Order, order," cried the enlightened member; "I protest against such leading questions. Indeed, it appears to me, Moderator, that it is impossible to proceed with this part of the case unless it has been made clearly apparent to the court what Mr. Heward believes."

Upon which there naturally ensued a lively discussion in the presbytery, in which the witness was with difficulty prevented from joining. The subject was without doubt sufficiently unfathomable to keep half-a-dozen presbyteries occupied; but there were at that period in the kingdom of Fife, men of sufficient temerity to pronounce authoritatively even upon a matter so mysterious and indefinite. The court, however, adjourned that day without coming to any decision; and even the Edinburgh papers published a report of the Afton case, which involved so many important interests; although so far as concerned the great Heward heresy, the objections could not be held to be proved.

Colin was saved on the other counts of his indictment also, as it happened, but more by accident than by any effect which he produced on his reluctant parishioners. By dint of repeated examinations on the model of that which we have quoted above, the presbytery came to the decision that the presentee's leaning to papal error was, like his adherence to the Heward school of theology, not proven; and they even—for presbyteries also march to a certain extent with the age—declined to consider the milder accusation brought against him, of favouring the errors of a less fatal heretic. By this time, it is true, Colin was on the point of abandoning for ever the Church to which at a distance he had been willing to give up all his ambitions, and the Mistress was wound up to such a pitch of indignant excitement as to threaten a serious illness, and Lauderdale had publicly

demonstrated his wrath by attending "the English chapel," as he said, "two Sundays running." As for Colin, in the quiet of St. Rule's, feeling like a culprit on his trial, and relishing not at all the notion of being taken to pieces by the papers, even though they were merely papers of Fife, he had begun to regard with some relief the idea of going back to Balliol and reposing on his Fellowship, and even taking pupils, if nothing better came in his way. If he could have gone into Parliament, as Matty Frankland suggested, the indignant young man would have seized violently on that means of exposing to the House and the world the miseries of a Scotch presentee and the horrors of Lord Aberdeen's Act. But, fortunately, he had no means of getting into Parliament, and a certain sense at the bottom of his heart, that this priesthood which had to be entered by a channel so painful and humiliating was in reality his true vocation, retained him as by a silken thread. If he had been less convinced on this point, no doubt he would have abandoned the mortifying struggle, and the parish of Afton, having whetted its appetite upon him, would have gone freshly to work upon another unhappy young preacher, and crunched his bones with equal satisfaction; and, what is still more important to us, this history would have broken off abruptly short of its fit and necessary period. None of those misfortunes happened, because Colin had at heart a determination to make himself heard, and enter upon his natural vocation, and because, in the second place, he was independent, and did not at the present moment concern himself in the smallest degree about the stipend of the parish, whether corn was at five pounds the chaldron or five shillings. To be sure, it is contrary to the ordinary habit of biography to represent a young clergyman as entering a parish against the will or with the dislike of the inhabitants; as a general rule it is at worst, an interested curiosity, if not a lively enthusiasm, which the young parish priests of literature find in their village

churches; but then it is not England or Arcadia of which we are writing, nor of an ideal curate or spotless primitive vicar, but only of Colin Campbell and the parish of Afton, in the kingdom of Fife, in the country of Scotland, under the beneficent operation of Lord Aberdeen's Act.

However, at last the undignified combat terminated. After the objections were all disposed of, the seven hundred and fifty communicants received their minister, it is to be hoped, with the respect due to a victor. Perhaps it was a touch of disdain on Colin's part—proving how faulty the young man remained, notwithstanding, as the Mistress said, "all he had come through"—that prompted him to ascend the pulpit, after the struggle was over, with his scarlet hood glaring on his black gown to the consternation of his parishioners. It cannot be denied that this little movement of despite was an action somewhat unworthy of Colin at such a moment and in such a place; but then he was young, and it is difficult for a young man to do under all circumstances exactly what he ought. When he had got there and opened his mouth, Colin forgot all about his scarlet hood—he forgot they had all objected to him and put him in the papers. He saw only before him a certain corner of the world in which he had to perform the highest office that is confided to man. He preached without thinking he was preaching, forgetting all about doctrines, and only remembering the wonderful bewildering life in which every soul before him had its share, the human mysteries and agonies, the heaven, so vague and distant, the need so urgent and so near. In sight of these, which had nothing to do with Lord Aberdeen's Act, Colin forgot that he had been put innocently on his trial, and taken to pieces; and, what was still more strange, when two or three harmless weeks had passed, the seven hundred and fifty communicants had clean forgotten it too.

CHAPTER XX.

But, after all, there are few trials to which a man of lofty intentions and an elevated ideal can be exposed, more severe than the entirely unexpected one which comes upon him when he has had his way, and finds himself for the first time in the much desired position in which he can carry out all the plans of his youth. Perhaps few people arrive so completely at this point as to acknowledge it distinctly to themselves; for, to be sure, human projects and devices have a knack of expanding and undergoing a gradual change from moment to moment. Something of the kind, however, must accompany, for example, every happy marriage; though perhaps it is the woman more than the man who comes under its influence. The beautiful new world of love and goodness into which the happy bride supposes herself to be entering comes to bear after a while so extraordinary a resemblance to the ordinary mediocre world which she has quitted that the young woman stands aghast and bewildered. The happiness which has come has made a more subtle happiness, that ideal perfection of being to which she has been more or less looking forward all her life. Colin, when he had gone through all his trials, and had fairly reached the point at which the heroic and magnificent existence which he meant to live should commence, found himself very much in the same position. The young man was still in the fantastic age. To preach his sermons every Sunday, and do his necessary duty, and take advantage of the good society at St. Rule's, did not seem a life sufficient for the new minister. What he had

thought of was something impossible, a work for his country, an elevation of the national firmament, an influence which should mellow the rude goodness of Scotland, and link her again to all the solemn past, to all the good and gracious present, to all the tender lights and dawns of hope.

Colin had derived from all the religious influences with which he had been brought in contact a character which was perhaps only possible to a young Scotchman and Presbyterian, strongly anchored to his hereditary creed, and yet feeling all its practical deficiencies. He was High Church, though he smiled at Apostolic succession; he was Catholic, though the most gorgeous High Mass that ever was celebrated would have moved him no more than one of Verdi's operas. When other enlightened British spectators regarded with lofty superiority the poor Papist people coming and going into all the tawdry little churches, and singing unintelligible Latin, horribly out of tune, Colin for his part looked at them with a sigh for his own country, which had ceased to recognise any good in such devotion. And all through his education, from the moment when he smiled at the prayer-book under the curate's arm at Wodensbourne, and wondered what a Scotch peasant would think of it, to the time when he studied in the same light the prelections of the University preacher in St. Mary's, Colin's thought had been, "Would I were in the field!" It appeared to him that if he were but there, in all his profusion of strength and youth, he could breathe a new breath into the country he loved. What he meant to do was to untie the horrible bands of logic and knit fair links of devotion around that corner of the universe which it has always seemed possible to Scotsmen to make into a Utopia; to persuade his nation to join hands again with Christendom, to take back again the festivals and memories of Christianity, to rejoice in Christmas and sing lauds at Easter, and say common prayers with a universal voice. These were to be the outward signs

but the fact was that it was a religious revolution in Scotland at which Colin aimed. He meant to dethrone the pragmatic and arrogant preacher, whose reign has lasted so long. He meant to introduce a more humble self-estimate, and a more gracious temper into the world he swayed in imagination. From this dream Colin woke up, after the rude experience of the objectors, to find himself at the head of his seven hundred and fifty communicants, with authority to say anything he liked to them (always limited by the knowledge that they might at any time "libel" him before the presbytery, and that the presbytery might at any time prosecute, judge, and condemn him), and to a certain extent spiritual ruler of the parish, with a right to do anything he liked in it, always subject to the approval of the Kirk-Session, which could contravent him in many ingenious ways. The young man was at last in the position to which he had looked forward for years—at last his career was begun, and the course of his ambition lay clear before him. Nothing now remained but to realize all these magnificent projects, and carry out his dreams.

But the fact is that Colin, instead of plunging into his great work, stood on the threshold struck dumb and bewildered, much as a bride might do on the threshold of the new home which she had looked forward to as something superior to Paradise. The position of his dreams was obtained, but these dreams had never till now seemed actually hopeless and preposterous. When he took his place up aloft in his high pulpit, from which he regarded his people much as a man at a first-floor window might regard the passers-by below, and watched the ruddy countrymen pouring in with their hats on their heads and a noise like thunder, the first terrible blow was struck at his palace of fancy. They were altogether different from the gaping rustics at Wodensbourne, to whom that good little curate preached harmless sermons out of his low desk, about the twenty-first Sunday after

Trinity, and the admirable arrangements of the Church. Colin upstairs at his first-floor window was in no harmless position. He was put up there for a certain business, which the audience down below understood as well as he did. As for prayers and psalm-singing, they were necessary preliminaries to be got over as quickly as possible. The congregation listened and made internal criticisms as the young minister said his prayers. "He's awfu' limited in his confessions," one of the elders whispered to another. "I canna think he's fathomed the nature o' sin, for my part;" and Colin was conscious by something in the atmosphere, by a certain hum and stir, that, though his people were a little grateful to find his first attempt at devotion shorter than usual, a second call upon them was regarded with a certain displeased surprise; for, to be sure, the late minister of Afton had been of the old school. And then, this inevitable preface having been disposed of, the congregation settled down quietly to the business of the day. Colin was young, and had kept his youthful awe of the great mysteries of faith, though he was a minister. It struck him with a sort of panic, when he looked down upon all those attentive faces, and recalled to himself the idea that he was expected to teach them, to throw new light upon all manner of doctrines, and open up the Bible, and add additional surety to the assurance already possessed by the audience that it was a very well-instructed congregation and knew all about the system of Christian theology. It gleamed upon Colin in that terrible moment that, instead of being a predestined reformer, he was a very poor pretender indeed, and totally inadequate to the duties of the post which he had taken upon him thus rashly; for, indeed, he was not by any means so clear as most of his hearers were about the system of theology. This sudden sense of incapacity, which came upon him at the very moment when he ought to have been strongest, was a terrible waking up for Colin. He preached his sermon—but with pale lips and a heart out of

which all the courage seemed to have died for the moment; and betook himself to his manse afterwards to think it all over, with a horrible sense that, after all, he was a sham and impostor, and utterly unworthy of exercising influence upon any reasonable creature. For, to be sure, though a lofty ideal is the best thing in the world, according to its elevation is the pain and misery of the fall.

The consequence was that Colin stopped short in a kind of fright after he had made this first discovery, and that, after all his great projects, nothing in the world was heard all that winter of the young reformer. To return to our metaphor, he was silent as a young wife sometimes finds herself among the relics of her absurd youthful fancies, contemplating the ruin ruefully, and not yet fully awakened to the real possibilities of the position. During this little interval he came gradually down out of his too lofty ideas to consider the actual circumstances. When Lauderdale came to see him, which he did on the occasion of the national new-year holiday, Colin took his friend to see his church with a certain comic despair. "I have a finer chancel than that at Wodensbourne, which was the curate's object in life," said Colin; "but, if I make any fuss about it, I should be set down as an idiot; and, if any man has an imagination sufficiently lively to conceive of my ploughmen entering my church as our poor friends went into the Pantheon——"

"Dinna be unreasonable," said Lauderdale. "You were aye awfu' fantastic in your notions; what should the honest men ken about a chancel? I wouldna say that I'm just clear on the subject mysel'. As for the Pantheon, that was aye an awfu' delusion on your part. Our cathedral at Glasgow is an awfu' deal mair Christian-like than the Pantheon, as far as I can judge; but I wouldna say that it's an idea that ever enters my head to go there for my ain hand to say my prayers; and, as for a country kirk ith naked pews and cauld stone——"

"Look at it," said Colin with an air of disgust which was comprehensible enough in a Fellow of Balliol. The church of Afton was worth looking at. It illustrated with the most wonderful, almost comic, exactness, two distinct historic periods. At one end of it was a wonderful Norman chancel, gloomy but magnificent, with its heavy and solemn arches almost as perfect as when they were completed. This chancel had been united to a church of later date (long since demolished) by a lighter and loftier pointed arch, which, however, under Colin's incumbency, was filled up with a partition of wood, in which there was a little door giving admission to the church proper, the native and modern expression of ecclesiastical necessities in Scotland. This edifice was like nothing so much as a square box, encircled by a level row of windows high up in the wall, so many on each side; and there it was that Colin's lofty pulpit, up two pairs of stairs, rigidly and nakedly surveyed the rigorous lines of naked pews which traversed the unlovely area. Colin regarded this scene of his labours with a disgust so melancholy, yet so comical, that his companion, though not much given to mirth, gave forth a laugh which rang into the amazed and sombre echoes. "Yes, it is easy enough to laugh," said Colin, who was not without a sense of the comic side of his position; "but if it was your own church——"

"Whisht, callant," said Lauderdale, whose amusement was momentary; "if I had ever come to onything in this world, and had a kirk, I wouldna have been so fanciful. It's well for you to get your lesson written out so plain. There's nae place to speak of here for the prayers and the thanksgivings. I'm no saying but what they are the best, but that's no our manner of regarding things in Scotland. Even the man that has maist set his heart on a revolution must aye begin with things as they are. This is no a place open at a' times to every man that has a word to say to God in quietness, like yon Catholic chapels. It's a place for preaching; and you maun preach."

"Preach!" said Colin; "what am I to preach? What I have learned here and there, in Dickopftenburg for example, or in the Divinity Hall? and much the better they would be for all that. Besides, I don't believe in preaching, Lauderdale. Preaching never did me the least service. As for that beastly pulpit perched up there, all wood and noise as it is——" but here Colin paused, overcome by the weight of his discontent, and the giddiness natural to his terrible fall.

"Well," said Lauderdale, after a pause, "I'm no saying but what there's some justice in what you say; but I would like to hear, with your ideas, what you're meaning to do."

To which Colin answered with a groan. "Preach," he said gloomily; "there is nothing else I can do: preach them to death, I suppose: preach about everything in heaven and earth; it is all a priest is good for here."

"Ay," said Lauderdale; "and then the worst o't is that you're no a priest, but only a minister. I wouldna say, however, but what you might pluck up a heart and go into the singing business, and maybe have a process in the presbytery about an organ; that's the form that reformation takes in our kirk, especially with young ministers that have travelled and cultivated their minds, like you. But, Colin," said the philosopher, "you've been in more places than the Divinity Hall. There was once a time when you were awfu' near dying, if a man daur say the truth now it's past; and there was once a bit little cham'er out yonder, between heaven and earth——"

Out yonder—Lauderdale gave a little jerk with his hand, as he stood at the open door, across the grey, level country which lay between the parish church of Afton and the sea; and the words and the gesture conveyed Colin suddenly to the lighted window that shone feebly over the Campagna, and to the talk within over Meredith's deathbed. The recollection brought a wonderful change over his thoughts. He took his friend's arm

in silence, when he had locked the door. "I wonder what *he* is doing," said Colin. "I wonder whether the reality has fallen short of the expectation there. If there should be no golden gates or shining streets as yet, but only another kind of life with other hopes and trials! If one could but know!"

"Ay," said Lauderdale, in the tone that Colin knew so well; and then there was a long pause. "I'm no saying but what it's natural," he went on afterwards with some vagueness. "It's aye awfu' hard upon a man to get his ain way; but once in a while there's one arises that can take the good out of even that. You'll no make Scotland of your way of thinking, Colin; but you'll make it worth her while to have brought ye forth for a' that. As for Arthur, poor callant, I wouldna say but his ideal may have changed a wee on the road there. I'm awfu' indifferent to the shining streets for my part; but I'm no indifferent to them that bide yonder in the silence. There was one now that wasna in your case," continued Lauderdale; "*he* was aye pleased to teach in season and out of season. For the sake of the like of him, I'm whiles moved to hope that a's no so awfu' perfect in the other world as we think. I canna see ony ground for it in the Bible. Naething ever comes to an end in this world, callant;—and that was just what I was meaning to ask in respect to other things."

"I don't know what you mean by other things," said Colin; "that is, if you mean Miss Meredith, Lauderdale, I have heard nothing of her for years. That must be concluded to have come to an end if anything ever did. It is not for me to subject myself to rejection any more."

Upon which Lauderdale breathed out a long breath which sounded like a sigh, and was visible as well as audible in the frosty air. "It's aye weel to have your lesson written so plain," he said after a minute, with that want of apparent sequence which was sometimes amusing and sometimes irritating to Colin;

"it's nae disgrace to a man to do his work under strange conditions. When a lad like you has no place to work in but a pulpit, it's clear to me that God intends him to preach whether he likes it or no."

And this was all the comfort Colin received, in the midst of his disenchantment and discouragement, from his dearest friend.

But before the winter was over, life had naturally asserted its rights in the mind of the young minister. He had begun to stretch out his hands for his tools almost without knowing it, and to find that after all, a man in a pulpit, although he has two flights of stairs to ascend to it, has a certain power in his hand. Colin found eventually, that he had after all a great deal to say, and that even in one hour in a week it was possible to convey sundry new ideas into the rude, but not stupid, minds of his parishioners. A great many of them had that impracticable and hopeless amount of intelligence natural to a well brought-up Scotch peasant, with opinions upon theological matters and a lofty estimate of his own powers; but withal there were many minds open and thoughtful as silence, and the fields, and much observation of the operations of nature could make them. True, there were all the disadvantages to be encountered in Afton which usually exist in Scotch parishes of the present generation. There was a Free church at the other end of the parish very well filled, and served by a minister who was much more clear in a doctrinal point of view than Colin; and the heritors, for the most part—that is to say, the land-owners of the parish—though they were pleased to ask a Fellow of Balliol to dinner, and to show him a great deal of attention, yet drove placidly past his church every Sunday to the English chapel in St. Rule's; which is unhappily the general fortune of the National Church in Scotland. It was on this divided world that Colin looked from his high pulpit, where, at least for his hour, he had the privilege of saying what he pleased without any contradiction; and it is not to be denied

that after a while the kingdom of Fife grew conscious to its other extremity that in the eastern corner a man had arrived who had undoubtedly something to say. As his popularity began to rise, Colin's ambitions crept back to his heart one by one. He preached the strangest sort of baffling, unorthodox sermons, in which, however, when an adverse critic took notes, there was found to be nothing upon which in these days he could be brought to the bar of the presbytery. Thirty years ago, indeed, matters were otherwise regulated; but even presbyteries have this advantage over popes, that they do take a step forward occasionally to keep in time with their age.

This would be the proper point at which to leave Colin, if there did not exist certain natural, human prejudices on the subject which require a distinct conclusion of one kind or another. Until a man is dead, it is impossible to say what he has done, or to make any real estimate of his work; and Colin, so far from being dead, is only as yet at the commencement of his career, having taken the first steps with some success and *éclat*, and having recovered the greater part of his enthusiasm. There was, indeed, a time when his friends expected nothing else for him than that early and lovely ending which makes a biography perfect. There is only one other ending in life, which is equally satisfactory, and, at least on the face of it, more cheerful than dying; and that, we need not say, is marriage. Accordingly, as it is impossible to pursue his course to the one end, all that we can do is to turn to the other, which, though the hero himself was not aware of it, was at that moment shadowing slowly out of the morning clouds.

It is accordingly with a feeling of relief that we turn from the little ecclesiastical world of Scotland, where we dare not put ourselves in too rigorous contact with reality, or reveal indiscreetly, without regard to the sanctity of individual confidence, what Colin is doing, to the common open air and daylight, in

which he set out, all innocent and unfearing, on a summer morning, accompanied as of old by Lauderdale, upon a holiday journey. He had not the remotest idea, any more than the readers of his history have at this moment, what was to happen to him before he came back again. He set out with all his revolutionary ideas in his mind, without pausing to think that circumstances might occur which would soften down all insurrectionary impulses on his part, and present him to the alarmed Church, not under the aspect of an irresistible agitator and reformer, but in the subdued character of a man who has given hostages to society. Colin had no thought of this downfall in his imagination when he set out. He had even amused himself with the idea of a new series for the Times," which might peradventure work as much commotion in the Church of Scotland as the former series had done in the Anglican communion. He went off in full force and energy with the draft of the first of these revolutionary documents in the writing-case in which he had once copied out his verses for Alice Meredith. Poor Alice Meredith! The bridle which Colin had once felt on his neck had worn by this time to such an impalpable thread that he was no longer aware of its existence; and even the woman in the clouds had passed out of his recollection for the moment, so much was he absorbed with the great work he had embarked on. Thus he set out on a pedestrian excursion, meaning to go to the English lakes, and it is hard to say where besides, in his month's holiday; and nothing in the air or in the skies gave any notice to Colin of the great event that was to befall him before he could return.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was, as we have said, a lovely summer morning when Colin set out on his excursion, after the fatigues of the winter and spring. His first stage was naturally Ramore, where he arrived the same evening, having picked up Lauderdale at Glasgow on his way. A more beautiful evening had never shone over the Holy Loch; and, as the two friends approached Ramore, all the western sky was flaming behind the dark hills, which stood up in austere shadow, shutting out from the loch and its immediate banks the later glories of the sunset. To leave the eastern shore, where the light still lingered, and steal up under the shadow into the soft beginning of the twilight, with Ramore, that "shines where it stands," looking out hospitably from the brae, was like leaving the world of noise and commotion for the primitive life, with its silence and its thoughts; and so, indeed, Colin felt it, though his world was but another country parish, primitive enough in its ways. But then it must not be forgotten that there is a difference between the kingdom of Fife, where wheat grows golden on the broad fields, and where the herrings come up to the shore to be salted and packed in barrels, and the sweet Loch half hidden among the hills, where the cornfields are scant and few, and where grouse and heather divide the country with the beasts and the pastures, and where, in short, Gaelic was spoken within the memory of man. Perhaps there was something of the vanity of youth in that look of observation and half amused, half curious criticism which the young man cast upon the peaceful manse, where it did not seem as if any-

thing could ever happen, and where the minister, who had red hair, had painfully begun his career when Colin himself was a boy. The manse of Afton was not nearly so lovely, but—it was different; though perhaps he could not have told how. And the same thought was in his mind as he went on past all the tranquil houses. How did they manage to keep existing, those people for whom life was over, who had ceased to look beyond the day, or to anticipate either good or evil? To be sure all this was very unreasonable; for Colin was aware that things did happen now and then on the Holy Loch. Somebody died occasionally, when it was impossible to help it, and by turns somebody was born, and there even occurred, at rare intervals a marriage, with its suggestion of life beginning; but these domestic incidents were not what he was thinking of. Life seemed to be in its quiet evening over all that twilight coast; and then it was the morning with Colin, and it did not seem possible for him to exist without the hopes, and motives, and excitements which made ceaseless movement and commotion in his soul. He was so full of what had to be done, even of what he himself had to do, that the silence seemed to recede before him, and to rustle and murmur round him as he carried into it his conscious and restless life.

Colin had even such a wealth of existence to dispose of that it kept flowing on in two or three distinct channels, a thing which amused him when he thought of it. For underneath all this sense of contrast, and Lauderdale's talk, and his own watch for the Ramore boat, No. 1 of the "Tracts for the Times" was at the same time shaping itself in Colin's brain; and there are moments when a man can stand apart from himself, and note what is going on in his own mind. He was greeting the old friends who recognised him in the steamboat, and looking out for home, and planning his tract, and making that contrast between the evening and the morning all at the same moment.

And at the same time he had taken off the front of his mental habitation, and was looking at all those different processes going on in its different compartments with a curious sense of amusement. Such were the occupations of his mind as he went up to the Loch, to that spot where the Ramore boat lay waiting on the rippled surface. It was a different homecoming from any that he had ever made before. Formerly his prospects were vague, and it never was quite certain what he might make of himself. Now he had fulfilled all the ambitions of his family, as far as his position went. There was nothing more to hope for or to desire in that particular; and, naturally, Colin felt that his influence with his father and brothers at least would be enhanced by the realization of those hopes, which, up to this time, had always been mingled with a little uncertainty. He forgot all about that, it is true, when he grasped the hands of Archie and of the farmer, and dashed up the brae to where the Mistress stood wistful at the door; but, notwithstanding, there was a difference, and it was one which was sufficiently apparent to all. As for his mother, she smoothed down the sleeve of his black coat with her kind hand, and examined with a tender smile the cut of the waistcoat which Colin had brought from Oxford—though, to tell the truth, he had still a stolen inclination for "mufti," and wore his uniform only when a solemn occasion occurred like this, and on grand parade; but, for all her joy and satisfaction at sight of him, the Mistress still looked a little shattered and broken, and had never forgotten—though Colin had forgotten it long ago—the "objections" of the parish of Afton, and all that her son had had "to come through," as she said, "before he was placed."

"I'm awfu' shaken in my mind about a' that," said the Mistress; "there's the Free Kirk folk—though I'm no for making an example of them—fighting among themselves about their new minister, like thae puir senseless creatures in America.

Thamas, at the Millhead, is for the ae candidate, and his brother Dugald for the tither; and they're like to tear each other's een out when they meet. That's ill enough, but Afton's waur. I'm no for setting up priests, nor making them a sacerdotal caste as some folk say; but will you tell me," said Mrs. Campbell, indignantly, "that a wheen ignorant weavers and canailye like that can judge my Colin? ay, or even if it was thae Fife farmers driving in their gigs. I would like to ken what he studied for and took a' thae honours, and gave baith time and siller, if he wasna to ken better than the like of them? I'm no pretending to meddle with politics that are out of my way—but I canna shut my een," the Mistress said, emphatically. "The awfu' thing is that we've nae respect to speak of for onything but ourselves; we're so awfu' fond of our ain bit poor opinions, and the little we ken. If there was ony change in our parish—and the minister's far from weel, by a' I can hear—and that man round the point at the English chapel wasna such an awfu' haveril—I would be tempted to flee away out of their fechts and their objections, and get a quiet Sabbath day there."

"I'm no for buying peace so dear, for my part," said Lauderdale; "they're terrible haverils, most of the English ministers in our pairts, as the Mistress says. We're a' in a kind of dissenting way now-a-days, the mair's the pity. Whisht a moment, callant, and let a man speak.—I'm no saying onything against dissent; it's a wee hard in its ways, and it has an awfu' opinion of itsel', and there's nae beauty in it; but, when your mind's made up to have popular rights and your ain way in everything, I canna see onything else for it, for my part."

"Weel, we'll a' see," said big Colin, who in his heart could not defend an order of ecclesiastical economy which permitted his son to be assaulted by the parish of Afton, or any other

parish, "if it's the will of God. We're none of us so awfu auld; but the world's aye near its ending to a woman that sees her son slighted; there's nae penitence can make up for that—no that he's suffered much that I can see," the farmer said with a laugh. "There's enough of the Kirk for one night."

"Eh, Colin, dinna be so worldly," said his wife; "I think whiles it would be an awfu' blessing if the world was to end a you say; and a thing be cleared up, and them joined again that had been parted, and the bonnie earth safe through the fire—if it's to be by fire," she added with a questioning glance towards her son; "I canna think but it's ower good to be true. When I mind upon a' we've to go through in this life, and a' that is so hard to mend;—eh, if He would but take it in His ain hand!" said the Mistress with tears in her eyes. No one was so hard-hearted as to preach to her at that moment, or to enlarge upon the fact that everything was in His hand, as indeed she knew as well as her companions; but it happens sometimes that the prayers and the wishes which are out of reason, are those that come warmest, and touch deepest, to the heart.

But, meanwhile, awaiting the end of the world, Colin, when he was settled for the night in his old room, with its shelving roof, took out and elaborated his *Tract for the Times*. It was discontent as great as that of his mother's which breathed out of it; but then hers was the discontent of a life which had nothing to do or to look for, and which had found out by experience how little progress can be made in a lifetime, and how difficult it is to change evil into good. Colin's discontent, on the contrary, was that exhilarating sentiment which stimulates youth, and opens an endless field of combat and conquest. At his end of the road it looked only natural that the obstacles should move of themselves out of the way, and that what was

just and best should have the inevitable victory. When he had done, he thought with a tenderness which brought tears to his eyes, yet at the same moment a smile to his lips, of the woman's impatience that would hasten the wheels of fate, and call upon God to take matters, as she said, in His own hand. That did not, as yet, seem a step necessary to Colin. He thought there was still time to work by the natural means, and that things were not arrived as such a pass that it was needful to appeal to miracle. It could only be when human means had failed that such a resource could be necessary; and the human means had certainly not failed entirely so long as he stood there in the bloom of his young strength, with his weapons in his hand.

He preached in his native church on the following Sunday, as was to be expected; and from up the Loch and down the Loch all the world came to hear young Colin of Ramore. And big Colin the farmer sat glorious at the end of his pew, and in the pride of his heart listened, and noted, and made inexorable criticisms, and commented on his son's novel ideas with a severe irony which it was difficult to understand in its true sense. The Duke himself came to hear Colin's sermon, which was a wonderful honour to the young man, and all the parish criticised him with a zest which it was exhilarating to hear. "I mind when he couldna say his Questions," said Evan of Barnton; "I wouldna like to come under ony engagement that he kens them noo. He was aye a callant awfu' fond of his ain opinion, and for my part I'm no for Presbyteries passing ower objections so easy. Either he's of Heward's school or he's no; but I never saw that there was ony right decision come to. There were some awfu' suspicious expressions under his second head— if you could ca' yon a head," said the spiritual ruler, with natural contempt; for indeed Colin's divisions were not what they ought to

have been, and he was perfectly open to criticism so far as that was concerned.

"A lot of that was out of Dennistoun," said another thoughtful spectator. "I'm aye doubtful of thae misty phrases. If it wasna for hurting a' their feelings, I would be awfu' tempted to say a word. He's no' that auld, and he might mend."

"He'll never mend," said Evan. "I'm no' one that ever approved of the upbringing of thae laddies. They have ower much opinion of themselves. There's Archie, that thinks he kens the price of cattle better than a man of twice his age. She's an awfu' fanciful woman, that mother of theirs—and then they've a' been a wee spoiled with that business about the English callant; but I'll no say but what he has abilities," the critic added, with a national sense of clanship. The parish might not approve of the upbringing of the young Campbells, nor of their opinions, but still it had a national share in any reputation that the family or any of its members might attain.

Colin continued his course on the Monday with his friend. He had stayed but a few days at home, but it was enough, and all the party were sensible of the fact. Henceforward that home, precious as it was, could not count for much in his life. It was a hard thing to think of, but it was a necessity of nature. Archie and the younger sons greeted with enthusiasm the elder brother, who shared with them his better fortunes and higher place; but, when the greeting was given on both sides, there did not remain very much to say; for, to be sure, seen by Colin's side, the young Campbells,—still *gauche*, and shamefaced, and with the pride of a Scotch peasant in arms, looked inferior to what they really were, and felt so—and the mother felt it for them, though Colin was her own immediate heir and the pride of her heart. She bade him farewell with suppressed tears, and a sense of loss which was not to be suppressed. "He has his

ain hame, and his ain place, and little need of us now, the Lord be praised," the Mistress said to herself as she watched him going down to the boat; "I think I would be real content if he had but a good wife." But still it was with a sigh that she went in again and closed the door upon the departing boat that carried her son back to the world.

CHAPTER XXII.

As for Colin and his friend, they went upon their way steadily, with that rare sympathy in difference which is the closest bond of friendship. Lauderdale by this time had lost almost all the lingerings of youth which had hung long about him, perhaps by right of his union with the fresh and exuberant youth of his brother-in-arms. His gaunt person was gaunter than ever, though, by an impulse of the tenderest pride—not for himself but for his companion—his dress fitted him better, and was more carefully put on than it had even been during all his life; but his long hair, once so black and wild, was now grey, and hung in thin locks, and his beard, that relic of Italy, which Lauderdale preserved religiously, and had ceased to be ashameb of, was grey also, and added to the somewhat solemn aspect of his long thoughtful face. He was still an inch or two taller than Colin, whose great waves of brown hair, tossed up like clouds upon his forehead, and shining brown eyes, which even now had not quite lost the soft shade of surprise and admiration which had given them such a charm in their earlier years, contrasted strangely with the worn looks of his friend. They were not like father and son; for Lauderdale preserved in his appearance an indefinable air of solitude and of a life apart, which made it impossible to think of him in any such relationship; but perhaps their union was more close and real than even that tie could have made it, since the unwedded childless man was at once young and old, and had kept in his heart a

virgin freshness more visionary, and perhaps even more spotless, than that of Colin's untarnished youth; for, to be sure, the young man not only was conscious of that visionary woman in the clouds, but had already solaced himself with more than one love, and still meant to marry a wife like other men, though that was not at present the foremost idea in his mind; whereas, whatever love Lauderdale might have had in that past from which he never drew the veil, it had never been replaced by another, nor involved any earthly hope.

As they crossed the borders, and found themselves among the Cumberland hills, Lauderdale began to make gradual advances to a subject which had been for a long time left in silence between them. Perhaps it required that refinement of ear natural to a born citizen of Glasgow to recognise that it was "English" which was being spoken round them as they advanced—but the philosopher supposed himself to have made that discovery. He recurred to it with a certain pathetic meaning as they went upon their way. They had set out on foot from Carlisle, each with his knapsack, to make their leisurely way to the Lakes; and, when they stopped to refresh themselves at the humble roadside inn which was their first resting-place, the plaintive cadence of his friend's voice struck Colin with a certain amusement. "They're a' English here," Lauderdale said, with a tone of sad recollection, as a man might have said in Norway or Russia, hearing for the first time the foreign tongue, and bethinking himself of all the dreary seas and long tracts of country that lay between him and home. It might have been pathetic under such circumstances, though the chances are that even then Colin, graceless and fearless, would have laughed; but at present, when the absence was only half a day's march, and the difference of tongue, as we have said, only to be distinguished by an ear fine and native, the sigh was too absurd to be passed over lightly. "I never knew you have the *mal du*

pays before," Colin said with a burst of laughter:—and the patriot himself did not refuse to smile.

"Speak English," he said, with a quaint self-contradiction; "though I should say speak Scotch if I was consistent;—you needna make your jokes at me. Oh ay, it's awfu' easy laughing. It's no *that* I'm thinking of; there's nothing out of the way in the association of ideas this time, though they play bonnie pranks whiles. I'm thinking of the first time I was in England, and how awfu' queer it sounded to hear the bits of callants on the road, and the poor bodies at the cottage doors."

"The first time you were in England—that was when you came to nurse me," said Colin; "I should have died that time but for my mother and you."

"I'm not saying that," said Lauderdale; "you're one of the kind that's awfu' hard to kill—but it's no that I'm thinking of. There are other things that come to my mind with the sound of the English tongue. Hold your peace, callant, and listen; is there nothing comes back to your ain mind when you hear the like of *that?*"

"I hear a woman talking very broad Cumberland," said Colin who notwithstanding began to feel an uncomfortable heat mounting upwards in his face; "you may call it English, if you have a mind. There is some imperceptible difference between that and the Dumfriesshire, I suppose; but I should not like to have to discriminate where the difference lies."

As for Lauderdale, he sighed; but without intending it, as it appeared, for he made a great effort to cover his sigh with a yawn, for which latter indulgence he had evidently no occasion; and then he tried a faint little unnecessary laugh. "I'm an awfu' man for associations," he said; "I'm no to be held to account for the things that come into my head. You may say it's Cumberland, and I'm no disputing; but for a' that there's something in the sound of the voice——"

"Look here," said Colin impatiently; "listen to my tract. I want you to give me your opinion now it is finished; turn this way, with your face to the hills, and never mind the voice."

"Oh, ay," said Lauderdale, with another sigh; "there's nae voice like his ain voice to this callant's ear; it's an awfu' thing to be an author, and above a' a reformer; for you may be sure it's for the sake of the cause, and no because he's written a' that himsel'. Let's hear this grand tract of yours; no that I've any particular faith in that way of working," he added impartially. It was not encouraging perhaps to the young author; but Colin was sufficiently used by this time to his friend's prelections, and for his own part was very well pleased to escape from memories more perplexing and difficult to manage. It was with this intention that he had taken out No. I. of the *Tracts for the Times*. If any of the writers of the original series of these renowned compositions could but have looked over the shoulder of the young Scotch minister, and beheld the different fashion of thoughts, the curious fundamental difference which lay underneath, and yet the apparent similarity of intention on the face of it! Rome and the Pope were about as far off as Mecca and the prophet from Colin's ideas. He was not in the least urgent for any infallible standard, nor at all concerned to trace a direct line of descent for himself or his Church; and yet withal his notions were as high and absolute and arbitrary on some points as if he had been a member of the most potent of hierarchies. It would, however, be doing Colin injustice to reproduce here this revolutionary document: to tell the truth, circumstances occurred very soon after to retard the continuation of the series, and, so far as his historian is aware, the publication of this preliminary* address was only partial. For, to be sure, the

[1] Numbers I. and II. of the Scotch *Tracts for the Times*, together with fragments of subsequent numbers uncompleted, will be given, if desired by Colin's friends, in the appendix to the second edition of this biography.

young man had still abundance of time before him, and the first and most important thing, as Lauderdale suggested, was the preparation of an audience—an object which was on the whole better carried out by partial and private circulation than by coming prematurely before the public, and giving the adversary occasion to blaspheme, and perhaps frightening the Kirk herself out of her wits.

Having said so much, we may return to the more private and individual aspect of affairs. The two friends were seated, while all this was going on, out of doors, on a stone bench by the grey wall of the cottage inn, in which they had just refreshed themselves with a nondescript meal. The Cumberland hills—at that moment bleaching under the sunshine, showing all their scars and stains in the fulness of the light—stretched far away into the distance, hiding religiously in their depths the sacred woods and waters that were the end of the pilgrimage on which the two friends were bound. Lauderdale sat at leisure and listened, shading the sunshine from his face, and watching the shadows play on the woods and hills; and the same force of imagination which persuaded the unaccustomed traveller that he could detect a difference of tone in the rude talk he heard in the distance, and that that which was only the dialect of Cumberland was *English*, persuaded him also that the sunshine in which he was sitting was warmer than the sunshine at home, and that he was really, as he himself would have described it, "going south." He was vaguely following out these ideas, notwithstanding that he also listened to Colin, and gave him the fullest attention. Lauderdale had not travelled much in his life, nor enjoyed many holidays; and, consequently, the very sense of leisure and novelty recalled to him the one great recreation of his life—the spring he had spent in Italy, with all its vicissitudes, prefaced by the mournful days at Wodensbourne. All this came before Lauderdale's mind more strongly a great deal than it did before

that of Colin, because it was to the elder man the one sole and clearly marked escape out of the monotony of a long life—a thing that had occurred but once, and never could occur again. How the Cumberland hills, and the peasant voices in their rude dialect, and the rough stone bench outside the door of a grey lime-stone cottage, could recall to Lauderdale the olive slopes of Frascati, the tall houses shut up and guarded against the sunshine, and the far-off solemn waste of the Campagna, would have been something unintelligible to Colin. But in the meantime these recollections were coming to a climax in his companion's mind. He gave a great start in the midst of Colin's most eloquent paragraph, and jumped to his feet, crying, "Do you hear that?" with a thrill of excitement utterly inexplicable to the astonished young man: and then Lauderdale grew suddenly ashamed of himself, and took his seat again, abashed, and felt that it was needful to explain.

"Do I hear what?" said Colin; and, as this interruption occurred just at the moment when he supposed he had roused his hearer to a certain pitch of excitement and anxiety, by his account of the religious deficiencies of Scotland, which he was on the point of relieving by an able exposition of the possibilities of reform, it may be forgiven to him if he spoke with a little asperity. Such a disappointment is a trying experience to the best of men. "What is it, for Heaven's sake?" said the young man, forgetting he was a minister; and, to tell the truth, Lauderdale was so much ashamed of himself that he felt almost unable to explain.

"She's singing something, that's a'," said the confused philosopher. "I'm an awfu' haveril, Colin. There's some things I canna get out of my head. Never you mind; a' that's admirable," said the culprit, with a certain deprecatory eagerness. "I'm awfu' anxious to see how you get us out of the scrape. Go on."

Colin was angry, but he was human, and he could not but laugh at the discomfiture and conciliatory devices of his disarmed critic. "I am not going to throw away my pearls," he said; "since your mind is in such a deplorable state you shall hear no more to-day. Oh, no. I understand the extent of your anxiety. And so here's Lauderdale going the way of all flesh. Who is *she?* and what is she singing? The best policy is to make a clean breast of it," said the young man, laughing; "and then, perhaps I may look over the insult you have been guilty of to myself."

But Lauderdale was in no mood for laughing. "It would be the best plan to go on," he said; "for I've been giving my best attention; and maybe if I was to speak out what was in my heart—"

"Speak it out," said Colin. He was a little affronted, but he kept his composure. As he folded up his papers and put them away in his pocket-book, he too heard the song which Lauderdale had been listening to. It was only a countrywoman singing as she went about her work, and there was no marked resemblance in the voice to anything he had heard before. Yet he knew what was coming when he put up his papers in his pocket-book, and it occurred to him that perhaps it would be well to have the explanation over and be done with it, for he knew how persistent his companion was.

"It's no that there's much to say," said Lauderdale, changing his tone; "a man like me, that's little used to change, get's awfu' like a fool in his associations. There's naething that ony reasonable creature could see in thae hills, and a' the sheep on them, that should bring *that* to my mind; and, as you say, callant, it's Cumberland they're a' speaking, and no English. It's just a kind of folly that men are subject to that live their lane. I canna but go a' through again, from the beginning to—— Well, I suppose," said Lauderdale with a sigh, "what you and me would call the end."

"What any man in his senses would call the end," said Colin, beginning to cut his pencil with some ferocity, which was the only occupation that presented itself to him for the moment; "I don't suppose there can be any question as to what you mean. Was it to be expected that I should court rejection over again for the mere pleasure of being rejected?—as you know I have been, both by letter and in person; and then, as if even that was not enough, accused of fortune-hunting; when Heaven knows——" Here Colin stopped short, and cut his pencil so violently that he cut his finger, an act which convicted him of using unnecessary force, and of which accordingly he was ashamed.

"It is no *that* I was thinking of," said Lauderdale, "I was minding of the time when we a' met first, and the bit soft English voice—it's no that I'm fond of the English, or their ways," continued the philosopher. "We're maybe no so well in our ain country, and maybe we're better; I'll no say. It's a question awfu' hard to settle. But, if ever we a' foregather again, I cannot think there will be that difference. It wasna to say musical that I ken of, but it was aye soft and pleasant—maybe ower soft, Colin, for the like of you—and with a bit yielding tone in it, as if the heart would break sooner than make a stand for its own way. I mind it real weel," said Lauderdale, with a sigh. "As for the father, no doubt there was little to be said in his favour. But, after a', it wasna him that you had any intention to marry. And yon Sabbath-day after *he* was gone, poor man!—when you and me didna ken what to do with ourselves till the soft thing came out of her painted cha'amer, and took the guiding of us into her hands. It's *that* I was thinking of," said Lauderdale, fixing his eyes on a far-off point upon the hills, and ending his musings with a sigh.

Colin sighed, too, for sympathy—he could not help it. The scene came before him as his friend spoke. He thought he could see Alice, in her pallor and exhaustion, worn to a shadow,

in her black dress, coming into the bare Italian room in the glorious summer day, which all the precautions possible could not shut out from the house of mourning—with her prayer-book in her hand; and then he remembered how she had chidden him for reading another lesson than that appointed for the day. It was in the height of his own revolutionary impulses that this thought struck him; and he smiled to himself in the midst of his sigh, with a tender thought for Alice, and a passing wonder for himself, what change might have been wrought upon him if that dutiful little soul had actually become the companion of his life. Colin was not the kind of man who can propose to himself to form his wife's mind, and rule her thoughts, and influence her without being sensible of her influence in return. That was not the order of domestic affairs in Ramore; and naturally he judged the life that might have been, and even yet might be, by that standard. The Mistress's son did not understand having a nullity, or a shadow of himself, for a wife; and insensibly he made his way back from the *attendrissement* into which Lauderdale's musings had led him, into half-amused speculation as to the effect Alice and her influence might have had upon him by this time. "If *that* had happened," he said with a smile, bursting out, as was usual to him when Lauderdale was his companion, at that particular point of his thoughts which required expression, without troubling himself to explain how he came there—"if *that* had happened," said Colin, with the conscious smile of old, "I wonder what sort of fellow I should have been by this time? I doubt if I should have had any idea of disturbing the constituted order of affairs. Things are always for the best, you perceive, as everybody says. A man who has any revolutionary work to do must be free and alone. But don't let us talk any more of this—I don't like turning back upon the road. But for that feeling I should have settled the business before now about poor Arthur's 'Voice from the Grave.'"

"I was aye against that title," said Lauderdale, "if he would have paid any attention; but you're a' the same, you young callants; it's nae more a voice from the grave than mine is. It's a voice from an awfu' real life, that had nae intention to lose a minute that was permitted. It would be awfu' agreeable to ken if he was permitted to have any pleasure in his book; but then, so far as I can judge, he maun ken an awfu' deal better by this time—and maybe up there they're no heeding about a third edition. It's hard to say; he was so terrible like himself up to the last moment; I canna imagine, in my own mind, that he's no like himself still. There should be a heap of siller," said Lauderdale, "by this time; and sooner or later you'll have to open communication, and let them ken."

"Yes," said Colin, with a momentary look of sullenness and repugnance; and then he added, in a lighter tone, "heaps of money never came out of a religious publisher's hands. A third edition does not mean the same thing with them as with other people. Of course, it must be set right some time or other. We had better set off, I can tell you, and not talk idle talk like this, if we mean to get to our journey's end to-night."

"Oh, ay," said Lauderdale, "you're aye in a hurry, you young callants. Is it the father that makes you so unwilling for any correspondence?—but it's awfu' easy to settle a thing like that."

"I think you want to try how far my patience can go," said Colin, who had grown crimson up to the hair. "Do you think a man has no feeling, Lauderdale? Do you think it is possible to be treated as I have been, and yet go back again with humility, hat in hand? I don't feel myself capable of that."

"If you're asking me my opinion," said Lauderdale, calmly, "I've nae objection to tell you what I think. You're no vindictive, and you've nae pride to speak of—I'm meaning pride of *that* kind. It's no in you to bear a grudge at onybody, beyond,

maybe, the hour or the day. So I'm no heeding much about that question, for my part. If you had an awfu' regard for the man, he might affront you; but no being indifferent. I'm telling you just my opinion, with my partial knowledge of the premises; and for *her*, I cannot but say what is in my ain mind. I've a kind of longing to see her again; we used to be awfu' good friends, her and me. I had you to take care of, callant, and she had *him;* and whiles she had a moment of envy, and grudged terrible in her heart to see the air and the sun, that are for baith the good and the evil, so hard upon him, and so sweet to you. There was little in her mind to hide, and her and me were good friends. I'll never forget our counts and our reckonings. It's awfu' hard for the like o' me to divine wherefore it is that a' that has come to an end, and her and you dropped out of one another's life."

"Lauderdale," said Colin, with a little choking in his voice, "I will tell you what I never told you before——" and then the young man stopped short, as if he had received a blow. What was it that came over him like an imperious sudden prohibition, stopping the words upon his lips the first time he had ever dreamt of uttering them to mortal ear? He had a feeling somehow as if one of those flying shadows that kept coming and going over the mountains had taken visible shape and stepped before him, and put a cold hand on his lips. He was about to have confessed that his love had been no more than tender compassion and kindness; he was about to have said what Lauderdale perhaps might have guessed before, what Colin had kept secret and hidden in his breast—that Alice never was nor could be the ideal woman of his thoughts, the true love who waited for him somewhere in the future. But perhaps, after all, it was no shadow nor unseen influence, but only the young man's magnanimous heart that spared that humiliation to the name of Alice—solely to her name; for, now that all was over between them,

it was only that abstract representation of her that was concerned.

"Ay," said Lauderdale, after a moment, "you were going to tell me——" and then he rose as Colin had done, and threw his knapsack on his shoulder, and prepared to resume his march.

"We shall have an hour's walking in the dark, if we don't make all the better progress," said Colin; "which is uncomfortable when one does not know the way. And now to return to No I." he said with a laugh, as they went on along the dusty road. There was not another word said between them of the confession thus abruptly stopped. Perhaps Lauderdale in his heart had a perception of what it meant; but, however that might be, both fell at once with eagerness, as if they had never digressed for a moment, upon the first number of Colin's *Tracts for the Times.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

This conversation, however, as was natural, had a certain effect upon both the friends. It threw Colin, who, to be sure, was chiefly concerned, into a world of confused imaginations, which influenced even his dreams, and through his dreams reacted upon himself. When he was alone at night, instead of going to sleep at once, as would have been natural after his day's journey, he kept falling into absurd little dozes, and waking up suddenly with the idea that Alice was standing by him, that she was calling him, that it was the marriage-day, and that somebody had found him out, and was about to tell his bride that he did not love her; and at last, when he went to sleep in good earnest, the fantastic *mêlange* of recollection and imagination carried him back to Frascati, where he found Arthur and Alice, as of old, in the great *salone*, with its frescoed walls, and talked to them as in former days. He thought Meredith told him of an important journey upon which he was setting out, and made arrangements in the meantime for his sister with an anxiety which the real Arthur had never dreamt of exhibiting. "She will be safe with you at present," the visionary Arthur seemed to say, "and by-and-by you can send her to me——" And when Colin woke it was hard for him to convince himself at first that he had not been in actual communication with his friend. He accounted for it, of course, as it is very easy to account for dreams, and made up his mind how it came about, and yet left behind in some crevice of his heart a dumb certainty which hid itself out of sight that it might not be argued with, that after all Arthur

and he in the dark had passed by each other, and exchanged a word or thought in passing. Colin took care not to betray even to himself the existence of this conviction; but deep down in the silence it influenced him unawares.

As for Lauderdale, his thoughts, as might have been expected, had taken another direction. Perhaps he was past the age of dreaming. Colin's revelation which he did not make had possibly told his friend more than if it had been said out in words; and the two began their second day's journey with but little talk, and that of a vague and general kind. They had not gone far upon the white and dusty road when Lauderdale drew aside a little, and stepped across the boundary of furze and wild thorn and bramble bushes which separated it from the hillside.

"No, I'm no tired at this hour of the morning," he said, "but I've an awfu' objection to dust, and the road is as powdery as a mill. My intention is to take a seat on this brae and let that carriage pass."

"Wait a little, then; it comes on very slowly; there must be some invalid in it, for the horses look good enough," said Colin; and he turned his back to the approaching carriage, about which he was altogether indifferent, and faced round to the green slope, covered with trees and brushwood, upon which Lauderdale meant to rest. They were separated a little when the carriage came up, and neither of them paid much attention to it. Lauderdale was already half way up the slope, and Colin was standing by the side of the road, looking after him. Then all at once there was a sudden cry, and the horses made a dash forward, and rolled the equipage along at such a pace that its occupants were quite out of Colin's sight when he turned round. This he did with a start so violent that the stones under his feet seemed suddenly to get in his way and trip him up: and Lauderdale for his part came down from the brae with a long leap and strange exclamation. "What was that?" they said to each

other, in the same breath, and paused for a moment, and looked into each other's faces, and listened. The carriage went on faster, raising a cloud of dust, and nothing was to be heard except the sound of the horses' hoofs and the wheels. It was Colin who was the first to break the silence. He detached himself from among the stones and bushes, where he had got entangled in that moment of agitation, and sprang back again to the high road which lay before him, veiled in a cloud of dust. "It is simply absurd," said Colin. "Lauderdale, I cannot imagine what you mean; you are enough to drive a man mad. Some one gives a chance outcry in passing, and you make up your mind that it is—— Good heavens! I never knew such folly!" cried the young man. He took off his hat without knowing it, and thrust his hair up over his forehead, and made an effort to take courage and regain his composure as he took breath. But it was very clear that Lauderdale had nothing to do with Colin's excitement. He had himself heard the cry, and felt in his heart that it was no imagination. As he stood there in his pretended indignation the impulse of flight came upon him, mingled with a terror, which he could not explain nor comprehend. There was not a man in existence before whom he would have flown; but that little cry of recognition took away all his courage. He did not feel in himself the strength to go forward, to venture upon a possible meeting. The blood which had rushed to his face for the first moment seemed to go back upon his heart and stifle it. He had made a step or two forward without thinking; but then he stopped himself, and wavered, and looked upon the road which lay quite tranquil behind him in the shadow of the hills. It seemed to him for the moment as if his only safety was in flight.

As for Lauderdale, it took him all the time which Colin had occupied in these thoughts to get down from his elevation and return to his friend's side. He for his part was animated and

eager. "This is no *her* country," said Lauderdale; "she's a traveller, as we are. The carriage will stop at our next stage, but there's no time to be lost;" and as he said these words he resumed his march with that long steady step which got over so much ground without remarking the hesitation of Colin, or what he had said. The young man himself felt that saving impulse fail him after the first minute. Afterwards, all the secondary motives came into his mind, and urged him to go on. Had he allowed that he was afraid to meet or to renew his relationships with Alice Meredith, supposing that by any extraordinary chance this should be she, it would be to betray the secret which he had guarded so long, and to betray himself; and he knew no reason that he could give for such a cowardly retreat. He could not say, "If I see her again, and find that she has been thinking of me, I shall be compelled to carry out my original mistake, and give up my brighter hopes,"—for no one knew that he had made any mistake, or that she was not to his eyes the type of all that was dearest in woman. "The chances are that it is all a piece of folly—a deception of the senses," he said to himself instead—"something like what people have when they think they see ghosts. We have talked of her, and I have dreamed of her, and now, to be sure, necessity requires that I should hear her. It should have been seeing, to make all perfect;" and, after that little piece of self-contempt, he went on again with Lauderdale without making any objection. The dust which had been raised by the carriage came towards them like a moving pillar; but the carriage itself went rapidly on and turned the corner and went out of sight. And then Colin did his best to comfort and strengthen himself by other means.

"Don't put yourself out of breath," he said to Lauderdale; "the whole thing is quite explainable. That absurd imagination of yours yesterday has got into both our heads. I don't mind

saying I dreamt of it all last night. Anything so wild was never put into a novel. It's an optical illusion, or, rather I should say, it's an ocular illusion. Things don't happen in real life in this kind of promiscuous way. Don't walk so quick and put yourself out of breath."

"Did you no hear?" said Lauderdale. "If you hadna heard I could understand. As for me, I canna say but what I saw as well. I'm no minding at this moment about my breath."

"What did you see?" cried Colin, with a sudden thrill at his heart.

"I'll no say it was *her*," said Lauderdale; "no but what I am as sure as I am of life that she was there. I saw something white laid back in the carriage, somebody that was ill; it might be her or it might be another. I've an awfu' strong conviction that it was her. It's been borne in on my mind that she was ill and wearying. We mightna ken *her*, but she kent you and me."

"What you say makes it more and more unlikely," said Colin. "I confess that I was a little excited myself by those dreams and stuff; but nothing could be more improbable than that she should recognise you and me. Bah! it is absurd to be talking of *her* in this ridiculous way, as if we had the slightest reason to suppose it was she. Any little movement might make a sick lady cry out; and, as for recognising a voice!—All this makes me feel like a fool," said Colin. "I am more disposed to go back than to go on. I wish you would dismiss this nonsense from your thoughts."

"If I was to do that same, do you think you could join me?" said Lauderdale. "There's voices I would ken after thirty years instead of after three; and I'm no likely to forget the bit English tone of it. I'm a wee slow about some things, and I'll no pretend to fathom your meaning; but, whether it's daft-like or no, this I'm sure of, that if you make up to that carriage

that's away out of our sight at this moment, you'll find Alice Meredith there."

"I don't believe anything of the kind. Your imagination has deceived you," said Colin, and they went on for a long time in silence; but at the bottom of his heart Colin felt that his own imagination had not deceived him. The only thing that had deceived him was that foolish feeling of liberty, that sense that he had escaped fate, and that the rash engagements of his youth were to have no consequences, into which he had deluded himself for some time past. Even while he professed his utter disbelief in this encounter, he was asking himself how in his changed circumstances he should bear the old bridle, the rein upon his own proud neck? If it had been a curb upon his freedom, even at the moment when he had formed it—if it had become a painful bondage afterwards while still the impression of Alice's gentle tenderness had not quite worn off his mind—what would it be now when he had emancipated himself from those soft prejudices of recollection, and when he had acknowledged so fully to himself that his heart never had been really touched? He marched on by Lauderdale's side, and paid no attention to what his friend said to him; and nothing could be more difficult to describe than the state of Colin's mind during this walk. Perhaps the only right thing, the only sensible thing he could have done in the circumstances, would have been to turn back and decline altogether this reawakening of the past. But then at six-and-twenty the mind is still so adverse to turning back, and has so much confidence in its own power of surmounting difficulty, and in its good star, and in the favour and assistance of all powers and influences in heaven and earth; and his pride was up in arms against such a mode of extricating himself from the apparent difficulty, and all the delicacy of his nature revolted from the idea of thus throwing the wrong and humiliation upon the woman, upon

Alice, a creature who had loved him and trusted him, and whom he had never owned he did not love.

Underneath all these complications there was, to be sure, a faint, sustaining hope that an encounter of this kind was incredible—that it might turn out not to be Alice at all, and that all these fears and embarrassments might come to nothing. With all this in his mind he marched on, feeling the sweet air and fresh winds and sunshine to be all so many spectators accompanying him perhaps to the turning-point of his life, where, for all he knew, things might go against him, and his wings be clipped, and his future limited for ever and ever. Perhaps some of Colin's friends may think that he exhibited great weakness of mind on this occasion—and, indeed, it is certain that there are many people who believe, with great reason, that it is next thing to a sin to put honour in the place of love, or to give to constancy the rights of passion. But then, whatever a man's principles may be, it is his character in most cases that carries the day. Every man must act according to his own nature, as says the Arabian sage. Sir Bayard, even, thinking it all over, might not approve of himself, and might see a great deal of folly in what he was doing; but, as for a man's opinion of himself, that counts for very little; and he could only go on and follow out his career in his own way.

Lauderdale, on his side, had less comprehension of his friend at this point of his character than at any other. He had discouraged, as far as he was able, the earlier steps of the engagement between Colin and Alice; but when things "had gone so far" the philosopher understood no compromise. He hastened on through the dust, for his part, with a tender anxiety in his heart, concerned for the girl who had approached him more nearly than any woman had done since the days of his youth; who had been to him that mingled type of sister, daughter, dependent, and ruler, which a very young, very

innocent, woman sometimes is to a man too old to fall in love with her, or even to think of such a weakness. Such love as had been possible to Lauderdale had been given early in his life—given once and done with; and Colin had filled up all the place in his heart which might have been left vacant as a prey to vagrant affections. At present, he was occupied with the thought that Alice was ill, and that the little cry she had uttered had a tone of appeal in it, and was in reality a cry for help to those who had succoured her in her loneliness, and been more to her for one little period of her life than father or family. And Colin's friend and guardian pursued his way with great strides, going to the rescue of the tender little suffering creature, the mournful, yet dutiful little woman, who had borne her grief so courageously at Frascati, where they two were all the protectors, all the comforters she had. Thus the friends went on with their different sentiments, saying little to each other, and not a word upon this particular subject. They had meant to pause at a village which was on their way to Windermere to rest during the heat of the day and refresh themselves; and it was here, according to all likelihood, that the carriage which had passed with the invalid would also stop, to repose the sick lady if she was a stranger—to await the approach of the two pedestrians if it was Alice, and if she was free to take such a step. Lauderdale had no doubt either of the one or the other of these facts; and, to tell the truth, Colin, regarding the matter under an altogether different aspect, had little doubt on his part that the crisis of his fate had arrived.

Nevertheless, when he saw the first straggling houses of the hamlet—rude little Westmoreland houses, grey and simple, with a moorland air, and no great proprietor near at hand to trim them into model cottages —— It is so hard to believe what goes against one's wishes. After all, perhaps, the end would

be a laugh, an exclamation of surprise, a blessed sense of relief; and no dreadful apparition of old ties and old vows to bind the freedman over again in cold blood and without any illusion. Such feverish hopes came into Colin's mind against his will, as they drew nearer. The road was as dusty as ever, but he did not see the broad mark of the carriage wheels; and with a great throb of relief found when they came in sight of the little inn that there was no carriage, nothing but a farmer's gig before the door. He began to breathe again, throwing off his burden. "It might be one of my farmers for anything one could tell to the contrary," said Colin, with a short laugh, and a sense of relief past describing. "You see now what fools we were to suppose——"

At that moment, however, he stopped short in the midst of his sentence. A man was coming to meet them, who might have been, for anything, as Colin said, that one could say to the contrary, the farmer to whom the gig belonged. He was at present but a black figure against the sunshine, with his face shaded by his hat; but notwithstanding Colin stopped short when he came in sight of him, and his heart stopped beating,—or at least he thought so. He had seen this man once in his life before,—but once, and no more. But there are some circumstances which sharpen and intensify the senses. Colin recognised him the moment his eyes rested on him. He stopped short, because what he was saying was proved to be folly, and worse than folly. It was a denial of the certainty which had suddenly appeared before his eyes. He stopped without explaining why he stopped, and made a step onwards in a confused and bewildered way. Henceforward Lauderdale had nothing to do with it. It was Colin himself as the principal and contracting party who was concerned.

And the stranger, for his part, who had also seen the young man but once in his life, recognised Colin. It had only been

for a moment, and it was nearly four years ago, but still Mr. Meredith knew, when he saw him, the young man whom he had bidden to begone for a fortune-hunter; who had closed his son's eyes, and laid Arthur in his grave; and given to Alice in her desolation the tenderest guardianship. He did not know Lauderdale, who had his share in all but the last act of that sad little domestic drama; but he recognised Colin by intuition. He came forward to him with the courtesy of a man whom necessity compels to change all his tactics. "Mr. Campbell, I think?" he said. "I feel that I cannot be mistaken. Alice was sure she saw you on the road. I came back after I had taken her home, to try whether I could meet you. Will you do me the favour to introduce me to your friend. I believe I am almost as much indebted to him as to you."

"There's no debt on one side or the other," said Lauderdale, interposing, for Colin found it difficult to speak. "Tell us how she is, which is far more important. We heard her give a cry, and since then we've been hurrying on to see."

"She is not strong," said Mr. Meredith. "I hope you will consent to gratify Alice by going back with me. My house is close by here, and I came on purpose. Mr. Campbell, you may think you have a just grievance against me. I hope you will overlook it at present, and hear my explanation afterwards. We can never be sufficiently grateful for all you have done for my son, both before his death and after. It was a terrible dispensation of Providence; but I cannot be thankful enough that my poor boy lived to produce a work which has been of value to so many; and but for you it never could have been successfully published. My dear sir, I hope you will not suffer any personal feeling to me——I beg you to believe that what I said was said in ignorance—I mean, I trust that you will not refuse to gratify Alice. She is almost all I have left," Mr. Meredith said, with a faltering voice. "I have had great

losses in my family. She has not been so much interested about anything for a long time. You will come with me, will you not, for Arthur's and for my daughter's sake?"

If any man could have said No to that appeal, Colin was not the man. He made little answer except a bow, and Mr. Meredith turned with them, and they all got into the country vehicle at the door of the little inn, and drove off in silence to the house where Alice was awaiting them. Colin had scarcely a word to say as he drove along by her father's side. The gaiety, and freedom, and happy thoughts with which he had set out on his journey seemed to detach themselves from his mind, and abandon him one by one. His fate had encountered him where he had least expectation of meeting it. And yet at the same time a compunction awoke in his heart to think that it was in this way, like a captive brought back to her presence, that the man whom Alice loved was going to her. He could have felt aggrieved and angry for her sake, if the claim of his own reluctance and dread had not been nearer, and gained upon the more generous feeling. And yet withal he had a longing to see her, a kind of inclination to carry her off from this man, who had but a secondary claim upon her, and heal and cherish the wounded dove. Such was the singular medley of emotion, with which Colin was led back out of the free ways of his own choosing into the beaten path of life.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"HOLMBY is not my house," said Mr. Meredith as they drove up the avenue; "I took it to please Alice. She has a fancy for the north now, as she used to have for the south." As he said this he gave a wistful side-glance at Colin, who had scarcely spoken during all the drive; and even to this speech the young man made little response. The house was a pale grey house, of rough limestone, like the humbler houses, surrounded by woods, and bearing anything but a cheerful aspect. The avenue was long and straight, and the cold commonplace outline of this secluded dwelling-place filled up the vista between the two dark lines of trees, growing gradually more distinct as they approached. Everything had a certain visionary aspect to Colin at the moment, and the look of the house irritated him, as if it had been a type of the commonplace existence which he was henceforward to lead. He could not keep the cloud that was on his mind from appearing also on his countenance, though, at the same time, he could not help observing that Mr. Meredith looked at him often with a regard that was almost pathetic. To be sure, there was nothing very elevated in the aspect of this man, whose history was not one which Colin liked to think of; but still it was evident that his heart was trembling for his child, and that he was conveying to her the lover whom he had once rejected and insulted, as he might have carried a costly medicine, hard to procure and of doubtful efficacy, but still the only thing that there was any hope in. Colin recognised this wistful look by the freemasonry of a mind equally excited,

though in a different way; and, as for Lauderdale, he looked on at both with a painful doubt and uncertainty which had never before entered into his thoughts. For all this time he had been trying to think it was Alice's father, or even Alice herself, who was to blame; and now only he began to see clearly the reluctance of his friend to its fullest extent—his reluctance and, at the same time, that almost fantastic honour and delicacy which kept the young man from avowing even to his closest companion the real state of his feelings. So that now, at the first moment for years in which the fulfilment of Colin's engagement began to appear possible, Lauderdale, who had preached to him of constancy, who had longed after Alice, who had taken every opportunity of directing to her the truant thoughts of his friend, for the first time faltered. He began to see the other side of the question just at the time when it would have been agreeable to ignore it. He saw not only that Colin's happiness was at stake, but that it would be better for Alice even to break her heart if that was inevitable, than to be married, not for love, but for honour; and unhappily he recognised this just at the moment when Sir Bayard, Sir Quixote, whatever absurd title you may please to give him—the Mistress's son, who was incapable of leaving a woman in the lurch, or casting upon her the shame of rejection—was going on to meet his fate.

From this it will be seen that it was a very subdued and silent party which was at this moment driving along the long avenue under the trees, and making Alice's heart beat, in-doors on her sofa, with every turn of those wheels on the gravel. "Is papa alone?" she asked of her little sister, who was at the window; and her heart was jumping up into her throat when she uttered that simple question, as if it would take away her breath. When she received for answer a lengthened and interrupted description of the two gentlemen who accompanied

Mr. Meredith, Alice put her head back on her pillows and closed her eyes in the sudden faintness of her great joy. For she in her simplicity had no doubt about Colin. If he had not loved her he would not have turned back; he would never have come to her. It was the tender guardian of her loneliness, the betrothed in whom she had reposed the entire faith of her nature, whom her father was bringing back to her; and, so far as Alice was concerned, the four intervening years might have had no existence. She had seen nobody and done nothing during that dreary interval. Ill-health, and seclusion, and mourning had made it appear to her that her life had temporarily stopped at the time when Mr. Meredith carried her off from Frascati. And now, with Colin, life and strength and individuality were coming back. This was how the matter appeared on her side of affairs, and it seemed to Alice the natural solution of the difficulty; for, after all, but for her father's cruel persistence against her, which Providence by many blows had broken and made to yield, she would have been Colin's wife for all those years. And now, the one obstacle being removed, it seemed only natural to her straightforward and simple intelligence that the long-deferred conclusion should arrive at last.

Both she and the little sister at the window were in mourning. Mrs. Meredith was dead—the stepmother, who had been Alice's greatest enemy; and, of all the children who had once made their father indifferent to his elder son and daughter, the only one left was the little girl, who was giving her sister an elaborate description of the gentlemen who were with papa. This was why Mr. Meredith had yielded. Alice judged, according to her simple reckonings, with a little awe of the terrible means employed, that it was Providence who had thus overturned her father's resolution, and made him yielding and tender. It did not occur to her to ask whether for her happi-

ness it was just or reasonable that so many should suffer; she only accepted it as providential, just as Colin four years before had persuaded himself that all the circumstances which had thrown them together were providential. And now the climax, which the poor girl permitted herself to think God had been bringing about by all the family convulsions of these four years, came close, and the heart of Alice grew faint with thankfulness and joy. When she heard them coming upstairs she sat upright, recovering with her old force of self-restraint her composure and calmness. Mr. Meredith came in with a little bustle to spare his daughter the agitation of the meeting. "You were quite right, Alice, my love," he said, bringing them hurriedly up to her. "Here is Mr. Campbell and your friend, Mr. Lauderdale. They recognised you at the same minute as you recognised them; and, if I had not been so foolish as to tell John to drive on, we might have picked them up and saved them their walk. I thought she was ill," the anxious father continued, turning his back upon Alice and occupying himself with Lauderdale. "She had a fainting fit yesterday, and I was frightened it was coming on again, or I should have stopped and picked you up. We are a little dark here with all these trees. I would have them cut down if Holmby were mine; but at this window, if you are fond of scenery, I can show you a beautiful view."

And it was thus that the two, who parted at Frascati as lovers within a few weeks of their marriage, met in the shaded drawing-room at Holmby. The most exciting events of Colin's life were framed within the interval; but nothing had happened individually to Alice. He seemed to find her exactly where he had left her, though with the sense of having himself travelled to an unutterable distance in the meantime. She did not say much in the tumult and confusion of her joy; she only held out her hand to him, and lifted her soft eyes to his face with a look of supreme content and satisfaction, which had the strangest

effect upon Colin. He felt his doom fixed for ever and ever as he looked into the gentle blue eyes which conveyed to him all that was in Alice's heart. And she had not the slightest suspicion of the heaviness that was in his as he drew a chair near her sofa. "At last!" she said softly, under her breath. The little sister stood by, looking on with round eyes opened to their widest; but, as for Alice, she had no consciousness of any presence but one. And Colin sat down by her without any answer, in his heart not knowing what to say. Her black dress, her languid air, the paleness one moment, and the flush of delicate colour the next, all moved him strangely. Even had he not been Bayard he could not have done anything to wound the fair, feeble creature who looked at him with her heart in her eyes. And naturally the consequence was, that Colin answered in a way far more decisive than any words—by clasping the soft clinging hand, and bending down to kiss it as in the old Italian days. Alice had never had any doubt of her betrothed, but at that moment she felt herself receiving the pledge of a new and more certain troth—and in the revulsion from despondency and weakness her mouth was opened for the first time in her life—opened with a fulness, the thought of which would have covered poor Alice with misery and confusion if she could but have known what was passing in her companion's heart.

"I had grown so tired of waiting," she said, scarcely aware of what she said, "I was wearying, wearying, as Mr. Lauderdale used to say; and to think you should be passing so near, and perhaps might have passed altogether, and never have known I was here; Oh, Colin, it was Providence!" said Alice, with the tears in her eyes.

And poor Colin, who did not know what to say, whose heart was bursting with the profound pity and instinctive tenderness of old, and with that sense that all his own imaginations were ended for ever, and his future decided for him without any

action of his own—Colin could find no answer to make. He bent down again on the pale, soft hand which he held in his own, and kissed it once more with that tender affection which was everything in the world but love. "Yes," he said, but it was more to himself than to her, "I think it was Providence." Alice had not an ear that could hear the despair that was in the words—for indeed it was a despair so mingled with softer emotions, with sympathy and anxiety, and a kind of fondness that nobody could have found it out who did not know Colin to the bottom of his heart. This was how the meeting was accomplished after all those years; for by this time Lauderdale had looked at the view without seeing it, and was returning to see how his friend had gone through the encounter, and to claim Alice's recognition for himself. The two spectators who approached from the window, where they had been pretending to look at the view, were, to tell the truth, as much agitated as the young people themselves. Perhaps even, on the whole, a stranger, not knowing anything about the matter, would have concluded that it was Lauderdale and Mr. Meredith who were moved the most; for perhaps there is nothing which can happen to one's self which moves one so profoundly as to watch a crisis of fate passing over another human creature whom one loves, yet whom one cannot die for or suffer for, and whose burden has to be borne, not by us, but by himself. Alice's father, for his part, looked upon this meeting somehow as his child's last chance for life—or rather, it would be better to say, as his own last chance to save her life and preserve her to himself; and Lauderdale saw Colin's happiness, which was almost of more importance than his life, hanging upon the doubtful expression in the sick girl's eyes. When the two turned back, it was impossible to mistake the sweet joy and serenity of Alice's looks. Excitement was unnatural to her in all circumstances. She had been agitated profoundly for a moment; but now all that was

over, and the content of old had returned to her face. The same look that Lauderdale remembered at Frascati—the look which always greeted Colin's arrival—not any tumult of delight, but a supreme satisfaction and completeness, as if there remained nothing more in the world to be looked for or desired! She half rose up to meet her old friend as he came back to her, himself greatly moved, and not venturing to look at Colin—and held out both her hands to him. "Oh Mr. Lauderdale, I have not told you how glad I am, nor how I have been *wearying*"—said Alice. She repeated that word—a word she had once laughed at—as if with a soft appeal to his recollection. She had said it so often to herself in those long years—half because it was Scotch, and pleased her yearning fancy; and half because there was a lingering depth of expression in it, like her long watch and vigil. And then she smiled in his face, and then cried a little. For, notwithstanding her tranquillity, all this had tried her weakness, and proved a little more than she could bear.

"You must not agitate yourself, Alice," said Mr. Meredith, taking, as most men do, the result of her past agitation for the thing itself. "She is still a little weakly, but I hope now we shall soon see her strong again." This he said again with a covert glance at Colin, who was still sitting close to the sofa with his face shaded by his hand. Notwithstanding that shade the young man knew by instinct the look that was being directed upon him, and turned to meet it; and on his face there were greater marks of agitation than on that of Alice, which had been relieved by her tears. He was pale, and to Lauderdale's anxious eyes seemed to have fallen back from his vigour of manhood for the moment into that unassured youth which he had left behind him for years. And then the voice of Mr. Meredith had an effect upon Colin's mind altogether different from that produced by the soft familiar tones of Alice.

When the father spoke, Colin's heart shut fast its doors, and rose up against the impending fate.

"If Miss Meredith was ill," he said, with a little bitterness, taking at least advantage of the rights thus pressed back upon him to repulse this man, whom he could not help disliking in his heart, "I am surprised that you did not let me know."

This speech was so unexpected and sudden, and there was in it such an amount of suppressed exasperation, that Lauderdale made a step forward without knowing it, and Alice put out her hand vaguely to arrest the vehemence of her betrothed. As for Mr. Meredith, he was as much relieved by the assumption of right in Colin's words, as he was disturbed by his unfriendly tone.

"My dear sir," said the father, "I hope you will let bygones be bygones. I have learned many severe lessons, and Providence has dealt with me in a way to make me see my errors; but I can safely say that, since I understood the true state of the case, I have always reproached myself for not having shown the gratitude I felt to you."

Colin, for his part, did not make any answer. His temper was disturbed by the struggle he had been going through. He could not cry and get over it, like Alice; being a man it was only in this way that he could give a little vent to his feelings. And then he could relieve himself by putting out some of his pain upon Mr. Meredith, without injury to her who had thus thrown herself undoubtingly upon his love, as she supposed. Perhaps Bayard himself, under the same circumstances, would have done as much.

"I may say, my gratitude to both," said Mr. Meredith, whose anxiety that he might not lose this chance for Alice was so great that it made him almost servile, and who could not help recollecting at that inopportune moment the letter he had written to Lauderdale; "I know that Mr. Lauderdale also was very kind

to my poor boy. I hope you will both excuse the error of the moment," he said, faltering a little. It was hard to own himself altogether in the wrong, and yet in his anxiety he would have done even that for Alice's sake.

"Speak no more of it," said Lauderdale. "Our friend Arthur spoke of his father with his last breath, and we're no like to forget any of his words. It's an awfu' consolation to my mind to see *her* again, and to feel that we're a' friends. As for Colin, he's a wee out of himself, as is natural. I would have been real vexed," said the philosopher, with the smile that was half tears, and that Alice remembered so well—"being sure of Arthur for a fast friend whenever we may meet again—to have lost all sight and knowledge of you."

He looked at Alice, but it was to Arthur's father that he held out his hand; and, as for Colin, it was impossible for him not to follow the example, though he did it with a certain reluctance which did not escape any of the spectators. And then they all made believe to be composed, and at their ease, and began to talk, forming a little circle round Alice's sofa, outside of which the little sister, with her eyes open to the widest extent, still stood, drinking in everything, and wondering much what it could mean.

"And, now that we have you," said Mr. Meredith, "we cannot let you go again. You can go to Windermere, and any other place worth seeing, from Holmby. You must tell me where to send for your things, and we will try to make you comfortable here."

"We have no things but those we carry with us," said Colin. "We are pedestrians, and not fit for ladies' society. I am afraid we must go upon our dusty way—and return again," he added with an involuntary glance at Alice. It was because he thought he was failing of his duty that he said these last words; but they were unnecessary so far as Alice was concerned, who had no suspicion, and, most likely, if she had known his secret, would

not have understood it. It never could have entered her head as a possible idea that he would thus have come to her again and accepted his old position had he not loved her; and in her truthfulness she had the superiority over Colin—notwithstanding, perhaps, that his motives were of a higher order, and his mode of thinking more exalted than anything that could ever have come into her honest and simple mind.

"Oh, we can put up with your dress," said Mr. Meredith, putting on a heartiness that was scarcely natural to him. "We can be tolerant on that point. I will give orders directly about your rooms. Alice is not well enough to see visitors, and your coats do not matter to her," he went on with a little laugh; not that he was merry, poor man, but that, like all the rest, he was agitated, and did not know how to give it vent. As for Alice, she did not say anything, but she turned her soft eyes upon Colin with a look that seemed to caress him and his dusty vestments. If he had been in the roughest peasant's dress, it would not have made any difference to Alice. Her soft, tranquil eyes rested upon him with that content and satisfaction which convey the highest compliment that eyes of woman can make to man. When he was there she had no longer any occasion to look into the world, or seek further, and she could not but smile at the idea that his dusty coat mattered anything. Thus it was that everything was settled before Colin knew what was being done. The sun was still high in the heavens when he found himself established at Holmby, by Alice's side, an inmate of her father's house; he who had got up that morning with the idea that he was entirely sundered from his old ties, and that nothing in the world was so impossible as such a return upon the past. Even now, when it had taken place, he could not believe it was true, but sat as in a dream, and saw the fair shadow of the Alice of Frascati moving and speaking like a phantom. Would it remain for ever, looking at him with the soft eyes which he felt ashamed to meet,

and to which he could make so little response? A kind of despair came over Colin as the slow afternoon waned, and the reality of the vision began more and more to force itself upon him. Everything was so frightfully true and natural, and in reason. He had to baffle not only the eyes of Alice, but those of Lauderdale, who, he felt sure by instinct, was watching him, though he never could catch him in the act, and put him down as of old by the broad, full, half-defiant look which he had learned was his best shield against all question. Lauderdale had grown too skilful to subject himself to that repulse; and yet Colin knew that his friend observed his smallest action, and heard every word he was saying, however distant he might be. And thus the day passed on in a kind of distracting vision; and they all dined and talked, and looked, as it is the duty of any party of people in England to look, exactly as if they had been all their lives together, and it was the most natural thing in the world.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE evening passed on, Colin could not very well tell how; and he began to see a prospect of escaping a little, and gaining a moment's breathing time, to realize, if he could, the astonishing revolution which had taken place. Alice, who was an invalid, retired early; and after that the conversation flagged, and the three men who had so little in common, and who had been, on the sole occasion which had brought them into contact with each other before, so entirely in opposition, found it hard to know what to say, so as to cultivate all the friendly feelings that were possible and dissipate the disagreeable reminiscences. Mr. Meredith betook himself to the only subject that seemed to him practicable—his son's book, which Colin had edited so carefully; but then it is already known to the readers of this history that Colin's opinions were by no means those of the "Voice from the Grave." And then the young man was burning to escape—to get out of doors and feel the wind on his face, and endeavour in the silence and darkness to realize his position. He had to escape not only from Mr. Meredith, who watched him with the anxiety of a man who fears to see his last hope escape him, but also from Lauderdale, who was concerned less for Alice than for Colin, and whose anxiety, now that his mind had been fully awakened, was as great that Colin should not risk his own happiness, as was Mr. Meredith's anxiety that the happiness of Alice should be secured. Of the two, it was the latter whom Colin could meet with most ease; for it was in no way necessary that he should open his heart to a man who sought him only as he might have sought a physician; and, indeed, there was a

certain relief to his mind in the expression of some irritation and resentment towards Mr. Meredith, who had once insulted him, and was friendly now only from the most interested motives. When he at last found it possible to leave the room, and had actually opened the door to escape into the open air, it was Mr. Meredith who detained him. "Pardon me," he said; "but, if you would but give me five minutes in my own room— I have a great deal to say to you." Colin was obliged to yield, though his impatience was unspeakable; and he followed Mr. Meredith into the library, which, like all the other rooms in the house, was but partially lighted. Here Alice's father gave his guest a chair with solemnity, as for an important conference; and this was more than Colin's powers of self-restraint could bear.

"I must ask you to pardon *me*," he said, putting his hand on the back of the chair. "You will, perhaps, understand that all that has happened to-day has disturbed my calculations a little. A man cannot go back four years of his life in so unexpected a way without feeling a little off his equilibrium. May I ask you to postpone till to-morrow what you have to say?"

"Only a moment—only three words," said Mr. Meredith; "I hope you have forgiven me for the mistake which I have regretted ever since. I meant no slight to you, whom I did not know. I was naturally excited to find my daughter in such circumstances; and, Mr. Campbell, I am sure you are generous; you will not let a mere mistake prejudice you against me."

"It was not a mistake," said Colin coldly; "you were right enough in everything but the motives you imputed to me; and I am almost as poor a man now as I was then, with very little chance of being richer—I may say with no chance," he went on, with a certain pleasure in exaggerating his disadvantages. "A Scotch minister can make no advance in his profession. Instead of finding fault with what you did then, I feel disposed to bid you weigh well the circumstances now."

Mr. Meredith smiled, with a little air of protection, and drew a long breath of relief. "Alice will have enough for both," he said; "and Providence has taught me by many severe lessons the vanity of riches. She will have enough for both."

It was at this moment that all the bitterness of the sacrifice he was making rushed upon Colin's mind—rushed upon him like a flood, quenching even the natural courtesy of his disposition, and giving him a certain savage satisfaction in wreaking his vengeance upon the rich man, whose riches he despised, and whose money smelt of spoliation and wrong. All the silent rage against his fate which possessed Colin—all the reluctance and disappointment which a higher principle kept in abeyance in presence of the innocent Alice—blazed up against her father in a momentary glare which appalled the victim. Colin might give up his ideal and his dreams for tender friendship and honour and compassion; but the idea of any sordid inducement mingled with these motives drove him the length of passion. It was, however, not with any noisy demonstration, but in a white heat of bitterness and angry resistance that he spoke.

"It will be better that we should understand each other clearly on this point," said Colin. "I am not your judge, to say you have done well or ill; but it is a matter on which I may be permitted to have my own opinion. I will not accept a shilling of your fortune. If Alice is content to have me as I am, she shall have all the care, all the tenderness that I can give her; but—pardon me, it is necessary to speak plainly—I will take nothing from you."

Colin stood up with his hand on the back of his chair, and delivered his charge full into the breast of his unsuspecting opponent. Perhaps it was cruel; but there are circumstances under which it is a relief to be cruel to somebody, and the pain in his soul found for itself a certain expression in these words. As for the unhappy victim who received them, the sense of sur-

prise almost deadened the effect for the moment; he could not believe that he had heard rightly. Mr. Meredith was of the Low Church, and was used to say every day that wealth was vanity, and that the true treasure had to be laid up above; but still experience had not shown him that poor young priests of any creed were generally so far moved by these sentiments as to despise the fortune which a wife might bring them. He was so much amazed that he gave a gasp of consternation at the young man who thus defied him, and grew not pale but grey with an emotion which was more wonder than anger. Mr. Meredith was not a bad man, notwithstanding that he had ruined several households, and made himself rich at other people's expense; and even had he felt the full force of the insult personally, his anxiety about Alice would have made him bear it. That fatherly dread and love made him for the moment a great deal more Christian than Colin, who had thus assaulted him in the bitterness of his heart.

"Mr. Campbell," he replied, when he had sufficiently recovered himself to speak, "I don't know what you have heard about me. I don't mean to enter upon any defence of myself. My poor boy, I know, misunderstood some transactions, not knowing anything about business. But, so far as I can see, that matters very little between you and me. I have explained to you that my conduct in reference to yourself was founded on a mistake. I have expressed my gratitude to you in respect to my son; and now, if we are to be more closely connected——"

"That depends upon Miss Meredith," said Colin, hastily. "You have opened your doors to me voluntarily, and not by my solicitation; and now it is to *her* that I have a right to address myself. Otherwise it would have been better if you had not asked me to come here."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Meredith. He thought he saw a doubtful gleam in Colin's eye, and an accent of repugnance in his

voice, and he trembled to the bottom of his heart lest perhaps, after all, he might lose this chance of preserving his daughter. "Yes, yes," he said with a smile, which it cost him a little trouble to assume, and which looked horribly out of place to Colin; "I ought to have learned by this time that it does not do to interfere between lovers. I allow that it lies entirely between her and you."

He might have said a great deal more if his young hearer would have given him time; but Colin was only too glad to escape. The word "lovers" which Mr. Meredith used, the smile which he was so far from meaning, the lighter tone which belied his feelings quite as much as Colin's, drove the young man half frantic with impatience and disgust. At last he managed to get his will, and escaped out of doors, with the cigar which was an excuse for his thoughts. The night was dark, and agitated by a ghostly wind, and the country, utterly unknown, which lay round the house in the darkness, and which neither memory nor imagination presented to the mind of the stranger, increased the natural effect of the gloom and the solitude. He went down through the long straight opening of the avenue, which was a little less black than the surrounding world, with a sensation of loneliness which was as strange as it was painful. He did not seem to know himself or his life henceforward any more than he knew the wild, strange country over which the night and the wind ruled supreme. It seemed to him as if the solace of friendship, the consolation of sympathy, were all ended for ever; he could not talk, even to those who were most dear to him, of his betrothed, or of his marriage—if, indeed, that was what it must come to. He had walked up and down the avenue two or three times, from one end to another, before even a little coherence came to his thoughts. All was so strange and unbelievable as yet; so like a trick of magic played upon him by some malign magician. He was not capable of thinking; but

everything passed before him like a vision, appearing and disappearing out of the darkness. His old freedom, his impulses of revolution, the force and fulness of life with which he was young enough to sport, even in its most serious strength, and all the sweet wealth of imagination that had lain hoarded up for him among the clouds—these were things that belonged to yesterday. To-night it was another world that seemed to lie before him in the gloom, a separate sphere from the actual world in which he was standing. Vague limitations and restrictions which he could not identify were awaiting him; and he saw no way of escaping, and yet did not know how he was to bear the future thraldom.

As this ferment calmed down a little, Colin began to think of Alice, sweet and patient, and dutiful as she always was. He even resented, for her sake, his own indifference and repugnance, and said bitterly to himself that it was hard that such a woman should be accepted as a necessary burden, and not longed for as a crown of blessing; but yet, with all that, he could not cheat his own heart, or persuade himself that he wanted to marry her, or that it was less than the sacrifice of all his individual hopes to enter again upon the old relationship, and fulfil the youthful bond. When, however, he attempted to ask himself if he could escape, the same heart which sank at the thought of this bond baffled and stopped him in his question. He would not harm *her*, should it kill him.

> "He loved her with all love, except the love
> Of men and women when they love the best."

And it was he himself who had knitted in youthful generosity and indiscretion the chain that now lay on his limbs like iron. Alice had done nothing unmaidenly, nothing that in all honour and delicacy she ought not to have done. To be sure, another man as honourable as Colin might have given her to understand, or permitted her to find out, the change which had taken in his

sentiments. But Colin could not even assert with any truth that his sentiments had changed. For he was almost as conscious that she was not the woman of his imagination when he led her home from the ilex avenue on the day which determined their fortunes as he was now after the long separation which had not broken the link between them. He had known in his heart that it was not broken, even when he had most felt his freedom; and now what could he do? Perhaps that morning, after the carriage had passed him, after the little cry of recognition which convinced his heart, but which his mind could still have struggled against, he might have turned back as he had once thought of doing, and fled ignominiously. But that moment was past, and there was nothing to be done but accept the results of his own youthful rashness. Such were the thoughts that went through his mind as he walked up and down the avenue between the two long lines of trees, hearing the wind roar among the branches overhead, and feeling that henceforward there must always be a secret in his heart, something which nobody must discover, a secret which neither now nor any time could be breathed into any sympathetic ear. This sense of something to conceal weighed harder upon Colin than if it had been a crime—for there is no crime so terrible but a human creature may entertain the hope some time of relieving his mind of it, and breathing it into the ear of some confidant, consecrated either by love or religion, who will not shrink from him in consequence of that revelation. The sting of Colin's burden was that he could never relieve himself of it, that all the questions raised by it must absolutely confine themselves to his own mind, and must lie unnamed and even unsuggested between him and those friends from whom he had never hidden anything but this.

All this he revolved in his mind as he contemplated his position. So far from seeking sympathy, it would be his business to refuse and ignore it, should it be given by any implication, and to seek congratulations, felicitations, instead. All this he

was going to do for Alice's sake; and yet he did not love Alice. He looked up at a faintly-lighted window, where there seemed to be a shaded light as in an invalid's room, and thought of her with a mixture of bitterness and sweetness, of tender affection and unconquerable reluctance, of loyalty almost fantastic and the most painful sense of hardship, which it would be impossible to describe. She, for her part, was lying down to rest with her heart full of the sweetest content and thankfulness, thinking with thoughts so different from his how her life had changed since the morning, and how the almost-forgotten sunshine had come back again to remain for ever. This was how Alice was looking at the matter, and Colin knew it in his heart. If she could but wake out of that soft paradise to see the darkness and the turmoil in his mind! But that was what she must never find out.

And thus Colin made up his mind, if he could ever be said to have had any doubt in his mind, as to what was to be done. He did not even cheat himself by the hope that anything could happen to deliver him. It was Providence, as Alice had said. Perhaps it might come darkly into the young man's mind to wonder whether those severe lessons which Mr. Meredith said he had had in his family—whether all those fatal losses and sorrows which Alice regarded with awe, yet with a certain devout admiration as God's mysterious way of bringing about her own happiness, could be designed to effect an end which did not make him happy; for, in such a question, personal content or dissatisfaction has a great deal to do with the way in which a man regards the tenor of Providence. Had he been as happy as Alice was, perhaps he too would have concluded that this was but another instance how all things work together for good. But, as he was not happy, he plunged into a world of more painful questions, and returned again as before, after his favourite speculations had beguiled him for a little out of the immediate matter in hand, to realize, as if by a flash of lightning, all the

facts of the case, and all the necessities before him. There may be many people who will condemn Colin both for remaining indifferent to Alice, and for remaining faithful to her in his indifference. But this is not a defence nor eulogium of him, but simply a history. It was thus his mind acted under the circumstances. He could conduct himself only according to his own nature; and this is all that there is to say.

All this time Lauderdale was standing at his window, watching in the darkness for an occasional glimpse of something moving among the trees. He had put out his light by instinct, that Colin might not think he was being watched. He kept looking out upon the wild tree-tops swaying about in the wind, and upon the wilder clouds, dashed and heaped about the sky with a great sadness in his heart. Colin's nature was not like his; yet by dint of a sympathy which had been expanding and growing with the young man's growth, and a knowledge of him and his ways, which no one in the world possessed to the same extent, Lauderdale had very nearly divined what was in his friend's heart. He divined at the same time that he must never divine it, nor betray by word or look that such an idea had ever entered his mind. And that was why he put his light out, and, watching long till Colin had come in, said his prayers in the dark, and went to rest without seeking any communication with him, though his heart was yearning over him. It was Colin, and not Lauderdale, who was the hero of that silent struggle. Yet perhaps there was no single pang in the young man's suffering so exquisite as that which thrilled through his companion as he resigned himself to an appearance of repose, and denied himself so much as a look at his friend, to whom he had been like a father. At such a moment a look might have been a betrayal; and now it was Lauderdale's business to second Colin's resolution—to avoid all confidence, and to save him even from himself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

After this agitated night the morning came, as morning has a knack of coming, with that calm freshness and *insouciance* which exasperates a mind in distress. What does Nature care about what happened last night or may happen to-morrow? If she had disturbed herself for such trifles, she must have died of it in her first thousand years. The new day, on the contrary, was as gay and as easy in her mind as if in all the world there were no painful puzzles awaiting her, and no inheritance of yesterday to be disposed of. Somehow the sight of that fresh and joyous light recalled to Colin the looks of the fair spring mornings in Italy, which used to burst in upon Arthur's deathbed with what always seemed to him a look of careless surprise and inquiry. But Alice for her part found a tender sweetness in the new day. All that was bright in nature came and paid court to her by reason of her happiness—for there is no fairweather friend so frank in her intruded intentions as Nature, though it is happiness and not grandeur to which she attaches herself. Alice went down to breakfast that morning, which she had not been able to do for a long time. She had laid aside her black dress by instinct, and put on a white one, which had nothing but its black ribbons to mark it as mourning; and there was a little delicate colour on her cheek, and her eyes, though a little too large and clear, had a glimmer of sunshine in them, like the light in a dewdrop. Colin would have been hardhearted indeed, had he refused to be moved by that tender revival of health and hope, which was owing to him solely; and his friends are aware that Colin was not hardhearted. He was, perhaps, even

more thoughtful of her, more devoted to her, than he would have been had the timidity of real love been upon him. When the breakfast was over—and naturally there was still a certain embarrassment upon the party so abruptly united, and made up of elements so unlike each other—Colin and Alice were left together. He proposed to her to go out, and they went out, for Alice had forgotten all about the precautions which the day before were so necessary for her. They went into the avenue, where the daylight and the sunshine had tamed down the wind into a cheerful breeze. Nothing of the landscape outside was to be seen from that sheltered enclosure—no more than could have been seen through the close shade of the ilexes at Frascati, which they were both thinking of as they strayed along under the shadow of the trees; but the stately elms and green transparent lime leaves which shadowed the avenue of Holmby were as unlike as could be supposed to the closely woven sombre green which shut out the overwhelming sunshine in the grounds of the Villa Conti. Here the sun was very supportable, to say the truth; there was no occasion to shut it out, and even when a great tree came in the way, and interfered with it, a little shiver came over Alice. And yet it was June, the same month in which they had wandered through the ilex cloister, and watched the span of blue sky blazing at the end, the only indication visible that the great shining glowing world lay outside. Collin was so full of recollections, so full of thoughts, that at first he could find but little to say; and, as for Alice, her content did not stand in need of any words to express it. Nor could any words have expressed, on the other hand, the profound remorseful tenderness, almost more tender than love itself, with which Colin bent over her, and held her supported on his arm.

"Do you remember the ilexes in the Villa Conti?" he said. "It was about this time, was it not?"

"It was on the second of June," said Alice, hastily. She was half vexed that the day had not been marked by him as by her. "Oh, yes, I remember every twig, I think," she said, with a smile. "The second of June was on a Sunday this year. I think I cried nearly all day, for it seemed as if you never would come. And not to know where you were, or how you were, all these four dreary, dreary years!——"

What could Colin do? He pressed the hand that clung to his arm, and answered as he best could, touched ever more and more with that tenderness of remorse towards the woman who loved him. "You know it was not any fault of mine. It was your father who sent me away."

"Yes, I know," said Alice; "it was that always that kept me up, for I knew *you* would not change. Poor papa! he has had such dreadful lessons. Mrs. Meredith, you know, and the poor little children! I used to think, if God would only have taken me, and left them who were so happy——"

And here there was a little pause, for Alice had some tears to brush away, and Colin, ever more and more touched, could not but offer such consolations as were natural under the circumstances. And it was Alice who resumed at length, with the simple certainty natural to her mind.

"I see now that it was all for the best," she said; "God has been so good to us. Oh, Colin, is it not true about His mysterious ways?—and that everything works together for good? though it may seem hard at the time."

Perhaps Colin found it difficult to answer this question; perhaps, not being absorbed by his own happiness, he could not but wonder over again if poor Mrs. Meredith and her children who were dead, would have seen that working of Providence in the same light as Alice did. But then this was not a subject to be discussed between two lovers; and, if it was not Providence who had seized upon him in the midst of his thoughtless holiday, and

brought him back to the bonds of his youth, and changed all his prospects in the twinkling of an eye, what was it? Not the heathen Fate, taking a blind vengeance upon Folly, which was a harder thing to think of than the ways, however mysterious, of God. These were not thoughts to be passing through a man's mind at such a moment; and Colin avoided the answer which was expected of him, and plunged into more urgent affairs.

"I must go away," he said; "do not look reproachful, Alice. I do not mean to continue my holiday after this. It seems to me we have waited a great deal too long already," Colin went on with a smile, which he felt to be forced, but which had no such effect upon Alice. "Now that the obstacles are removed I cannot consent to any longer delay; and you know I have a house to take you to now, which I had not in the old times."

"You had always Ramore," said Alice; and the way in which she said it proved to him still once more that, though he had put her out of his mind, Alice had forgotten nothing he had ever said to her. She spoke of the farmer's homely house not as of a place which she heard some vague talk of so many years ago, but as a home for which she had been longing. "And your mother!" said Alice; "if you had the most beautiful house in the world, I want you to take me there first of all; I want you to take me to her."

It will be seen from this that Alice did not think there was anything to be deprecated in Colin's haste. She accepted it as most reasonable, and the thing that was to be looked for. She thought it natural that he should be reluctant to lose sight of her again, as she, for her part, was very reluctant to lose sight of him; and thus they went on to make all their necessary arrangements. In this close and tender interview, as he saw ever more and more how Alice depended upon him, how real the link between them had been to her even during those long years of separation, and how, in her perfect good faith and simplicity, she considered him

and all belonging to him, as hers, Colin himself came to consider it the most natural and unquestionable conclusion. The pain in his heart softened, his reluctance seemed to melt away. Alice had more beauty at this time of her life than ever she had had before. Her weakness, and the charm of that hidden love which had been so long working in her, and which had now brightened into the fullest blossom, had given an expression hitherto wanting to her eyes. She was more individual and distinct by right of having kept and hoarded that individual attachment in her heart, in defiance of everything that could be done against it; and now in Colin's presence, believing as she did with that confidence which can be born only of love, in his entire interest in everything connected with her, her timidity disappeared, and she hourly gained interest and character. All this had its effect upon Colin so long as the two were together straying through the avenue, crossing the bars of shade and the rays of sunshine, listening to the birds singing overhead and to the rustle of the summer leaves. But it was harder work when they went indoors again, when Mr. Meredith's anxious face appeared, and the grave countenance of Lauderdale, carefully cleared of all anxiety, and become, so far as that was possible, altogether inexpressive. Colin was of so uncertain a mood that the very absence of all question in Lauderdale's eyes jarred upon him, though he could not have borne to be interrogated. He was high-fantastical beyond all previous precedent at that moment; and the readers of this history are aware that already, at various periods of his life, it had happened to him to be fantastical enough. The conversation and confidences of the avenue broke clean off when the party were all assembled within. Alice could not say anything before her father of her weariness and waiting, or it would have sounded like a reproach; and Colin, for his part, could not utter a word about his intentions or prospects to any ears but hers. He could speak to her, and she, who accepted

everything said without any question, found nothing wanting in his words; and that was already a new link between them; but before her father and his own friend he was dumb. He could not even talk to Lauderdale as he had talked to him four years ago at Frascati; and yet he resented that Lauderdale did not ask him any questions. From which it will be seen that nothing could well be less manageable and reasonable than the state of Colin's mind at this moment, when the most important decision of his life was being made.

That evening it was he who sought an interview with Mr. Meredith. It was very clear, in every point of view, that everything should be arranged with the least delay possible. "I have served half as long as Jacob did," Colin said, with a smile, which, however, was far from being the radiant smile of a happy lover; and Alice's father, who was not by any means so confident of Colin's love as Alice was, was so much concerned that his daughter should not lose the happiness which meant not only happiness but life and strength as well, that he did not venture to make any objections. Neither did the poor man resent the insult, when Colin repeated with mildness, yet with steadiness, his determination to receive nothing from him. Alice had something of her own, which came to her from her mother, the little revenue which Arthur had once had his share of, and on which the two had lived at Frascati: but beyond that, Colin, always superlative, would have none of the rich man's fortune, which was soiled, as he thought, with fraud and cruelty. Whether this accusation was just or unjust, poor Mr. Meredith, who was a kind father, swallowed it without saying anything, and consented to all his future son-in-law's requirements. Colin had made up his mind to leave Holmby at once, to hasten back to Afton, and make all the preparations necessary to receive his bride; and the marriage was fixed to take place very shortly—in August, when Colin could take up

again his broken thread of holiday. All this was arranged between the two as an absolute matter of business, requiring no expression of sentiment. If Mr. Meredith thought the young man a little cold and stern, and swallowed that sentiment as he had swallowed the other, after all, perhaps, it was best that in discussing what was a business matter even a bridegroom should talk in a business way. And, then, Alice was unquestionably satisfied, and had regained some colour on her cheek, and some elasticity in her step. She had never been consumptive, like Arthur. Her illness was a kind of hopelessness, a lingering languor, which was quite as capable of killing her as if it had been a legitimate disease; and this was a malady from which, to all appearance, only Colin and a happy life could deliver her. Under these circumstances, therefore, it was natural that Mr. Meredith, though a little wounded, and even a little alarmed, by the new son-in-law, who meant to have everything his own way, consented to his wishes, being anxious, above all things, to preserve his daughter. He caressed and petted Alice all the more when his consent had been made known to her, with a kind of faint idea, in his ignorance, that all the indulgences which had surrounded her would be at an end when she put herself under the power of this abrupt and imperious young man. As for Alice, she looked from her father to her betrothed with a serenity and confidence so profound that it went to Colin's heart. "She has been used to be taken care of all her life," her father said, as fathers generally say, but with an odd forgetfulness, for the moment, that Colin knew something about that. "I hope you will be very good to her."

Alice opened her soft lips at this, to give vent to a little ring of laughter so soft that it did not wound even the fantastical delicacy of her Bayard. To doubt Colin seemed to her not so much wrong as absurd, out of all reason. She said, half under her breath, "He has taken care of me before now"—and, to

relieve herself of that which she could not express to her father without blaming him, it was to Lauderdale she turned. "You made me feel as if I were a princess," she said to him, and held out her hand to the friend who was looking on with an anxiety so intense that it precluded speech. As for Colin, in the high state of irritation in which he was, the very silence with which Lauderdale pressed the little hand of Alice between his own aggravated and exasperated him. Why did not he say something? Why did he not look him, the bridegroom, straight in the eyes, and ask, "Are not you happy?" Had he done so, Colin would have taken it as the direst and most unpardonable offence; but, in the disturbed state of his heart and mind, he resented the very absence of the question. A man must have some one to bear the brunt of his discontent when things go wrong with him, and in the meantime there was nobody but Lauderdale to take this necessary part.

Accordingly, when all was settled, and when it was finally arranged that Colin should leave Holmby next morning and make haste home, to commence his preparations, it was of his own accord that he invited Lauderdale to join him in the avenue for half an hour's talk. The wind had fallen, and the night was very still, but it was almost as dark as on the previous evening, and the gloom had this advantage, that they could not see each other's faces, which was all the better under the circumstances. They had walked almost all the length of the avenue before Colin spoke, and then it was to this effect.

"Lauderdale, look here. I am going home, and leaving you in the lurch. We are not going to Windermere together, as we meant to do. You see, I have things more important in hand. What I want to say is, that you are not to think yourself bound by me. I see no reason why you should return because a—a good fortune so unexpected has come to me."

"Do you mean that you want me to go my ways?" said

Lauderdale. "With me there is little need to speak in parables. Say plain out if you would rather be your lane. I am no a man to take offence—not from you."

"Good heavens!" said Colin, in his impatience, "why should you or any one take offence? What I tell you is the plainest statement of the case. I have to go home, but you are not obliged to go home. And why should you break off your excursion for me?"

"If I was minding about the excursion," said Lauderdale, "I would go on. You aye make so much account of yourselves, you callants. As for Windermere, I'm no bigoted, but if it's mair worth seeing than our ain lochs it would be a wonder to me. I'm no for parting company. It's aye been my way of thinking, that even a railroad, seen with four een, was better than the bonniest country in the world, seen with two only. We'll go hame, Colin, if you have no objections, you and me."

And then there was a silence, and the two friends went on together side by side in the darkness, without a word to each other. Between them the ordinary words of congratulation would have sounded like mockery, and the one divined too clearly the condition of the other to know what to say. Lauderdale, however, knew Colin so well that he knew silence to be as dangerous as speech.

"I have an awfu' desire in my mind," he said at length; "no doubt it's daftlike, but that is no extraordinary. I would like to do something with my hands to please her, now we've found her. I'm no rich, and, what's an awful deal worse, I'm no much for anything but talk—and maybe she has an inkling of that. What was that yon lad Browning says about Raphael's sonnets and Dante's picture? I'm of that opinion mysel'. I would like to do something with my hands that was nae fit work for the like of me, just to please her; if it was naething better than the things they whittle with their knives away yonder among the

Alps," said Lauderdale; and even in the darkness Colin could see the little flourish of his arm with which he had the habit of indicating the never-to-be-forgotten region "away yonder." "Have patience a moment till I've done speaking," he went on; "I've been thinking I would like to take a good day's work at the Manse garden. It's as innocent a thing in its way to plant flowers as to write verses. So I'm saying I'll go home with you, if you've nae objections," said Lauderdale. He came to a conclusion so suddenly, that Colin, who had gradually yielded to the influence of the familiar tranquillising voice, came to a sudden pause when he stopped short. Lauderdale paused too in his walk when his friend did so, though without knowing why. It was indifferent to him whether he kept walking or stood still; his mind went on pursuing its leisurely meditations all the same.

But Colin's heart was full. He grasped Lauderdale's arm without knowing it, with that sudden impulse of saying something which sometimes comes upon people who must not say what is in their hearts. "Come!" he said, with a little choking in his voice, "we will do that day's work together; for I suppose there never was gain, however great, but had loss in it," said Colin. Perhaps he did not know very well himself what he meant, but even these vague words were a little ease to him in their way. And then they went indoors, and the long day came to an end.

This was how the holiday excursion terminated. They left Holmby next morning, and went home again; neither one nor the other thinking any more of the Church Reformation, or of the "Tracts for the Times." When Colin found his MS. in his writing-case when he opened it on the night of his arrival at Ramore to write to Alice, he looked at it with a little wonder, as if it had been a fossil of an early formation unexpectedly disinterred among the fragments of daily use and wont. And then he returned it to his pocket, with something that looked like a

very clumsy attempt at a smile. There are points of view from which a good-sized tree or a shepherd's cottage may blot out a mountain; and everybody knows how easily that is accomplished on the moral horizon, where a tiny personal event can put the greatest revolution in the background. It would be too long to tell the wonder and admiration and perplexed joy of the Mistress when she heard of the accident which had put an end to her son's journey. Her joy was perplexed, because there was always a shadow which she could not decipher upon Colin's countenance; and, even if her mother's pride would have permitted her to consult Lauderdale on such a subject, or to suffer either him or herself to suppose for a moment that he could know more about her boy than she did, Lauderdale's lips were sealed. Colin stayed only a night at Ramore to let his family know what was going to happen, and then he hurried to Afton, still accompanied by his friend. They talked of almost everything in the world during that journey, except of the preparations they were going to make, and the change that was to follow; but Colin's great ambition, and the important changes he meant to work in his native Church and country, had little part in their discussions. At such a moment, when it is next to impossible to a man to talk of what he is thinking of, it is such a wonderful relief for him to escape into metaphysics; and, fortunately, in that department of human investigation, there are still so many questions to discuss.

CHAPTER XXVII.

If this had been anything but a true history, it would have been now the time for Alice Meredith to overhear a chance conversation, or find a dropped letter, which would betray to her Colin's secret; but this is not an accident with which the present historian can give interest to his closing chapter, because, in the first place, it did not happen; and, in the second, if a second should be thought necessary, because Colin had never confided his secret either to writing or to any mortal ear—which is of all ways of securing a private matter the most certain. He thought to himself, with a certain inexpressible content, as he put his manse in order to receive her, that never to any living creature, never even to the air that might have repeated the matter, had he so much as whispered what was the real foundation of the old betrothals, which were now about to be carried out. He had never been so near telling it as on the night before Alice reappeared in his life—that moment when the words were half formed on his lips, and nothing but a chivalrous, visionary sense of the respect he owed to a woman had prevented him putting an end to Lauderdale's recollections by a confession which would have closed his friend's lips for ever. Fortunately he had been saved from that danger; and now no one, even in the depths of his heart, could say or feel that Alice had been ever regarded by her husband otherwise than as the chosen of a man's heart, the companion of his existence, should be regarded. He had by times a hard enough struggle during these intervening weeks, when he took refuge in his study at Afton, in the midst of the

disorganized house, where things were being prepared for the arrival of his wife; and in her garden, where Lauderdale had done more than a day's work, and had, indeed, taken the charge of re-arrangement into his hands. But the garden, in those lingering, never-ending summer twilights, full of northern sweetness, was too much for Colin; when the early stars came out on the skirts of the slow departing day, they seemed to cast reproachful glances at him, as if he had abandoned that woman in the clouds. He used to go in with a sigh, and shut himself up in his study, and light his candles; and then, after all, it was a great good fortune that she had never come down out of the wistful distance, and walked upon the common soil, and looked him in the face. As for Alice, if anybody had betrayed to her the exact state of affairs, if she had been made aware of this mysterious and invisible rival, towards whom, in the depths of his heart, Colin sighed, the chances are that she would only have laughed, in the supreme security of her ignorance. She could no more have understood the rivalry there was in that dream than she could have comprehended any other or better description of love than that which her betrothed gave her. For the fact is, that nobody need in the least bemoan Alice, or think that her position was one to call for sympathy. She was perfectly content, knowing so little of Colin's heart as she did, and she would still have been perfectly content had she known it much more profoundly. If he had regarded her as he could have regarded his ideal woman, Alice would not have understood, and probably even would have been embarrassed and made uneasy by, such devotion. She had all that she had ever dreamed of in the way of love. Her ideal, such as it was, was fully realized. Colin's tenderness, which had so much remorse in it, was to Alice the most perfect of all manifestations of attachment. When his heart was full of compunctions for not giving her enough, hers was swelling with the sweetest pride and satisfac-

tion in receiving so much. It even seemed to her odd by times how a man so superior should be so fond of her, as she said to herself, in her innocence: for, to be sure, Arthur, though he was not equal to Colin, had given but a very limited consideration to his little sister. And her sense of the difference between Arthur's estimation of her and the rank she held with her betrothed was like the sweetest flattery to her mind. And Alice had reason in these conclusions of hers. She described Colin's affection perfectly well in her simple words. It was as true to say he was fond of her, as it was that he did not love her according to his estimate of love. But then his estimate of love was not hers, and she was entirely content.

Thus it came about that these two were married after all the long delay and separation. Alice recovered her health by magic as soon as she began to be happy. And Mr. Meredith, notwithstanding that he smarted a little under the affront put upon him by his new son-in-law, in that singular and quite original development of disinterestedness, which Alice's father, being Low Church, could not but think most unlike a clergyman—was yet so exhilarated by the unrivalled success of his expedient to save his daughter, that all the lesser annoyances were swallowed up. And then he had always the little one remaining, whom he could make an heiress of. It was a quiet wedding—for the Merediths were comparatively strangers in Westmoreland—but, at the same time, it was not in the least a sad one, for Mr. Meredith did not think of weeping, and there was nobody else to take that part of the business. Alice had only her little sister to leave, who was too much excited and delighted with all the proceedings, and with her own future position as Miss Meredith, to be much overcome by the parting. It was, indeed, a beginning of life almost entirely without drawbacks to the bride. She had nothing much to regret in the past, no links of tender affection to break, and no sense of a great blank left behind, as some young women have.

On the contrary, all that was dark and discouraging was left behind. The most exquisite moments of her life, the winter she had spent in Frascati under the tender and chivalrous guardianship of the companions who had devoted all their powers to console and amuse Arthur's sister, seemed but an imperfect rehearsal, clouded with pain and sorrow, for the perfect days that were to come. "I wish for nothing but Sora Antonia to bid God bless us," she said with the tears of her espousals in her eyes. And it was the best thing Alice could have said. The idyll for which Colin felt himself so poor a hero now, had existed, in a way, among the pale olive-groves, on the dear Alban hills. "*Dio te Benedica!*" he said, as he took away his bride from her father's door. It meant more than a blessing, when he said it as Sora Antonia might have said it, in that language which was consecrated to them both by love and death.

The scene and the circumstances were all very different when a few weeks later Colin took his bride to the Holy Loch. It was evening, but perhaps Colin had not time for the same vivid perceptions of that twilight and peaceful atmosphere which a few months before had made him smile, contrasting it with the movement and life in his own mind. But perhaps this was only because he was more occupied by external matters; by Alice at his side, to whom he had to point out everything; and by the greetings and salutations of everybody who met him. As for Alice herself, in her wistfulness and happiness, with only one anxiety remaining in her heart—just enough to give the appealing look which suited them best to her soft eyes—she was as near beautiful as a woman of her unimposing stature and features could be. She was one of those brides who appeal to everybody, in the shy radiance of their gladness, to share and sympathize with them. There are some people whose joy is a kind of affront and insult to the sorrowful; but Alice was not one of these. Perhaps at this supreme hour of her life she was thinking

more of the sad people under the sun—the mourners and sufferers—than she had done when she used to lie on her sofa at Holmby, and think to herself that she never would rise from it, and that *he* never would come. The joy was to Alice like a sacrament, which it was hard to think the whole world could not share; and, as her beauty was chiefly beauty of expression, this tender sentiment shed a certain loveliness over her face as she stood by Colin's side, with her white veil thrown back, and the tender countenance, which was veiled in simplicity, and required no other covering, turned towards Ramore. Her one remaining anxiety was, that perhaps Colin's mother might not respond to the longing affection that was in her heart—might not take to her, as she said; and this was why her eyes looked so appealing, and besought all the world to love her. When it came to the moment, however—when Colin lifted her out upon the glistening beach, and put her hand into that of his father, who was waiting there to receive them, Alice, as was her nature, recovered her composure. She held up her soft cheek to Big Colin of Ramore, who was half abashed by the action, and yet wholly delighted, although in Scotch reserve he had contemplated nothing more familiar than a hearty clasp of her hand. She was so fair a woman to his homely eyes, and looked so like a little princess, that the farmer had scarcely courage to take her into his arms, or, as he himself would have said, "use so much freedom" with such a dainty little lady. But Alice had something more important in her mind than to remark Big Colin's hesitation. "Where is she?" she cried, appealing to him first, and then to her husband; "where is she, Colin?" And then they led her up the brae to where the Mistress, trembling and excited, propped herself up against the porch. Alice sprang forward before her escort, when she saw this figure at the door. She left Colin's arm as she had never left it before, and threw herself upon his mother. She took this meeting into her own hands, and accom-

plished it her own way, nobody interfering. "Mamma," said Alice, "I should have come to you four years ago, and they have never let me come till now. I have been longing for you all this time. Mamma, kiss me, and say you are glad, for I love you dearly!" cried Alice. As for the Mistress, she could not make any reply. She said "my darling!" faintly, and took the clinging creature to her bosom. And this was how the meeting took place, for which Alice had been longing, as she said, for four long years.

When they took the bride into the homely parlour of Ramore, and placed her on the old-fashioned sofa, beside the Mistress, it was not without a little anxiety that Colin regarded his wife, to see the effect made upon her by this humble interior. But, to look at Alice, nobody could have found out that she had not been accustomed to Ramore all her life, or that the Mistress was not her own individual property. It even struck Colin with a curious sense of pleasure, that she did not say "mother," as making a claim on *his* mother for his sake, but claimed her instantly as her own, as though somehow her claim had been nearest. "Sometimes I thought of running away and coming to you," said Alice, as she sat by the Mistress's side, in radiant content and satisfaction; and it would be vain to attempt to describe the admiration and delight of the entire household with Colin's little tender bride.

As for the Mistress, when the first excitement was over, she was glad to find her boy by himself for a moment, to bid God bless him, and say what was in her heart—"If it wasna that she's wiled the heart out of my breast," said Mrs. Campbell, putting up her hand to her shining eyes. "Eh, Colin, my man, thank the Lord; it's like as if it was an angel He had sent you out of heaven."

"She will be a daughter to you, mother," said Colin, in the fulness of his heart.

But at this two great tears dropped out of Mrs. Campbell's

eyes. "She's sweet and bonnie; eh, Colin, she's bonnie and sweet! but I'm an awfu' hardhearted woman," said the Mistress. "I cannot think ony woman will ever take *that* place; I'm aye so bigoted for my ain; God forgive me; but her that is my Colin's wife has nae occasion for ony other name," she said with a tender artifice, stooping over her boy and putting back those great waves of his hair which were the pride of her heart. "And I have none of my ain to go out of my house a bride," the Mistress added, under her breath, with one great sob. Colin could not tell why his mother should say such words at such a moment. But perhaps Alice, though she was not so clever as Colin, had she been there, might have divined their meaning after the divination of the heart.

It is hard to see what can be said about a man after he is married, unless he quarrels with his wife and makes her wretched and gets into trouble, or she does as much for him. This is not a thing which has happened, or has the least chance of happening, in Colin's case. Not only did Alice receive a very flattering welcome in Afton, and, what was still more gratifying, in St. Rule's, where, as most people are aware, very good society is to be found; but she did more than that, and grew very popular in the parish, where, to be sure, no curate could have been more serviceable. She had undoubted Low Church tendencies, which helped her on with many of the people; and in conjunction with these she had little High Church habits, which were very quaint and captivating in their way; and, all unconscious as she was of Colin's views in respect to Church reformation, Alice was "the means," as she herself would have said, of introducing some edifying customs among the young people of the parish, which she and they were equally unaware were capable of having been interpreted to savour of papistry, had the power and inclinations of the Presbytery been in good exercise as of old. As for Colin, he was tamed down in his revolutionary intentions without

knowing how. A man who has given hostages to society, who has married a wife—and especially a wife who does not know anything about his crotchets, and never can clearly understand why the bishop (seeing that there certainly is a bishop in the kingdom of Fife, though few people pay any attention to him) does not come to Afton and confirm the catechumens—is scarcely in a position to throw himself headlong upon the established order of things and prove its futility. No. I. of the "Tracts for the Times" got printed certainly, but it was in an accidental sort of way; and, though it cannot be said to have been without its use, still the effect was transitory, in consequence of the want of continuous effort. No doubt it made a good deal of sensation in the Scotch papers, where, as such of the readers of this history as live North of the Tweed may recollect, there appeared at one time a flood of letters signed by parish ministers on the subject. But then, to be sure, it came into the minds of sundry persons that the Church of Scotland had thoughts of going back to the ante-Laudian times in robes of penitence, to beg a prayer-book from her richer sister—which was not in the least Colin's intention, and roused his national spirit. For we have already found it necessary to say that the young man, notwithstanding that he had many gleams of insight, did not always know what he would be at, or what it was precisely that he wanted. What he wanted, perhaps, was to be catholic and belong to Christendom, and not to shut himself up in a corner, and preach himself and his people to death, as he once said. He wanted to keep the Christian feasts, and say the universal prayers, and link the sacred old observances with the daily life of his dogmatical congregation, which preferred logic. All this, however, he pursued in a milder way after that famous journey to Windermere, upon which he had set out like a lion, and from which he returned home like a lamb. For it would be painful to think that this faithful but humble history should have awakened any terrors in

the heart of the Church of Scotland in respect to the revolutionary in her bosom; and it is pleasant to be able to restore the confidence, to a certain extent, of the people and presbyters of that venerable corporation. Colin is there, and no doubt he has his work to do in the world; but he is married and subdued, and goes about it quietly like a man who understands what interests are involved; and up to the present moment he has resisted the urgent appeals of a younger brotherhood, who have arisen since these events, to continue the publication of the "Tracts for the Times."

It is at this point that we leave Colin, who has entered on a period of his life which is as yet unfinished, and accordingly is not yet matter for history. Some people, no doubt, may be disposed to ask, being aware of the circumstances of his marriage, whether he was happy in his new position. He was as happy as most people are; and, if he was not perfectly blessed, no unbiassed judge can refuse to acknowledge that it was his own fault. He was young, full of genius, full of health, with the sweetest little woman in the kingdom of Fife, as many people thought, for his wife, and not even the troublesome interpellations of that fantastic woman in the clouds to disturb his repose. She had waved her hand to him for the last time from among the rosy clouds on the night before his marriage day; for if a man's marriage is good for anything, it is surely good against the visitings of a visionary creature who had refused to reveal herself when she had full time and opportunity to do so. And let nobody suppose that Colin kept a cupboard with a skeleton in it to retire to for his private delectation when Alice was sleeping, as it is said some people have a habit of doing. There was no key of that description under his pillow; and yet, if you will know the truth, there was a key, but not of Bluebeard's kind. It was a key that opened the innermost chamber, the watch-tower and citadel of his heart. So far from shutting it up from Alice, he had done

all that tender affection could do to coax her in, to watch th stars with him and ponder their secrets; but Alice had no vocation for that sort of recreation. And the fact was, that from time to time Colin went in and shut the door behind him, and was utterly alone underneath the distant wistful skies. When he came out, perhaps his countenance now and then was a little sad; and perhaps he did not see so clear as he might have done under other circumstances. For Colin, like Lauderdale, believed in the *quattr' occhi*—the four eyes that see a landscape at its broadest and heaven at its nearest. But then a man can live without that last climax of existence when everything else is going on so well in his life.

THE END.

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