

AILIEFORD.

A FAMILY HISTORY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN DRAYTON."

"JAQUES. It is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

"ROSALIND. A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad: I fear, you have sold your own lands, to see other men's; then, to have seen much, and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

"JAQUES. Yes, I have gained my experience."—AS YOU LIKE IT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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A I L I E F O R D.

CHAPTER I.

I NEED not dwell upon the further vigils—the desperate interval of anxiety—some days and nights, unnaturally prolonged and extenuated by our intense excitement—which elapsed between my father's return on the early morning after Jamie's escape, and the first news we had from the fugitives. A hurried note from Sybil assured us of their comparative safety in Newcastle, where, however, they had not found the aunt whose protection she anticipated; another told of a passage procured in a Canadian timber ship, just about to sail; and

we heard again after an interval of some months from Jamie himself, of their arrival, almost penniless, but not without new hope and self-confidence, at their journey's end.

The actual robbers of the Englishman whose note had found its way into our poor Jamie's hands were traced by-and-by and brought to trial. Tom Cockburn, more guilty than my brother, had no such inveterate pursuer to track his footsteps, and I suppose with less difficulty made his escape, reappearing after a while to resume of his own will and purpose the dishonest and perilous trade into which his wife had betrayed him. I did not wonder to see the grey, pale face of Geordie Cockburn among the spectators at the trial, which her brother and mine had so narrowly escaped; but with a start and strong thrill of agitation I met a pair of dark gleaming eyes looking stealthy and furtive from the bar—a face once raised to mine, startled and guilty, on that bright autumn morning when I sought my own wanderer among the glens of Arthur's Seat, and pursued

the hasty escaping figure upon the road below. Here, again, with strange recognition, we looked into each other's eyes, and I saw the criminal's gaze return again and again, among the thronged faces round him, upon mine. If he knew me to be Jamie's brother, I cannot tell; but it was very clear he remembered our former meeting, and all his life would know me if we should meet at the end of the world again. I cannot tell with what a strong reality this recognition impressed Jamie's danger on my mind. He was safe now, and beyond the reach of this misfortune; but I shuddered, and felt the moisture hang heavy on my brow, as I thought what might have been.

A little time, and all these waves and billows had subsided. Our misfortune, heavy and sore, sank down like a stone to the bottom of the sea. The dimpling water ceased to note it, the surface lost cognizance of its violent stroke—calmly the smooth and unchanged order of our daily life gathered over us all once more. Mr. Middleton ceased to look upon me coldly. My junior in

the office forgot in some new excitement that I had been connected somehow with the interest of mystery and crime, and Ballantyne no longer vaguely comforted me by stories of similar evils. After a little uncertainty and hesitation, I went back—habit being already strong upon me—to my old quarters at Mrs. Cockburn's. True, a link of sad connection had risen between us; yet I went, feeling my return to her some comfort to them; their calamity was greater than ours.

And my heart sank to see the pinched and limited household, the new shifts and plans of economy which my mother began to try at home. It was but little time that Donald Clerk allowed them to make up Jamie's deficiency in; and though Andrew was the person more immediately pressed, and did in the first place supply the money, my mother could not bear an obligation, the oppressive weight of which her son did nothing to lessen. By degrees, and as we could accomplish it, Andrew got his money back—and then there begun to be some

ease in Ailieford. A natural strong spring of cheerful activity kept up the seeming of my mother's life. She could not give herself over to the brooding dreariness of solitary grief, and all careless observers, my father even, and Marget who was with her, her constant attendant all day long, saw little change in the face or smile which could not divorce from themselves the strong vitality and power of self-renewal which were the heart's inheritance. I, who had learned, by means of all we suffered together, to be my mother's friend, was the only one who could perceive how the strength was sapped, the well-springs slackened at their fountain—nor how the light and the sunshine were quenched out of her mind, in spite of the habitual radiance with which they lightened her unfaded eyes.

About this time there came thoughts to visit me—thoughts of a nobler texture than had been familiar to all my previous life. I began to ponder the anomalies and contradictions of this human world and human existence—began

to plan rash theories, as young men will, and long impatiently for some strong interfering hand, some broad, infallible process, to prevent such dark and ruinous misfortunes as this which had wrecked the life of Jamie, and thrown so great a cloud upon our own. Was Jamie's case a solitary case, strange in the annals of his class? Heaven help the lost hearts and desolate houses that, groaning, answered, "No!" Like the beach of a dangerous coast, these warehouses and offices were strewed with tokens of destruction, glaring with beacons, encumbered with many a dreary vestige of the lost; and my heart rose up in wild impatience, fretting against these two dark spectres, Vice and Misery, standing sentinels at the gateway of our common daily life—haunting its comings out and goings in, its harmless errands, its unconsidered pleasures, its homely needs and duties—betraying into deadly evil the first faint venture on forbidden ways, perverting the youthful folly into irretrievable sin—lying wait, holding watch, losing no chance of working

ruin. Alas! alas! these were no phantoms of the heated fancy. I could see them at my very elbow through the livelong day.

Oh, for some power, unpitying, cruel, to blind these fiendish eyes for ever! Oh, for some den of desperate torture to prison up their malice! Vain to write upon their very foreheads their wretched names—vain, with clearest logic, highest eloquence, to point out the infallible connection which one bears to the other; brand them, mark them, hold them up, all shamed and clouded over with the just disgrace they merit, to the eyes of every passer-by—yet in spite of all your pains, your prayers and labour, they will spread their snare in the broad daylight still, and kill their thousands in a day.

And the time is long to look for, when Satan shall be bound a thousand years. Is there then nowhere a solution to this vast problem? Can we do nothing but hang our heads and let our hearts faint? and is this great world only a magnificent failure—a blot upon God's

perfect harmony—a rebel escaped out of his guiding hand.

But there came upon me a revelation greater than of saints or angels. My eyes got sight and vision of a Man. Before him the chaos cleared and lightened—behind him the powers of darkness, leashed and baffled, bayed like chained blood-hounds on their delivered prey. Not like mine were the theories He carried in his hand—not a minute and subtle network of small restraints, of forms, or maxims—not thorns to hedge the path withal, and daunt the wandering footstep from its edge—not human barriers, faint and desperate. *I*, pining for some means of deliverance, would have given my voice joyfully for any strong restrictive system, for any might of absolute tyranny, so that it had a forlorn hope of forcing these young victims away from their own destruction. This One, benign and glorious, broke down the feeble barriers with his own hand—and I came at last to see an answer to the world's great riddle. Ploughing on the surface, vainly tried, made

the heart sick with disappointed hope; the husbandman of Heaven struck his spade down, down to the very core and centre of the inner life, and cured by the renovated spring and motive within, not by poor curbs without.

I saw Him—I say it with humility. Ah, young eager soul, projector, enthusiast, friend—I did not choose His mode of working, kindly. I would have improved upon it after my own vain fashion, and put the iron collar and fetters of uniform slavery where He only laid the silken ties and distinctions of individual love. But I came to see by-and-bye—what you too, will see by-and-bye if your heart seeks the knowledge—how all of us, helpers of human kind, have fretted our little lives away, chafing and fuming at the evil which was too mighty for us, while He, sole Saviour, Lord of the nature which He shares, goes on from man to man upon His sublime journey, and takes ever another and another single soul to the heart that has room for all.

Days, and weeks, and months passed over us

now, in a quiet order, broken by no more fever ; but not unlike to grow stagnant in the deep stillness which followed upon our grief. I retained my place in the office, unchanged, and, as it seemed, well-nigh unchangeable—settling down into a multitude of little habits, and in reality feeling a sort of customary bondage fix me upon my own individual stool at my own separate desk. As I got time to turn back upon my own personal fortune, how strangely far away and remote now seemed the personal trials which once I thought of sufficient magnitude to throw everything else into the shade. Mary—but I had never once thought of Mary when Jamie's fate hung in the balance—and now, when my heart returned to the remembrance, I could have fancied it was years since she reigned there supreme. Not forgotten—but thought upon with a distant, subdued, and pensive tenderness, as an old man might recal the first love of his youth. I was scarcely five-and-twenty then ; but it was strange what an effect of age and quiet was

produced upon my life when it subsided again into its own calm, natural, unlightened grey.

All my old habits of spectatorship came back upon me again. Debarred and shut out from living interests of my own, I lived an unprogressive life, considering, with a meditative eye the course of others. It was I who noticed first how Tom Cockburn's mother, awaking out of her first grief for him, unawares took comfort in a natural delusion, and convinced herself that our poor Jamie had led her more innocent son astray. It was I who marked the habits and restraints of her narrow life stiffen upon Geordie, as—even more rapidly than I—she grew old and grey, and faded, in the limited existence, whose little peculiar pleasures begun to please her, as its peculiar failings caught hold upon her life. For Geordie read the dingy old novels which now began to give way to a higher class, solacing her own checked heart with the unreal sentimentalities of persecuted Ethelinds and perfect Edwards, mysterious castles and forests, villains and lovers; and

Geordie began to take keen interest in the little real everyday romances which sometimes gleamed across her sober path. They never dawned upon herself; but already I saw blushing neighbour-girls come to her with their stories of courtship checked by tyrant fathers, of faithless far-away woers, of weddings prospective; and Geordie entering keenly into all, lived her own life by deputy, and kept her heart in a constant excitation by means of the joys and loves, true and fictitious, of others. Less sullen, except when she felt the renewed and bitter pressure of the family grief, Geordie, as her character gradually settled out of all its youthful ardours and speculations into the eccentricities of Miss Geordie Cockburn, milliner and single woman, grew altogether a more amiable person;—and though the change was still only in its dawn, and still her fierce “gloom” was frequent upon the iron-hued forehead, which wore no longer any flush of individual hope, I, standing by and looking on, saw the other life with its measure of interest

and content, gradually widening over and absorbing the conscious bondage of this.

I had no pleasure now in the evening streets, and evening gaieties, wherewith my contemporaries concluded their day, and no pleasure even in the acquaintances, who all of them knew Jamie, and whether they abstained from mention of him, or made reference feelingly to his story, or introduced his name as if nothing had intervened to separate us, did equally wound and repel me. When they ignored his very name, I felt sure that they believed him far more guilty than he was; when they mentioned him, I shrank from inquiries which I could almost have called impertinent. Where he was concerned it was impossible to please me; and my temper grew soured and irritable. So by-and-bye, I became as regular an inmate of the dusky parlour, as much a fixture to its centre table and evening candle, as Geordie herself. We were a strange pair; silently sharing the same minute and limited light. She with her sharpening features and her grey

unlightened paleness: I subsided and thrown back among the shadows, to which my quiet life seemed to belong of right; both of us young, not without our links of sympathy, our fellow-feelings and antipathies, nor, not less attractive, our strong repelling points of contrast. Little malicious Bell pointed at us as we sat together, with whispered insinuations and screams of suppressed laughter, calling the attention of any chance visitant to "our Geordie and her joe." Shy Peter blushed and sniggered on the same supposition, and Mrs. Cockburn wondered in reverie "if Willie Mitchell and Geordie Cockburn would never tire of sitting wearing their een out by one candle a' the nights of the year?" but for ourselves, there never for a second fluttered over us so much as the faintest shadow or indication of mutual regard. Love was in both our thoughts, perhaps—certainly, in its most high-flown and fantastic form, in the imagination of Geordie—but it never threatened a descent to connect the twin solitaires, who could exist together, and

share a kind of unexpressed sympathy, but who never could amalgamate into one.

So I took to my disused books once more, and plunged into the study of modern languages. I had some ease in acquiring them, and by-and-bye it gave me pleasure to surmount the difficulties of intricate grammar, and unfamiliar sound. "So many languages as a man hath, so many times is he a man," I said to myself with some complacency—and even dreams of putting them to use, and advancing my future by their means, began, by-and-bye, to dawn upon my mind.

CHAPTER II.

ONE evening, about this time, I was sauntering along Princes Street as the twilight of an August day fell upon the reddened clouds. I had been hovering about a bookseller's, waiting for the disinterment from the heart of a great bale of some books I had ventured to order, and now was slowly proceeding homewards with one of my new acquisitions open in my hand. It was impossible to share the pleasant ease and leisure of all these passers-by without a sympathetic lingering of enjoyment. A sky of singular beauty canopied the old town, of itself so picturesque and graceful; the air blew cool in the faces

which, all day long, had felt the heat of August skies; and the hum of many voices went and came through the wide atmosphere, which still, even in its darkening, kept reminiscences of the sunlight that had filled it all the day. True, I had caught sight in passing of Donald Clerk, at his half-closed warehouse door; but the air of ease and pleasure round me exercised a certain coercion upon everything personal, and I yielded myself quietly to its thoughtless content.

Just then some one plucked hastily at my arm. Looking round, I saw my good, sober master, Mr. Robert Middleton, looking very much flushed and annoyed, with a most unsuitable companion holding by his respectable middle-aged arm. This was a young man, fair-haired and good-looking, with a swagger of gaiety in his bearing considerably more than borne out by his somewhat unsteady gait and looks of reckless mirth. In a most perplexing strait between his natural civility and his strong disinclination to be seen in

company so inappropriate, Mr. Middleton had acquired a look of comical distress and annoyance. He saw me, and his heart was eased. He plucked at my sleeve.

“Mitchell, will you see this gentleman home? I have another engagement. I am expected—expected yonder away,” said the good man, meaning to point in an opposite castleward direction, but indicating one particular track in the soft purpled clouds instead. “Here’s his address—he’s a stranger in Edinburgh. I’ll take it as a real favour if you’ll see him home.”

And hurrying over an introduction in which I, easily perplexed, and not having the control of self-possession or mastery over my wandering wits, then disporting themselves far enough away from this visible scene, caught only the sound of my own name, but nothing of the stranger’s. Mr. Middleton had hastily scribbled an address on a bit of paper, which I had observed him holding crumpled up in his hand; but it was an address only, and

indicated no name. With instant familiarity, my new acquaintance thrust his arm through mine. I cannot say I was particularly grateful for the society into which I was thus suddenly thrown.

“He’s a correspondent of my father’s,” said the young man. “You would think he had found out my quarrel in that quarter—eh, wouldn’t you? But I’m very glad to get rid of the old fellow for all that. What’s the good of going home? Why, it’s daylight yet.”

“But I am on my way home,” said I, very plainly, “and cannot on any account be detained.”

“Oh, very well; but you needn’t look so full of propriety, man, when there’s no one to see you but me. After all, I dare say I may as well yield too, and save a lecture. Are you married?”

“No.”

“What a short, crabbed fellow! Is that your Edinburgh manners?” said my companion,

laughing. "You don't mean to say that Edinburgh here is anything like a place for business? It's my opinion you're all half-sleeping, and keep your books in your dreams. You don't mean to tell me, now, that there's anything done in the way of business here?"

"But I do certainly mean to tell you there is," said I, with the natural heat of an Edinburgh man, who feels that the universal metropolitan supremacy of his natural town is impugned.

"Well, I'll tell you this much—I've come this length to look for a situation," said my new friend. "My father and I quarrelled on account of my marriage, though I am sure we both thought we had the best reason for believing they would all be pleased. I wouldn't advise you to marry, Mitchell, unless she has money or good connexions of her own, distinct from yours—for to depend on one hand for everything is clearly too much and out of the question. However, what's done is not to be undone, and we had a great row in the house,

and my father and my mother falling foul of everybody in their way. So we just laid our heads together, and made up our minds to come here and try our fortune, and she tells me they are sure to send for us in a week or two, when they cool down, which I wish they would without delay. I've got some very good introductions too," continued the young man, drawing a card from his breast-pocket, and reading over from it a list of names, "and I can't think it's anything but this slow old wife of a town, where there's not stir enough to keep any decent trade alive—but I've heard of nothing yet. Do you happen to know of a good place anywhere that might do for three or four months till my father comes to himself? I've plenty of interest."

"No ; I am only in Mr. Middleton's office," said I.

We had by this time arrived at the "stair-foot" of my new acquaintance's dwelling. "Come along up-stairs with me, man ; you're not to leave me here," he said with rude kind-

ness. "I never see a conversible fellow in this dull hole. Come along."

And, held fast by his arm, and, indeed, proving of use to him to steady his somewhat insecure passage up the stair, I was dragged three stories high to the door, which had been opened in answer to the loud summons pealed from the bell below.

The lobby was dark. I saw a figure hovering in it, evidently waiting for my companion, but could not distinguish her appearance. "I've brought you a visitor. Come away and make tea for us, Mary," he said, brushing past her, as he led me in.

And unable to disengage myself from his grasp without more demonstration than I chose to make, I suffered myself to be guided into a handsome parlour.

"Just lodgings; time enough for a house yet," said the young man, throwing himself on a sofa. "What's come of Mary now—and lights—lights—we want candles, I say."

Some little interval of delay ensued—then a

servant entered with the candles. I looked more curiously at my companion as the light revealed his flushed but comely face, where good-humour and some intelligence strove with a slightly sensual cast of features. I could not think he was of the weak and hopeless class who are nobody's enemies but their own. I could even give him credit for powers of self-restraint, not very clearly evidenced by his demeanour to-night; but I suddenly forgot the involuntary estimate I was forming of this stranger by the sudden shock with which I started back at the next opening of the door.

Mary! why was it that some prophetic whisper did not warn me in the familiar sound of this name? yet it was a name common to hundreds within call of where we stood—so everyday and usual that its repetition scarcely called a passing pang from me in the very first shock of my disappointment. Mary—he lifted up his heated face, with its excitement and commonplace comeliness, to greet her as she entered, and through the partial light she came

with her sober step, her unembarrassed quietness, even with the very dress I recognized—advanced to him, but never lifted her eyes to turn them upon me.

And I saw the glow of offended shame coming over her face; the half-angry, uneasy pride, which had once seemed to me to upbraid unconsciously even her father's dreadful malady, indignantly demanding why it should expose and bring disgrace on "me." Here the feeling was less inappropriate; and turning from her first irritated glance at her husband—her husband!—Mary Burnet raised her head with its flush of displeasure to see who it was who witnessed his temporary shame.

And in silence we looked on each other once again. I felt the burning colour crimson my forehead—I felt the blood tingle to my finger-ends, and a haze of blinding agitation rose up before my eyes. Something I muttered—incoherent explanations, that I did not know—I was not prepared—in my own heart I trembled with a chaos of conflicting emotions,

strange and strong excitement growing on me when I saw her thus, so that I scarcely could endure her presence, and along with that a sense of guilt, as if I had thrust myself into the secret of her new life already, and came to triumph over the failure her prudence had made. And my emotion was so violent that it well-nigh mastered me; the only resource I had, I took. Passing by her hastily, I hurried out at the door, and down the long, dark echoing stairs; and in the open air at last, suffered one great, tearless, convulsive sob to relieve my overladen heart.

Mary—this man's Mary—mine in the heart or in the dreams never more. With burning, fierce contempt, I scorned her for desecrating her own image, as it still dwelt in my mind; with furious jealousy I burned to do some hurt to *him*—and thus I learned to know once more, with the force of instant reality, how my heart clung to her still. Unawares an idol shrine, veiled and secret, hidden even from myself, had risen in my innermost sanctuary,

and a vague hope of some chance meeting still in store, some reunion, bringing us together more completely than ever, existed in me, though I knew it not. Now, my teeth ground together, my cheek burned with a strong hectic, and I, who thought myself so indifferent, suddenly found such might of love in me that I could hate her once again, in the fierce and sudden passion of the discovery I had made.

So great a tumult could not easily subside. I almost fancied, as I hurried through the night-air, that it breathed no coolness on me, but rather received the heat and glow which burned in my own frame. Up and down, with hasty strides, I paced through street after street, till everything but myself was silent in the shelter and safeguard of home. Home at that moment had no charm for me. My soul fainted for something other than the cold, dim, even life, which I felt would no longer control the spirit which this chance had raised. Intolerable, impossible, I rejected the idea of turning back to-morrow, and to-morrow, and

to-morrow, to the same dull march again. I had not heard her voice, I had not touched her hand, I had but met with my own burning gaze, one startled look out of the eyes which had been my stars so long—one look, one moment—oh, stars of evil influence upon my subject fate! Daylight and all its sober virtues died out of the world before me; I felt I must rush away into the darkness somewhere, carrying my torch in my right hand.

It was nearly morning when I threw myself upon my bed, and sleep, full of violent dreams came to me, no rest, but an exhausting conflict. One while it was the madness of fever which chained me, as I thought, to the couch, from which, with all the desperate longing of excited will, I burned to tear myself away; sometimes I was shut up and caged in prison, seeing through the iron bars, storm and fire and destruction rage round my dearest friends, while I could only struggle, and chafe and cry aloud in a vain agony, unable to help them or to share their fate. Always impossibility, a haunting, crush-

ing sense of impotence was the demon with which I fought; and with cries and flashing lights, with fiery arrows in the darkened air, and all the din and tumult of demoniac combat, as Christian's struggle with Apollyon was, so was the war I waged that livelong night.

With a livid brow, and heavy eyes, I rose out of my secret battle to the quiet day, from which I could not escape. I have heard many speak of the singular connection between the body and the mind, and how the fever of the master spirit chafes his physical slave into wild fever too. It has never been so with me. Illness has never come beneficently to tame my fiery struggles down—my pulses have kept their common time, my heated blood has cooled of its own natural action. Here and there, looking back on my life, I can see where the storm has raged; but the storm never appeared to other eyes but my own—and so it was once more.

Mary—that next day Dr. Burnet's words about her mother when he consented to our

betrothal first, came echoing back upon my mind. He had broken *her* heart and made her fate a desolation—and I almost thought some strange connection existed between myself and this heart-broken woman whom I never saw ; but why was *I* the victim offered to her manes ; why should the wrong and misery she had suffered be thus revenged on me. Mary—once a world of tenderness and pathetic beauty invested the name. Mater Dolorosa—mother of sorrows—say rather a cold and unmoved sword of punishment—a calm superior afflicting fate.

I bore two days succeeding this one, with a composure impossible to a less degree of mental excitement than this that had dominion of my mind. Then, going home, I announced abruptly my determination to leave Edinburgh, and seek my fortune somewhere else. Somewhere ! I had formed no definite idea where this vague new world should be ; but visions of quiet inland places far away, where even my native tongue would be as unknown as myself, had

given me comfort in my thoughts. Moved by my mother's strong emotion—her grief to hear of my resolve—the weeping and entreaties into which this sudden intimation surprised her, and her appeal to me not to leave her desolate, I laid my heart open to her tender eye, which already knew its secrets so well. My mother ceased to resist my purpose. The tears would not dry up at once out of her kind and sorrowful eyes, and I think I can feel now the pang that must have stricken her heart; but she no longer bade me stay.

“You will see the world; you will be better of it, Willie,” she said, with a deep sigh; and straightway, as she began to make preparations for my journey, a hundred little natural relieving thoughts came to lighten the heart which had a hold so broad and kindly upon all the humanities of life. I, who went away from her a limited youth of narrow breeding, and restricted education, would come back again, she thought, an accomplished man. I, whom an adverse fortune had shut out from enjoyments, largely

bestowed upon many whom my mother thought less deserving, would reach a higher class of pleasures than my compeers could reach—and the kindly pride of love gleamed under the half-dried tear, and drew it glistening down to sanctify a smile. My own heart lightened out of its heaviness. It was a relief to me to be freed from the close trammels of my former life, and throw it with all its pains behind me. I did not know then how I should yet turn back upon this sombre youth with fond regret, and live its dim days over again ; for my mind was eased and lightened, when I laid its present bondage by.

CHAPTER III.

My father remonstrated angrily and with astonishment. Andrew humphed and sneered, and shrugged his shoulders. Mr. Middleton was mildly amazed and confounded, not without a faint suspicion of "some cause" for my extraordinary resignation of the stool in his office, which I, another piece of furniture, had occupied so long. My mother, the person to whom my departure was really a grief and loss, said nothing except of hope and encouragement, unless when now and then a heavy sigh stole unawares out of her heart ; and she put up her

hand hastily, and said with an attempted smile :
“ I will be very dreary, Willie, after you are
away.”

On the morning of my last day at home, a letter from Jamie arrived, but scarcely to cheer us. Jamie had got a humble situation in one of the smaller Canadian towns, without trust or responsibility, or *danger*—so Sybil wrote with tears, and we read with a pang—enough to keep them at present, and which might lead eventually to better things. But his own part of the letter was discouraging, full of fears and despondency ; he was ill and feeble, he said, and never had recovered the bodily and mental misery of his last week at home ; and there were evidences of lost heart and failing courage in the letter beyond the distinct complaints it bore. Had it come a fortnight sooner, I might have been moved to remain even in my irksome place ; but now all our arrangements were made, and the decision beyond recall.

But my heart smote me as I saw all the self-

command and restraint meek from my mother's face, when she thought it was no longer possible that I could see her from the deck of the smack which carried me to London. I had completed her desolation, "Joseph is not and Simeon is not"—I thought I could hear the forlorn cry of her heart—and I well knew how even to myself, the competence and comfort, and self-importance of Andrew brought little but an irritated impulse of opposition, and a positive lavishment of tenderness upon the other among us, whose fate was so sadly different—our poor, guilty, weak, beloved Jamie. He was gone now—of bitter compulsion and necessity—gone it might be to draw his last breath, and lay his dust among strangers; but wilfully, of no constraint or need, except the coercion of my own fantastic excited will, I, the last remaining home child, the only one whose heart belonged exclusively still to the first natural love and duty—I of my own choice, was hastening away.

The thing was done—I could no longer change it; but something bitterer and warmer than the salt spray which came dashing over our bows as we made our way down the Firth mingled with its foaming drops as I caught them on my cheek. But still I could not rest; I could not put down the strong individual force which commanded me away from my old life of quietness and stagnant order—and sometimes Mary's face and Mary's look returned upon my mind, and I started up once again, wildly impatient, burning for action—the haste, the speed, which alone could give ease to my tumultuous thoughts.

Not knowing what I sought, I wandered through the busy streets of London when our tedious voyage was over. I had some few pounds in my pocket, but I think scarcely a purpose or aim in all my mind save the vague desire for motion. I went about through the din and haste which stunned me, through the old historic places which I had believed could

wake such powerful interest, here and there like some abstracted spirit, curious but unmoved. Not that my constant faculty of observation deserted me now; little, common-place, every day scenes in the streets, scraps of conversation, faces of strangers, and even glimpses of shop windows, remain with me still, and fully took possession of my wandering fancy then, and in my letters home I described as minutely as a guide book—but nothing moved me—mine eye seemed to have ceased to affect my heart.

With this same indifference and total want of enthusiasm, I crossed the Channel. So clear was my spectator eye that I remember still—for the day happened to be quiet—the long gleaming sinuous waves, swelling like so many serpents, a stealthy cruel undercurrent, below the glassy level with which this fierce sea counterfeited calm. I have seen it often since, tossing its foam up to the skies, and felt its proud breast heave indignant under the little sturdy sea-boat that laughed its bluster to scorn, but never have

carried from it such an impression of evil will and malice as then; with a curious eye I watched the weltering wavy waters, glimmer away, blue and cold, into the sky, like coils of fatal snakes; but my heart refused a single throb of excitement to the new countries they carried me to, the unknown scenes, the unknown people, the strange tongue.

Old stately towns of the Low Countries, old grand historic monuments, habits and customs entirely strange to me, persons, costumes, appearances, quaint and characteristic in their novelty, and even the difficulties of a new language, at present only theoretically known, failed to rouse me out of my indifference. Like an animated panorama, they passed before me. I noted everything; was amused sometimes, and sometimes curious—but could not wake to any interest my numb and torpid heart.

For with a strange perversity, now that the body, obedient to my restless longing for change, had come to this new world, the spirit

wandered back, to cling with fond regret about the familiar things and places of old. My heart wandered after Jamie afar in the Canadian wastes — my heart hovered over my mother, forlorn and solitary, in our desolated home. Yes, it is the Rhine, the German mother river, whose rapid current glides away under my dreaming eyes. I see it rolling down on its long course, this strong, full tide, which has gained a personality and human interest from the love of its surrounding nations—and I can turn nowhere but from crested hill and lonely rock, grey battlemented wall and broken tower, the voices of the past come echoing down, rich with the story and the song which all the peoples of the earth have stayed to hear. Far behind us yonder, that grey arch standing out against the sky, that sunny island flitting back into the pale horizon line, commune together day and night of a forlorn, true heart, a love that lives and watches through all ages, adopted by the universal human spirit, which

weeps to hear its story, yet loves to weep. As for me, the Nonnenwerden passes out of my sight, veiled in a mist of other vision, and I see, not the knightly watcher pacing, Love's own noble warder, along the lonely battlements, jealous of the very wind that breaks too roughly the charmed calm of these convent-trees—no, another vigil-keeper, not less pure, and scarcely less forlorn, watching, with blue sad eyes, the slumbers of my fading, sinking brother, already realizing, only a little way removed from her, a desolate widowhood in a strange land. Alas, poor heart! poor Sybil! I lose the Roland of the ancient story in the sister of the present life.

I travelled very cheaply, suiting my accommodation to my means, and contenting myself in inferior inns, and at tables cloudy with constant smoke; my indifference stood me in good stead in this respect. Lingered in some of the Rhine towns on my way, I reached at last the busy Frankfort, where one feels somewhat

roused, and indisposed for loitering. By this time my purse began to fail me; and in Frankfurt accordingly—the sole introduction I had brought with me was to a Jewish merchant there, in some way connected with a friend of my old employer's—I set about the new occupation by which I fancied I might be able, far away here, where no one knew me, and there were no “appearances” to be kept up, to earn enough for daily bread. My appetite for the staff of life was not so lusty and manful as that of the homely country fellows and hard-favoured womankind, whom I sometimes noticed plunging adroit, well-practised knives into the brown leathery sides of rolls as long as a man's arm, but still my more fastidious wants craved supply as well as theirs. I began to find that I had a faculty for languages, and that my German book-lore did not fail me, as I expected it should, when I had to exercise it as a spoken tongue. So, my Jewish friend and my host at the inn giving me sage counsel each

in his department, I ventured upon offering myself to the public of Frankfort as a teacher of English, and after some patience and attenuation, succeeded in gathering a little knot of pupils, just enough to supply my table with the bread I stood in need of. It was my first beginning as a teacher, and sometimes suggested, over-forcibly for my mental quietness, certain old dream-pictures of mine, of a school-room in quiet Scottish Moulisburgh, and of the home adjacent, which long ago, a tender lie of self-deceived imagination had melted away into the clouds. I had come here to shake my heart and fancy free of the wild fever of disappointed hope, to bring the stir and fresh gale of action into my stagnating life, to shake myself out of my still habitudes of existence, and feel myself abroad, a man enfranchised, in a wide living world; but, by-and-bye, I shrank and shrank into a narrower compass than had ever confined me before, and settled down into a lonely, conscious exile, for ever brooding of his

lost and distant home. I do not think there ever existed a human creature more entirely solitary than I, in the something near a twelve-month which I spent in Frankfort. I gave good-morrow and good-night to the few people who came to know me by name, I met with reserve and courtesy, the courtesies of my pupils—but day by day I lived more within myself, and grew more completely isolated, spending all my dreams and yearnings upon the home I had been so eager to leave. I think I should have returned, without question, within the first year, had it not been for that harsh sentence of Andrew's, which came back on me so often with a pang of self-conviction, "Unstable as water." Yes, I began to fancy, Andrew and the other prudent people were in the right after all. In a fever fit of wild excitement, I had changed my sphere; but no excitement could change myself—action, impetuous haste, and strong self-exercise were not accordant with the faculties Heaven had conferred upon

me. I settled inevitably into my meditative restricted orbit, revolved on my minute axis, found my own sober level as by a natural law, and only wondered sometimes how identity could be so strong in a character so unmarked and insignificant as mine, and chafed at my own folly, which had debarred me from the quiet home enjoyments, the friendships, and household loves of which alone my tame heart was capable. My tame heart—poor, faltering, common-place coward!—and a morbid and unreal humility came to me in my solitude: I was put aside, I thought, from the life whose nobler duties I had proved myself unfit for—never would leave mark or footprint, name or descendant in the world behind me—not even a tomb, like Abraham, to tell posterity I had ever lived, a hermit heart on this full earth; but must pass like a shadow, with all my soul uncommunicated to my kind. I began to think I had done a sin against the Providence which ordered my lot, by my abrupt flight

from before the face of the personal sorrow sent to me ; and as every day I crept further within my shell of solitary existence, every day my heart grew sadder, my faith fainter, my mind more estranged, and separate at once from earth and heaven. I never see the old streets of Frankfort, never the blue Maine glancing past its walls, without perceiving over them, in the reflection of my own memory, a heavy, perpetual cloud. How this came to be broken—how a joyous sun—a charmed morrow broke out of the skies, and how, a little after, the whole returned into daylight again with a storm and thunder-shower—I will tell you by-and-bye.

CHAPTER IV.

I HAD been as I have said about a year in Frankfort ; the novelty had worn off, I was no longer a stranger in the town ; and long ago removed from my inn with its daily and nightly bustle, had planted myself high up in a fifth story under the leads, where I could contemplate from afar the daily business of the narrow but important street, on which my two small windows looked down. Another important feature in my range of vision—row upon row of windows opposite, from the lofty sashes of the *premier étage*, to the little scrambling attics

holding on among the faintly mossed tiles half way up the roof—gave me a distant prospect of the domestic as well as the public life of the good citizens of Frankfort on the Maine. I who spoke to no one, was slow of finding out either names or callings of my neighbours; but I could easily distinguish their little tastes and likings; how this one puffed his evening pipe complacently over his window garden, how Mynheer of the second story flew to his caged and feathered family whenever he came home, how Madame high up on my own level, had her soul absorbed in the white draperies and dainty muslin that veiled her clear small casement panes; how the bearded student lips that sometimes appeared grimly through their moustache, in the very highest garret toppling over the roof, drew sweet music often out of the flute, now hanging among a host of china pipes upon the opposite wall. Thus far my observations went—and Mynheer and Madame by-and-bye began to nod a good morning to me across the narrow

gulf which lay between us—but no further overtures of friendship were made on either side.

The long sashes of the first floor with their fluttering misty muslin curtains, had still greater attractions for me—partly because they were below the level of my vision, and I found it impossible to see more of their inmates than now and then a plump young German face, gleaming out like a full moon from window-sill or balcony. But then, the principal family of the colony which peopled this high white house, were people of some distinction in their way, with visitors and gaieties, more than fell to the usual lot. I do not know what called my eyes first to a homely covered carriage, family like, and of rural fashion, with a somewhat uncouth *Hausknecht* for a driver, and two stout horses for steeds, which visited periodically my neighbours in the opposite first floor. A middle-aged German house-father, with sometimes a meer-schaum clinging to his nether lip, its mouth-piece of amber lost under the forest of sandy-

coloured moustache which overhung the upper one; and a portly Frau, his wife, with innumerable wallets, bags and baskets, evidently intended to supply the wants of the journey solely, but enough as I thought, to provision a small garrison in expectation of a siege—did not interest me greatly; neither did the large dimensions of the young flaxen son, good-humoured and gentle as he looked under the mass of fair hair which you could fancy some malicious companion had thrown at him, on the chance of spoiling his good looks somewhere, and which had fixed itself like an island of brushwood about his smiling mouth. But a chance look from another of its travellers bound me with a singular fascination, to note the return of this family conveyance. She had caught me fast with a chain of her eye.

Her eye—yes, you have guessed my secret. Her eye was blue, as full of sunshine as a June sky is, before the dew has dried on the leaves. I was loitering on the pavement which she had

to cross from the carriage door, when this vision came upon me first. Round her head like a frame, was the great leaf of a hat, brown rustic looking straw, a dim halo enshrining the brightness within, and broad ribbons of blue hung down from it, I cannot tell after what fashion, mingling with the long fair curls which somehow seemed to fall with a pure nature which I never see in any curls now, upon the downy cheek and over the slender shoulder. Her form was a girl's form, light and airy—not a solid rounded mass like that of the mature young lady who bore her company—and a girl's face, with sweet parted lips, and the child's look of glad surprise and simple pleasure moving upon its delicate features still, was the face she turned upon me as she passed. In my moodiest reverie, I stood dark and heavy by a shop window, the cloud of my heart blotting out the golden July sunshine slanting high over our heads on the house-tops of the tall narrow street, which here below, lay refreshed and quiet

in such a grateful depth of shadow. And her eye lighted for a moment on my clouded face—only for a moment—she had to turn again to look for something left in the carriage; but when the pretty head came round, her eye sought me out once more—sought me out with a sweet wistful look of pity—a child's wonder of inquiry—a woman's quick longing to comfort. It seemed to say "what ails you? what ails you? Few sorrows have I of my own; tell me what saddens *you*."

Another breath, and she was gone; and the carriage rattled away over the stony street, and the young giant brother went up the ascending staircase after her, making a violent echo with every footstep. I went about before the door I cannot tell how long, nor with what fantastic emotion in my heart—for my heart suddenly awoke, and I longed to go to her with pure wistfulness like her own, seeking the human sympathy which she was ready to give. I think I could have told her all my story

without a word of preface. I thought so at least as I strayed about the street on the night I first saw her. Something drew me, with a certain yearning tenderness, towards this great, many-peopled house. I had found a friend within.

I did not know her name; but I called her by many names of saints I had seen in pictures, and fancied other pictures vaguely in my heart, nobler than any I had seen, giving permanence and immortality to that sweet pitiful glance. Week by week, gathering every gentle feminine title I could find, I took the sweetest name among them, like a choice flower, and called her by it, till it grew tame and unworthy like all the rest. Everything but Mary—I never called her that—and I found none to suit her fully till I came to learn her name.

During the few following days, I saw her various times, sometimes from my window, where I shewed myself very freely now in hope to catch her look again, and now and then

closer at hand, meeting her eyes. But my lethargy was broken. I looked no longer so heavy-sad, and downcast as to attract again that wistful look of wonder and sympathy. I fancy she must have known me even then, but I did not meet any more the heart in the eyes as I had done at first. Then there came a three months' interval, and neither the dusty brown carriage, neither father, mother, brother, nor the lady of my dreams, came back to keep my interest alive. Yet it did keep alive. The gathering ice upon my mind was broken, the wintry chill dispelled. I began to see how far myself was to blame for the torpor of my life, the heaviness that oppressed me, and I learned to smile to the good evenings and good morrows that greeted me, and to open myself a little to meet the sun.

Oh! variable, uncertain nature! a harp whereon the wind plays such fantastic measures! —a grave experience behind, a responsible life before, friends and natural loves, and home

itself in the homeland; and all the stronger moral motives—all the gratitude, the heavenly love and duty whereby the great Father and the Saviour Son call us to noble life—and yet to owe all this revival to the chance glance of a stranger's eye. Myself blushed sometimes to realize it. Yet it was true—and my revived heart bounded in my ears, when I saw the dusty carriage once more drawing up before the neighbouring door—saw the wallets disengaged from its depths within—saw the mother, round and portly, slowly emerging—and after her the light leap, the flash across the pavement, and the blue ribbons streaming back upon the freshened wind.

It is wonderful how many particulars one may glean, and what a pretty little piece of circumstantially evidenced history put together for one's neighbours, without what vulgar prejudice would call the indispensable preliminary of knowing so simple a fact as their names to start with. I lay in wait, watching the habits

and customs of the unconscious family opposite, with zeal as persevering as though they had been members of some rare species among the lower creatures, and I a natural philosopher, pains-taking and laborious. They were of no rare species these good Teutonic people. German men and women substantial, comfortable, good-humoured, having their little strifes and emulations, and their "place in society" to keep up, as resolutely as if their associates had been English dukes and earls, instead of Jew merchants and burghers of Frankfort; but doing all with a kind and measure of enjoyment not usual to our more sober race—a succession of little fêtes and festivities—of free open air recreations—of frank and avowed pleasure, which an English family of their rank and means would scarcely have ventured upon. Their means were quite easy and sufficient as my deductions went. The father a merchant in limited competent business—the mother a notable Hausfrau—the young people

as ready for dance or concert, pleasure-party or excursion, as any of their years on this side the Rhine. All of them good-humoured, contented, in admirable condition, with round moon faces, abundant fair hair, and a degree of staid volubility wonderful to behold; for I think your very Frenchman, with his running shower of talk, fades into comparative taciturnity before the flood of heavy, slow-flowing German, as it swells its solemn current through lips to the manner born. The mother of the substantial family in the *premier étage* was sister to *my* lady's mother—that I did not hesitate upon—and the resounding masculine salute with which the papa of the visited household greeted the papa of the visitors was pure friendship and fraternity of heart, cementing still more closely the relationship and intimacy of the younger race. But German men of fifty, with flaxen moustache and whisker growing grey, have a strong resemblance through all the race;

and German mothers who approach the same years are apt to grow into a uniform development, exercising an unpractised eye with weighty difficulties of identification; so that there might have been a double link of blood between the heads of these two households, for anything I, from my post of observation, could produce of evidence to the contrary. But their entire cordiality was not to be questioned; and when now and then my neighbours disappeared entirely from our horizon, and were absent a week, father and mother, young lady and young gentleman, I had no difficulty in concluding that they paid a return-visit, and were all merrily gathered together in a full country-house somewhere, making dearth of all manner of edibles—smoking cigars as thick as my wrist—cheering their hearts with Bavarian beer, or the thin wine of the Franconian hills, and paying visits in the dusty brown carriage, which was the

only piece of still life I had it in my power to identify with the other family in their unknown home.

Among all those, very kindly, very pleasant, but somewhat gross Teutons, it seemed to me that anything like the sweet young mistress of my fancy could very rarely appear. Yet she seemed so happily unconscious of her own superiority—so affectionate and joyous with the rotund mamma and aunt, the plump cousins, and withal so refined in her sweet girlish simplicity and frankness, that I scarcely grudged her to her kindred. They were all very fond of her, I saw—how could they help it?—and she, all unaware of her own condescension, was fond of them in return. I cannot quite analyze my own feelings towards her. I wanted to tell her a hundred things—my own story for one—and beside that many a secret thought never breathed to mortal ear, but which I now began to hoard up eagerly to tell her. All the restrained confidences of my solitary

heart—the fancies I have left half spoken when, even in my first tenderness, I was with Mary—came all gathering together as into a clear deep pool, waiting for the sunshine of this stranger's eye. Surely a stronger, wilder imagination never took hold of man. I accumulated my riches into my heart day by day, and all, unsunned and sacred, were for her eye—that eye that only once had met mine with feeling in its radiant glance. I put together my treasures unhesitatingly to lay them at her feet; but I had never heard her voice except in a distant echo, and did not know her very name.

But after the second visit, a sad change came upon my neighbours. Like a tree cut down by a single blow, the father, still strong and in his prime, suddenly died, and desolation came upon the house. I saw the well-known carriage come with only the other father and son in it; and I saw the widow and her daughters, when the funeral was over, enter

it with many weeping farewells to neighbours and servants left behind. The sons I thought were left behind too; and a little crowd of sympathisers gathered on the pavement as the carriage rolled along over the stones for the last time, carrying the mourners to another home.

I should never see her there again. I hurried down, I joined myself to the crowd; I heard the neighbourly lamentations over the dispersed household. Word by word I listened to Madame from my own elevation—to Lisette from the second-floor—but no one dreamt of saying where the sad travellers were gone. Taking courage, I asked at last; they told me, half-a-dozen voices, confusing one another, to Wurtzburg, where poor Herr Kleine's brother—he who possessed the carriage—had a government appointment, and where Madame and her poor children would be welcome as to a father's house. The relationship after all was not

between the mothers—but I was content and went my way.

I was content with the information—content with my life I could no longer be. It had been filled so entirely of late with observation of these strangers, that thus suddenly thrown back upon myself, my days became a listless void. Like a man who has fallen from a height of continuous excitement into a blank depth of quiet, I chafed at myself throughout the live-long day; I could not tolerate my pupils—my hourly routine grew unbearable; again there came upon me the impulse of flight—the desire for change. I hungered to be away—out of sight of these high walls, with all their curious eyes blinking at me one perpetual stare of examination, now that I had ceased to care for watching them. And my roused fancy dwelt upon this stare till it grew into scorn and sneers, and the wind came ringing with a laugh of mockery against my

casement, whispering, "Unstable as water," into my very heart. They were all aware of it—careless men in the streets—watching houses by the way-side, a hundred eyes wherever I might go—and the hoarse bells rang out over the whole listening city the climax and sentence, "Thou shalt not excel!"

Rising again into a very fever, I cried Amen, and bade all my watchers witness that I accepted my fate. Then I rose up and made my preparations quietly—I could stay no longer here.

CHAPTER V.

ONLY a very short time after, my sole preparation for my new beginning consisting in an introduction, supplied me by my Jew friend, to the Commandant of Wurtzburg, I took my place in the *Schnellpost*, and set out for the old ecclesiastical city. The *Schnellpost* was not by any means so *schnell* as it professed to be; but with our horses jingling in their loose harness, and our postillion, glorious in azure coat and silver lace, we made no small commotion as we dashed through the half-awakened villages in the cold, early daylight of October. The

heavens had been weeping as we rattled out of the stony streets of Frankfort, and now, though a faint sunlight began to flutter about the sky, the green, silent country roads and way-side cottages looked at first drenched and sodden, full of the morning rain. But as we made progress, the atmosphere lightened, and now the brown tobacco leaves, hung up upon the cottage walls, began to flutter faintly on the rising breeze, and to shake from them their heavy burden of rain-drops; and what was damp before, grew dewy and sparkling under the rising light, and the day was full once more in the clear enfranchised heavens.

The faint dull stir of this far inland country life began, and under the way-side trees, heavy with their cloud of small, brown, russet apples, a decent peasant of Bavaria, with long black coat, and flat, silver buttons, now and then paused to look up at us, sheltering his eyes with his hand. He might be a Lutheran village Dominus of the Reformation times, if

we took his appearance for our sole guide—might have sat at mild Melancton's feet, or cheered the brave young Hessian Philip in his ardour for the faith; but he is only a father of the hamlet yonder, a man of to-day after the antique fashion which to-day wears in Bavaria, and will soon be plodding over the Frankfort road with his meek cow harnessed to his rough wooden cart—no steed of other mettle procurable to his poverty—carrying the produce of his home-acre to the market we have left behind.

And now, up a hundred little, tantalizing, eminences, which we never see, but only feel, as our vehicle creeps at a snail's pace up the ascending side to reward our long-suffering with a two minutes gallop down—trees in a long succession thicken round us, and withdrawing somewhat sullenly from the desecrating public road, which breaks their calm, the relics of the great Spessart forest, stretch away in half-cleared glades and crowded knolls on either hand. Pine trees in rank and file, a ragged

army, with not a rood of underwood for miles to reconcile the umbrage on their heads with the luxuriant soil in which their feet are planted ; but long pale glimmers of sky instead, flying along behind them, and bringing out the rigid individuality of every separate trunk in strong and high relief. Stout old oaks, too, gnarled and knotty, and pretty shy withdrawing beeches, brave in the russet ribbons of the waning year, like village maidens dressed for an autumn festival. Along the grassy edges of the road, good-humoured and unenvious, a file of stumpy acacias, hanging down their long graceful leaves in a rounded ball, very like a clownish shock of hair, keep the way, not without a half-comic sense of their contrast, uniform and trim, to their free natural brethren behind. Something like the strong suppressed excitement which attends a youth's first journey into the world, is with me now, less fresh and less delighted, but more eager—for I have a strange certainty that I go into some new and brighter

development of life. The road interests me somewhat, but the road is tedious, and I am often inclined to spring down, like the impetuous Frenchman, and push the slumbrous vehicle, which I almost fancy a sturdy pedestrian might outstrip, from behind. But still the hours pass on as we pass, the cheerful morning light glides round, and by-and-bye throws itself aslant over those peaceful fields, and the far slopes of the retreating forest, and at last our long day's journey is concluding, in the mist of coming night.

Just before the sunset, as the light grew languid, weary with its day's labour done, I came first in sight of Wurtzburg. The sunbeams had ascended higher than the dim and shadowed Maine, which, travelling a longer road than we, had crossed our path more than once on his way to Frankfort and the Rhine. But so calm and placid lay the little river, playing softly with a tiny ferry-boat, that you could not have suspected him of so long a

journey, nor believed that, ever so footsore and weary, his quiet tide could hold its course so far. On his eastern bank low vines, trimly luxuriant, climbed upward rank by rank, till they reached to the long level sunbeams straying over the hill tops, and brightened into smiles of success and pleasure under the lingering ray. Opposite these mild Franconian hills, no higher than a river's braes might be at home, rose a loftier eminence, bearing on a natural platform, half-way up its ascent, the donjon of the citadel, and overshadowing with an air of natural protection the gray calm town below. And flashing here and there in a gilded vane, striking a long golden line through streets which open to the west, besetting high church towers and pinnacles with a haze of glory, which penetrated every crevice, and brought out dark and distinct some richly fretted morsels of the carven work of old, the sun threw his yellow light on Wurtzburg—on Wurtzburg, with its calm forsaken palace, with the quiet half-

holiday traffic in its streets, with the old remembrances of ecclesiastical pomp and wealth which dwell within it, like the pale bishops on its bridge—dead so far as evil, so far as oppression or exaction, or haughty power may go—but living in a dreamy, shadowy grace, half-created out of the glory of old Art—half out of the common yearning of Nature, for links and kindly ties to the dead, among whom we, too, to-morrow must be content to dwell.

On this, the first night of my arrival, I could do nothing but seek a humble inn, refresh myself, and stroll out to make acquaintance with the quaint streets and lofty houses of the reposing town. I cannot tell how my heart was touched when I saw the rude country-carts, drawn by kine, and accompanied by peasant women with small brown faces, like their wayside apples, and broad ribbons streaming from the stiff black silk cap, set out along the level country roads, which went away under the declining sunshine, one could not tell to what

secluded hamlets or far away separated farms. Wherever their destination lay, all were going home; and I had seen so often that same golden slant of light lying over the leafy roadway—the green calm fields—and shining red into the flashing windows of my own natural dwelling-place. The tears came into my eyes against my will. I saw my mother at the door, looking wistfully down the path, whereon never step or shadow of her distant son came with the sunset to her door. I saw my father plodding along the well-known way. I saw their lonely table, and the silence that closed down upon them when the household lamp was lit, and the old man had his books to overlook, and my mother at her constant work, sat still and sighed. Why, why—and I almost groaned to open my eyes on the little German river, on the antique streets, the ghostly churches, strange of tongue and separate of creed—and know myself parted still farther and farther from my self-rejected home.

Ah, weak, fantastic, perverse heart! growing half-frantic ere it is roused to some great step of progress, feverishly looked forward to, but whenever the progressive step is made, turning back with such a fondness of yearning to pine for what has been left, of its own free will, behind. Sick at heart I lingered among these paling figures, which in the moonlight came to look like so many wan spiritual guardians defending the town, their rule once swayed—upon the bridge. Till the grey donjon of the citadel shone out like silver from its darker hill—till the little river trembled under the light which seemed to flow, a subtle essence, into its veins—till the great towers of the Dom grew black against the silvered sky—and then so faint of heart that I remembered nothing of the sweet girl's face which had drawn me hither, I went to my little room, and lay down forlorn and solitary—a stranger among strangers—sick for home.

Next morning I set out early to deliver my

introductory letter—but with only a very faint and languid interest as to my success or unsuccess, and even very little desire to remain permanently here. The witchery seemed to have passed away from the residence of my unknown idol. I even thought I could meet herself without more than a smile of passing pleasure—and that I should find a life in Wurtzburg, with its calm monastic looks, and the country all full of homes and kind affections to others, pressing upon its gates at every hand, a most irksome and exhausting life to me. Walking thus, in a maze of languor and depression, along one of these old world streets, with its high burgher houses, and little open booths, altogether rapt and abstracted from the scenes before me, I looked up, more from custom than present interest, as carriage-wheels came rattling over the stony causeway by my side. I looked up—the close brown carriage rocked past me like a boat upon a swell of water—the strong horses shook their hairy

hoofs—Hans on the driving-box flourished his long whip in the air—and from the window a sweet face, wistful once more and sympathetic, bent out and looked at me. “What would you here, poor wandering spirit—what ails you always—what ails you?” said the wondering, gentle eyes; and once more they were past and gone, like the sun out of the heavens. I felt the shadow on my face glow into sudden crimson. I felt the dull pulses of my heart leap to the pace of wild excited joy. Everything disappeared before me—every recollection, hope and desire; I saw nothing but the homely carriage, the open window whence she had looked, the road that carried her—and hastened after her like a pursuing wind.

But at some turn or winding of the street I lost the little vehicle; up and down I followed the imaginary echo of its wheels, till I found myself at the outer wall of the city. Back again and back again, I turned with eagerness, a warm flush on my face and dews of anxiety

on my brow—but it seemed to have disappeared like some ghostly chariot, and was nowhere to be found. Then at last, once more disappointed and weary, I sought out the Commandant's house—an old house, high and picturesque, rich in carved balcony and delicate oriel, with a wide resounding gateway, and a little quadrangle abstracted in the heart of the lofty building. I went in among other humble people—and there in the court, all dusty and unobtrusive, unconscious of the race it had led me, stood the brown family carriage, one horse meditatively contemplating a hairy hoof which it poised before its downcast eyes, the other eating demurely a wisp of straw, protruding from under the arm of Hans, as he stood in confidential talk with a servant of the house. My heart fluttered—my pulse beat high—I was now so near—so near!

But I could not wait to see her descend. I had to follow the servant up a winding stair-

case, and along an outer gallery, rich with carved balustrades and canopies, which ran along the side of the quadrangle; thence, coming into an airy, wide, well-lighted passage, stone-paved and white, I was startled to hear footsteps and voices coming towards me—feminine voices, steps of a softer sound than mine—and some young tongue was laughing out a perpetual call on Greta—Greta—till I grew wild with curiosity and impatience. Greta, Greta; I knew at once it was her name.

A troop of girls came round the angle of the high white wall. She was not among them—and one, the youngest of the band, a pretty little fair-haired child, hung back, holding by an elder sister's hand, and summoned Greta, Greta, once again. Then at a soberer pace, came a great, portly shadow—the mamma of my frequent observation—and beside her, with the long beautiful curls streaming over a sable dress, with mourning in her whole array, and a

sweet gravity upon her face, came the princess of my dreams. I stood still like one bewitched—stepped aside, taking off my hat with involuntary reverence, waiting if only for a moment to catch a passing glance of her eye.

And Greta hung her head with a faint blush, and smiled a shy, conscious smile, though she did not look at me; but the mamma was not shy. *Her* glance fell upon me, kindly, fully, with a sympathetic interest which certainly did not touch my heart as Greta's did, but notwithstanding was grateful as from Greta's mother. And the simple-hearted Teutonic woman did more than this. She came to a sudden pause before me—she interrogated her shy daughter whether this was not the Englishman they had seen at poor brother Franz's in the Edelstrasse. I having opportunity was not slow to confess myself—a confession my own good mother would have heard with consternation and horror—the very Englishman, I was suspected to be, and kind Madame Kleine stopped and turned

back to a window, that I might tell her what I did here.

The lofty window had a wooden bench in its recess—thereon Madam Kleine throned herself—Greta, shy and graceful, lingering within hearing, I, most propitiatory and eager to make a favourable impression, standing hat in hand before her. I had come abroad to see the world, I said, and Madam Kleine, nodded, highly applauding the good taste which had led me to Bavaria in my *Wanderjahr*—weary of Frankfurt, I had sought a new field in Wurtzburg, and Madam Kleine smiled over all her breadth of face—lastly, I was in quest of pupils, and could teach my own tongue perfectly, studying the German mother language as I taught. This put the climax on my favour, and Madam answered me in half-a-dozen words of very comical bad French, and a whole flood of commendatory German, praising the discretion of my preference for the Saxon tongue. Then a little confidential communing between mother and

daughter followed, and Greta hung back blushing and laughing, unwilling, as I fancied, to answer positively whether she would learn English or no. But the issue was, that I escorted my new friends to their carriage, received particular instructions as to their residence, engaged to call to-morrow at a named hour, and watching tranced, upon the pavement of the quadrangle till the last echo of the wheels had died away, prolonged and faint, along the streets—awoke at last to find the phlegmatic servant at my elbow, still waiting to conduct me to the presence of the Commandant, and staring at me with a dumb wonder, too much amazed to smile.

To the presence of the Commandant I went by-and-bye, and had all the more gracious reception for what I told him of Madam Kleine's patronage already promised me. Wurtzburg was a foreign town to me no longer ; and I went along its moonlight streets that night in

a mood of strange, fanciful elation, musing over my last sadness, with a purpose of carrying it to Greta, too, when I could go to her side freely to tell her all that was in my heart.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT I did not fail to keep my appointment with Madam Kleine, I need not say—nor that she received me in a great salle, many-windowed—bright with white walls and gilded cornices, with gleaming naked floors, and chairs and couches of walnut, which seemed to stray about in the distance, undetermined of their proper position, and with no bright fireplace to make to, as a general centre, but only a chill, elaborate porcelain stove, standing out of the way in a corner, like any other cumbrous piece of furniture. But Madam Kleine, herself, and Herr Kleine, Madam's husband, and Gottfried, Madam's frank young Hercules son,

were just such cordial, hearty, unassuming people as I had concluded them to be. Plenty was about their house, frank and undenied enjoyment in their life, and a fresh, breezy breath of it continually stirring the atmosphere round them. Very true they had far less of the private home—the jealously-guarded inner sanctuary—than would have suited my craving for domestic joys—were turned entirely out for great merrymakings, and disturbed with feasting and family assemblies, much more frequently than English taste would find convenient. *They* found it abundantly convenient—it did not interfere with the small amount of government business which devolved upon the responsible shoulders of Herr Kleine, nor interrupted disagreeably the studies of Gottfried. Gottfried and his father were extremely well content to be disturbed, and lived their life heartily, sharing pleasures which this very fact made all the more innocent and blameless, quite as much like brother and brother as like father and son.

The Frankfort widow and her daughters had an establishment of their own in the neighbourhood. Some limited income remained to them, increased by all manner of kindly presents and cordial helps from the richer household. It had been proposed, I was told, that they should all live together; but Madam Kleine herself, judging from her own feelings, concluded that though the loss of a husband was very mournful and a great affliction, the loss of a house to a notable housekeeper, whose soul was in her management, was a greater calamity still—and that poor Madam Franz, had enough to bear without this climax to her sorrows. But the plump cousins still came trooping about Madam Kleine, surrounding with their caresses and affectionate admiration my pretty Greta, who bloomed among them day by day unconsciously, a rose among the ruder flowers.

I had come to be able to teach French, too, moderately well, in addition to my English; and with Gottfried's ardent co-operation, had

soon a full list of pupils. I taught himself both my languages. I taught my own kindly tongue to Greta; and what with this professional necessity, and what with the frank and hearty kindness with which their house at all times was open to the stranger, it happened that I spent a good deal of my time in Madam Kleine's salle—almost all of it indeed, in which I was not teaching or sleeping, or taking my solitary meal in my new lodging. These hospitable people would have had very few of my meals solitary. They had taken me up in my loneliness, as in another home; and under the sunshine of their friendship, my dislike to continental habits melted day by day. I grew used to many a thing which at first sight repelled me, by unconscious habit; and many were all starred and lightened over with touches of Greta's hand.

Greta herself—there was something very delightful to me in the simple intimacy permitted me with all under this home-roof—Greta never

shrank from sitting beside me, never hesitated to listen when I spoke to her, nor answer as her natural heart suggested. Knowing no designs themselves, they thought of none in others; and prudent as Madam Kleine was, she seemed to have no fear of my constant society for her darling child. True, I was nearly ten years older now than Greta; and, neither handsome nor distinguished, might seem a very harmless visitor. However it was, I had full scope and opportunity to touch, if I could, this gentle, youthful heart. I did not try, of will and purpose, to learn my pupil affection for myself; neither did I, of will and purpose, forbear. We were together day by day, and I did not disguise how dear and pleasant her society was; but I contented myself unconsciously with this, and never startled her ear with the distinct utterances which either bind together for ever, or for ever throw apart. I thought no one appreciated her—my pearl—my princess! I felt an angry flush of indignation

when she was named with others—and then my heart indeed would swell with secret, overbrimming delight as I thought of carrying her home. Home! had I enough, then, in all its humble quiet, to make up to the fair German for what she would leave behind in such a case? I never thought of that. Here, in this remote place, far away from the world, my life, which had failed and subsided so often, tasted of success. I was popular, honoured, sought after; and I forgot, without knowing it, all the humiliations and humilities I had passed through in times past.

And with full sway over the fresh young mind, which looked up to me with affectionate attention, I taught my own tongue to Greta. While she knew it but imperfectly, I called her Sweetheart—the name seemed to suit her nature so well; and Greta said it was a pretty word, but with a sudden shy consciousness, which she never displayed on another occasion, would not ask me what its meaning was, though I found

her an hour after poring gravely over a dictionary, which she put aside with a flushed cheek, and a slight curve upon her brow, when I came in ; but I called her Sweetheart still, and she never resented the name.

And I made one of all their many parties, of all their family gatherings ; often a lay figure, something out of place, where every one else could put on so much greater an appearance of enjoyment than was possible to me ; yet after my sober fashion, I too enjoyed, though a home of my own country with Greta in it, grew more and more tangible from among the clouds. I lived with them thus for months—for another long, smiling, prosperous year. I was far away here from everything which people call the world. Knowing a little about the government of this one Bavarian city, something of the kingdom, scarcely anything at all of wider continental politics, or of that self-sufficing world in my own country which believes itself the centre of every eye ; and Wurtzburg, one of the

quietest of foreign towns, knew neither trade nor excitement, neither the strong stir of industry, the thirst of wealth, nor the gripe of want. Travellers rushing past us in hurried journies, must have thought the whole country stagnant; yet motion, life and activity, like what I knew there, visited no other part of all my life. Activity—I fear rather of the loose, flexible branch, on which a brisk wind plays, than of the wind itself, the motive power. I was stirred by all the breezes about me—merry, pleasurable breezes as they were; and the one strong, untold, invisible emotion which grew upon me day by day, concentrating my life once more upon one hope, was enough to keep the inner man astir, and so far content.

A year—and I was Gottfried's confidant, and knew of his approaching betrothal; and I was deep in the state secrets of Herr Kleine, and knew how the astute statesmen of little German provinces govern the subjects, whose peaceable nature then had not begun to stir

with the pulses of revolt ; and strong was my interest in all the Frankfort cousins ; and I knew how Franz and Max were flourishing in their new business, and how much his father's clients were satisfied with the diligence of ruddy, boisterous Eberhard, who followed his cousin Greta somewhat too assiduously to please *me*. Mademoiselle Brigitta's wedding-gown and orange wreath were carried into the salle by a very garland of her plump younger sisters, for my inspection ; and I think few secrets of the family remained hidden from the house-friend.

For myself, I flourished and prospered. All the youth of Wurtzburg, aspiring to be anything, felt themselves bound by imperative duty to learn English straightway ; and a score of young men of all moods and forms of mind, took *me*, figuratively, into their bosoms, and bestowed upon my ears their thoughts and rhapsodies, their loves and sorrows, with true German liberality. For myself, I was a great

deal more sparing of my sympathy than pleased these ardent friends of mine; and some of the most acute among them had a lingering suspicion of a certain smile which I had no moustache to disguise upon my lip. But I had a true genius for listening, which could not fail to be appreciated; and never repaid a tale of tribulation with a counter story, darkened in all its outlines by way of improvement, and casting the first speaker entirely into the shade. My teaching was popular, my listening was still more so; and without the faintest effort on my own part, I found myself standing in the neutral and abstracted position of universal friend. I was not supposed at least to have any particular designs on my own behalf. My new society seemed to conclude me settled in my position, beyond the power of change, and contented, out of all wish for it. My fate pursued me; but here I smiled, and took it lightly, holding it no longer a fate.

With one person alone I was no listener,

but a narrator. My old dream had come true after a fashion very uncommon to my dreams, and I sat for hours beside Greta's low chair, or in the little garden arbour, rich with its scarlet creeper, telling her all that was in my heart. The boy's fancies and the man's, the sorrows that had desolated my real life, the fevers and frenzy-fits which had broken up my inward peace—things that never shaped themselves into articulate language before—took form of words that they might be communicated to Greta's listening ear. And she sat beside me with her sweet, wondering, wistful eyes, like a child looking out upon the sea. A world of experience, sore and painful, lay here before her, of which she knew nothing: with her simple faith and the pure kindness of her nature—besides that, with the deep human interest which one true heart has always in the story of another, she listened to me with the breath hovering half

suspended between her parted lips. I cannot tell if Greta knew or comprehended one half of what I told her, for many a time her blue eyes opened wide with silent wonder, as the man's strong passions of love and grief were poured upon her maiden ear. But, sweet heart! she felt all, even if she did not know.

And I cannot tell what delight it gave me, when Greta asked me questions about my home, my mother—about Jamie and his wife. She said their names with a little gentle hesitation, as a child might have said them, and puzzled sadly to find some German synonym for the Ailieford, which having no signification explainable by me, bewildered her considerably. Once she made a little drawing of a very German country-house, and was greatly disappointed that I did not see its likeness to my home—though it was a fancy sketch, she told me, faithfully following my

description. Alas! I had not described anything approaching to the magnitude of this little chateau, and felt myself humiliated by Greta's unconscious over-estimation, as if I were pluming myself in borrowed feathers. What would she say, indeed, to our little quiet Scottish house, if she was taken to it as her own?

Did I ever think of this? did I ever set it before me as a rational hope? I, the stranger whom their notice honoured—to whom their patronage gave bread. I, who neither here nor in my own country, had a single rood of inheritance beyond my own dreaming head and ineffective hands. Could I in sober daylight look on such a fancy for a moment, and believe it within my reach? I cannot tell; in the vague sunshine before me, everything was possible; the realities of the future lay upon the glowing sky like banks of clouds. They had a hazy form, beautiful to see, flooded round on every side with a very inundation of sweet light;

but no sharp outline, clear and cold, came between me and the sky; I did not seek the touch of certainty—what was possible was enough for me.

CHAPTER VII.

DEEP in the second summer of this charmed life there came a young Englishman to Wurtzburg. Use and wont had broken down his English reserve far more completely than my deeper shade of Scottish sobriety could be broken. He did not interfere with my established place and position. He took up, indeed, quite a different one, nor ever came in my way ; but a very short residence among us gave him a great popularity. His name was Morton, and I understood he came of an old English family in one of the Border counties, gentry of long establishment and comfortable means. Himself

was his father's heir; and Greta heard now of an English château something different from the dream castle her own fancy had builded, on the site of my humble Ailieford.

He was handsome, young, gay, rich, and had all the freedom and unconscious self-possession which I, who wanted it completely, attributed to the station he had been born in, and his own entire exemption from the subduing cares of common life. Perhaps temper and disposition give a still more easy solution to the problem; but with all his superior advantages, I was not jealous of my compatriot. I never saw myself thrust aside to make room for him—never discovered that his presence was more sought than mine, or that Madam Kleine found a place for me less frequently by Greta's side. I do not believe she did; I do not think Greta herself gave ear to my stories a whit less kindly—and my eyes were never opened to the clear sight of envy. I saw young Arthur come and go

about my treasure-house, without a pang or a fear.

The autumn came again with its harvest flush, its brilliant colours; the slow grapes ripened on the Steinberg; the yellow vine-leaves fluttered down the streets of the quiet city; a red glow came to the slanting sunbeams as they streamed upon the quiet evening roads, the peasants' journey home. One calm night, just as my second twelvemonth ended, a servant from my lodgings, coming out to seek me, met me on the bridge, and gave an English letter to my hand. I stood at the feet of Bishop Gottfried, sharing the wan flush of sunshine that reddened all his marble brow; and too much interested to carry my letter home before I read it, I turned in, half within his shadow, and opened the enclosure; and the wind that came startling down in gay, brief gusts from among the vines of Franconia, and curled into a hundred little waves the gleaming current of the Maine, stirred among

the home-news I spread before me, and turned the leaf with its date of Ailieford, its sober tenderness of address to "My dear Willie," and the sad tale it told. I had been three years gone; I had been selfishly absorbed with the pleasure I found in this new life; but my heart did not beat less true to all the old affections, nor my eyes fill with tears less mournful or less loving when I heard that Jamie, in the other stranger country, lay at the point of death.

"But Sibby says it is the last hope—they will try to bring him home," wrote my mother. "Donald Clerk even, hard-hearted as he is, would not hunt my poor laddie to the very grave, and I hope, even by this time, they are on the sea. Sibby is a kind nurse—I never would doubt it—but I think some way his mother's hand about him would cheer my poor Jamie's heart. It is a kind of hope to look forward to, even in spite of his illness; and I think he could not

be so bad if he were here, with good doctors and his native air to help him. I am turning an old woman, Willie, and cannot expect to be long left, neither your father nor me. I would fain see all my bairns again before my summons comes. Will you not come home and meet your brother?—even though we should be content to let you away again; for to see you would do good to Jamie, besides being the greatest pleasure that could be given to me. Come home and see us, my dear son. Jamie, if he is able to come, will be here within three months we reckon, and you should be a good traveller after your experience. Will you promise me to come home, Willie, and meet your brother and me, if it should be but once again in this weary world?"

I leaned upon the sculptured drapery of Bishop Gottfried, feeling as if some one had dealt me a dull, heavy blow. My heart made no answer to my mother's wish—like the dull

ring of a knell, this pain struck on me. It seemed to say, "Never, never. He will die in the cold, Canadian wilds, unsolaced save by one on earth, and One in Heaven—he will die, and you shall see him no more."

I hurried back to my lodging, and enclosing in a brief note, to help Jamie's expenses, a sum of money which had been paid to me that very day, I promised eagerly to meet my brother at home. But only for a time—I could *not* leave Wurtzburg. After my letter was gone, I wondered whether my mother could make anything of my incoherent explanation. Yes, it is the course of nature—yet now and then it struck me how hard to the parent's heart must be this inevitable ingratitude which clings to the young, perhaps unresponsive stranger, and casts all the unappreciated love of our childish years away. Having given this thought of atonement to the old home, I turned away with natural inconsistency—not to speed arrangements for my promised visit—but to seek a delicate pleasure

in Greta's sympathy, which did almost more than atone for my grief.

The little arbour in Madam Kleine's garden was covered with a flush of glossy scarlet leaves, a spot of rich colour among the deep surrounding green. The Maine was rippling close at hand, the slopes of the Steinberg rose softly before me, rich with their files of regimented vines. Leaves upon the garden ways and flowers in its trim enclosures fluttered before the wind, and all the brightness of the sunset poured along the path, streaming past the arbour door, with here and there a broken ray fretting the golden line, as if the light would fain break its own glorious laws to turn aside and see my lady in her enchanted bower.

Greta sat alone within, leaning her head upon her hand, and looking forward with an air of soft abstraction into the verdure and the light without. Her arm was under the long beautiful curls, and gleamed through their sunny network, and as she looked up hastily to meet me,

the pressure of her fingers had left a tint on her cheek I thought, as if some rose-leaves had been blown upon it by favour of the merry wind.

I took my place beside her upon a low rustic seat, and Greta looked down upon me with half-veiled eyes; why they were so shy of lifting those pale lids to look at me—why the fair young head itself bent further forward ever and anon with a little start and blush, as if some secret cause of embarrassment returned again and again upon the heart—I could not tell. We were very silent for a little time, and Greta told me faltering, “that they were all gone” upon some little expedition up the river. I did not ask who “they all” were, or why she alone was left behind. I was but too glad to have monopoly of her company if only for an hour.

And I began to tell her of my home letter, and its sad intelligence; a shade came over her face—she gave me pity, sweet, gentle, half-

expressed, the sympathy I loved—and then a slight tremble came upon Greta, and she asked me of Sybil—would Sybil be alone, quite alone, in the strange country if her husband died?

Quite alone—only God and her little helpless child to fortify her woman's heart; and Greta looked away again, away from me into the outer air, and said to herself how sad it was, how very sad.

Then—she did not look at me, but going on, as I thought in unconscious self-communion, Greta asked me once again who Sybil had at home. Father, mother—all the tender friends whom her own girl's heart clung to so dearly—did she leave them all for her husband's sake, this sad young Scottish wife?

“No, Sybil had no family—no friends—she was an orphan, and a stranger,” I said in answer, “and had none in the world but those she carried with her—her husband and her child.”

“Ah!—that was why she went away,” said

Greta, sighing faintly into the quiet air; and first a burning blush and then a paleness came over her moving face.

Her thoughts were far away from me—away from my sad story and personal heaviness, wandering after some fancies of her own. I myself grew chill, I knew not why, and felt myself shut out under the shadow of these leaves as from some light I longed for; perhaps it was because I was looking out, vacantly and in no reverie, upon the sunshine streaming full over the garden path.

“No friends—no home—no mother,” said Greta at last, in her low musing tone, “what wonder, then?—that was why she went away.”

“Nay, my child,” said the voice of Madam Kleine, suddenly coming upon us out of the light. “Nay, Greta, my child—but because she was his wife, and the good God bade her follow him to a strange land.”

With a violent start and blush, Greta rose,

flung off her curls with her arm, and as suddenly shook them back, half covering her flushed face. "He has been with you—he has seen you," she exclaimed in a rapid whisper, with but one quick enquiring glance before her head drooped under her mother's eye, and she stood like one in attitude for flight, suddenly arrested, with her curls hanging like a veil over her averted cheek, and her deprecating lifted hand.

"He has seen me, my little one," said Madam Kleine, drawing her daughter into her arms, "and I have said thou shalt go with him, as thy mother went with Gottfried; but not to love us the less, Greta, my child."

"No, no, no—" I heard the rapid, breathless murmur, as Greta clung to her mother's breast—and then she disengaged herself hastily, hurried away through the waning sunshine, and disappeared from me like many another dream.

I sat in the shadow chill and grey, shrunk back into myself once more. I did not move—I did not speak—my heart was dumb, and the

life grew stagnant in my veins. Madam Kleine sat down beside me, and wiped a tear out of either eye; but even in my shock of fear and eagerness, I knew the mother's triumph in her moved face.

“ My poor little dove ! it is very far, this England, for her first flight to be ; and the house will be sad, Greta, without thy voice and thy song. Yet it would be wrong to grudge her to a good fate, Monsieur William—you think so with me ? ”

“ The fate is— ? ” My throat was dry, I could hardly say the words.

“ He would marry Greta, your young countryman—he says there is none like her in all Bavaria—nor even in his England,” said Madam Kleine, again wiping off the affectionate tear which softened her smile. “ He would carry her to his castle, and make a great lady of my little one ; would I do right to keep her back, Monsieur William ?—for she is in his heart and he is in hers—are they not like each other, so

good, and so gay, and so innocent, the sweet young souls? And he will bring my child to Wurtzburg every year to see her mother. I will weep when they go away, do you tell me; but then immediately I will smile again, thinking how my pretty one may come back—and with the weeping and the smiling we will never be apart. My friend, you are pleased? you perceive?”

“I do not perceive that he is worthy of Greta,” I said, almost with a sob; “what do you know of him, he is almost a stranger?”

“Hush, you are hard to be satisfied,” said the mother, laying her hand on my arm with a smile. “He says he has a young brother, though, who will be richer and greater than he; this is because Monsieur Arthur’s father married another lady a second time, and she has great wealth and her child is her heir. I do not know your English law, but I think it strange the younger should be richer than

the elder—that is not how it is when Greta reads to me out of your English books—there the elder has all—and why is it that Monsieur Arthur's little brother will be richer than he?"

I shook off her arm impatiently. "I cannot tell—what is it to me how rich he is? He might be a king and not worthy of Greta. Will he make her as happy as she has been? will she be *well* with him—well—well? I do not ask if he is rich—this is what I ask?"

"My good friend," said Madam Kleine, "we never are so happy as we have been; notwithstanding we must have our own fate and our own house, and not be always little Greta, the light of the eyes at home. That is my philosophy. I will long for Greta many times, and Greta will weary her fond little heart thinking of me; yet Greta, too, must pass into the noonday as I did, and have her own course and her own life, though the child faints at

the beginning. Do not the mothers think so in England? and if I do not grudge Greta away from me why should you?"

I rose up before her dark and sullen; anger could not exist towards Greta, but I could have poured out a flood of vehement bitterness upon her mother. "Greta is more precious to me than the light, and she will never come into my heart again," I said in a passionate undertone, which Madam Kleine bent forward to hear. "To you it is little, for you have many another thing to give you pleasure—I am a stranger and have but her—have but the dream of her I had taken to my heart—and even that you steal away from me."

I said nothing more. I remember that Madam Kleine rose with deep concern and sympathy in her face, and that with only a repelling gesture waving her off, I turned and went away—went away unhesitatingly and steadily to the bridge, and leaning my brow upon the hem of Bishop Gottfried's stone-cold

mantle, bent over the balustrade and looked down upon the little river. My brow burned with no fever, there was no frenzy in my soul, and alas—alas—alas—alas, was all the plaint my heart made into the quiet night. This word came to me again and again, like the echo of a dirge. Unconsciously I said it within myself, unconsciously I repeated it aloud. No one had deceived me—no one had done me wrong. I was only sad—very sad—left alone once again.

And visions of all desolate, silent, pathetic things came unawares upon my heart. I saw Jamie on his bed; but his face was pale as the marble beside me, and his eyes were closed to open never more. I saw Sybil—but the weeds of widowhood were on her—her dead was buried out of her sight in the strange country, and her heart was all forlorn. I saw my mother—there was no one near her—but she had heard of Jamie's end, and Rachael mourned for her children, nor would be comforted. I heard no

voice of warning in the night—no spiritual touch or message came to me to say we were thus alike bereaved—only my grief went forth and covered all the earth, and all the sky, with its own mantle. Not angry, nor outraged, nor ready to revenge; but only very sad, very sad, desolate and downcast, with a yearning love within me, wandering about through a great void where the one being it had centred on was no more to be found. The moon rose calm and pale, the towers of Wurtzburg glittered in the light; I who had no home here, and whose heart fainted out of all friendship, went away quietly to my hired house—went and slept, dreaming no more, nor seeking any more to dream.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT very long after followed Greta's betrothal. I went to it, making a strong effort, because Gottfried told me Greta had nearly given her engagement up on her mother's report of how much it moved me. Greta's sweet, maidenly heart could find no triumph in breaking another; but she did not know how much less I should have felt her complete indifference to me than I did the wistful, almost tender look of pity with which her eyes sought me out when she entered the room. The same sweet inquiring look it was, which first made my soul yearn and faint for the sympathy of hers,

though blended in it now was a conscious shrinking, a timid awe of both herself and me, which perhaps increased its power. During the ceremony itself, I managed to steal out of the room and the house—not with the fierce impatience of jealousy, but with a certain strange unspeakable sadness and acquiescence in my fate. I did not go far away—I did not hurry out, with the strong impulse of violent haste and motion on me as I had done in the other disappointments of my life. I only strayed the length of Greta's arbour, and sat down there under the leaves to look out upon the pure daylight and the calm air around. The light lay clear and full upon the vineyards of the Steinberg, the Maine went by with a hush of murmuring sound. I leaned my head upon my hands, shutting out nothing from the eyes which did not burn or glow as of old, but only moistened with unshed involuntary tears. My heart expanded and stretched out its arms—tenderness, sad and inexpressible, softened all my thoughts.

I yearned over all whom I could call my own—yearned for the home which lay so far away, yet felt no impulse of flight towards its refuge. Churchyards and graves and quiet death came like a veiled procession through my heart—and I could say nothing of my mood, but that I was sad, very sad.

I acquiesced in my fate—I acquiesced in Greta's—I did not feel with jealous bitterness that something inferior to myself had been preferred to me. The veil of bright delusion had fallen from my eyes, and I felt that Greta's heart had not chosen wrong—that nature, fitness, gracious fortune, pointed to him and not to me. Greta, Sweetheart! though the little golden ring of betrothal bound her to him now—though she was marked and separated from all her girl attendants, with the shadow of wifhood like a veil over her brow—yet neither frenzy nor shrinking sense of desecration came to me. For Greta knew no guile—had done no wrong—and I could pray out of my solitude for joy and

benison upon her life wherever its course might be.

This passed, and so did Greta's marriage shortly after. It satisfied and eased me that the interval should be brief, for Greta's own wistful solicitude about me was the least easily borne of all. I saw she could not banish the thought of my sadness from her gentle mind, but I saw that she was most eager to obliterate the slightest suspicion of it from the minds of others; for Greta saw no honour in my humiliation, and could not bear to drag me a captive at her chariot wheels. She must have felt me in her own pure heart something like a brother, for I saw that quite intolerable to her was the slightest allusion to suffering on my part. She could not bear the "Poor Monsieur William!" which kind Madam Kleine bestowed upon me under her breath. I even saw Greta's little foot stamp, in unconscious impatient irreverence, as she held up her finger to stay her mother's voice. My disappointment

was sacred to herself—a thing to be mourned over, and wept gentle tears for in her solitude; but a thing that would bear the indifferent glance of no other eye.

I bought her a little present the day before her wedding. I myself, with my personal simplicity of taste, was almost rich in this simple, inexpensive German town. My present was a little slender ring, with a star of pearls; as much humbler than the jewels her bridegroom dedicated to her, as I was inferior to himself in all the charm and flush of youthful life. I scarcely expected to see her when I went to leave my offering; but Greta's sweet heart, simple and pure, knew there could be no harm in our farewell. When she heard I had come, she left her mother—and into the silent *salle*, then lying in the deep cold shadow of a late autumn day, she came to me with her shy step, her head half downcast, her consciousness subdued, and almost sad. She spoke to me in English; and I remember feeling, with a

singular mixture of emotions, that I myself had prepared her in this respect to be an English matron, and Arthur Morton's wife.

"I will wear it next to the ring my mother gives me,—her mother gave it her," said my sweet Greta; "but I need no pearls to make me think of you. Friend, you are not angry? You will remember Greta sometimes with kindness and peace?"

"I am not angry," I took the little hand, which wavered with a faint trembling, into mine. "I never have been angry, Greta. No; I am only sad, and lonely, and very desolate; but you have not wounded me, sweet heart; I am only as I was before I knew you, Greta—alone."

"Ah, no!" said Greta, quickly, "not alone, friend. They all love you yonder in your home—you have told me so."

And as she lifted her drooping head with eagerness to comfort me, the tear that had been quivering on Greta's eye-lash, fell upon her

hand. I put my lip to it hastily, and then I said, "Farewell!" and went away.

But not to think of going back to my home. I could have done so gladly, when my bright, indefinite hope was fluttering about my heart. Now that it had closed its wings, and sat mute for ever, I sickened to think of turning back to all the dim habitudes of my early life. Yes, even when I longed for them—even when my spirit fainted for the sympathy and help of my own friends, and recognized the warm and kindly family bond as it only is recognized after long sojourn among strangers, I could not turn my face towards my country, and of my own will go home. It seemed to me that I required some instant necessity, some strong compulsion of circumstances. I would have yielded to such with thankfulness, and been glad of the force which drove me back from my wandering; but the will to originate was numb and torpid within me, and no imperative voice in my own spirit commanded,

Arise, and go. Contrary to my wont, in times of unusual trial, the one thing my heart seemed to demand of me was inaction, quietness, repose. Not to flee again from everything which could recal what I had lately borne; not to flee from myself, the only creature upon whom I could revenge any one of all my own woes; rather to make this self a nearer, closer, more endeared companion, to commune with it of the precious things we had lost, and to cling with a lingering, brooding, passive affection to every place that brought back the bright days of my delusion. Such was my inclination now.

Next day, I caught a glimpse of them in their carriage, as they drove over the bridge, where I again stood by Bishop Gottfried's knee. *They!* One was with Greta now from whom, living or dead, she never could dissever herself—whose identity was constantly involved in hers. Even I no longer said *her*, but bade God bless them in my heart, as the sound of their

departure died lingering out of my ears. I almost could have fancied that the marble hand of Bishop Gottfried moved, as giving with an added emphasis the benediction his raised fingers extended to every passer-by; and Bishop Gottfried's cold, pale, mitred brow and heavy drapery stand out continually, gleaming through my remembrances as the centre of many a strange, fantastic thought.

After that—I fear not much to the credit of my wisdom—I grew very mystic and speculative. Gottfried Kleine and his friends gathered round me with an enthusiasm they had never felt before, and we set about the discussion of many an abstract question of morals, politics, and abstract truth. My fits of speakership were rare, it is true; and I always found my own real standing ground of listener and moderator, and was not long of becoming most entirely confused and bewildered by my friends' arguments and my own; but I did not dislike pursuing the tenor of my separate thoughts,

amid the hubbub of a metaphysical discussion. I came, indeed, rather to enjoy it, as one enjoys a stolen pleasure, and to find amusement in the absurdities of blundering, which, with my attention constantly straying to something else than the subject in hand, I was betrayed into; for amusement is quite compatible with the heaviness of heart which lies deep underground, and is not called upon for superficial demonstrations. I have seen the truest mourner smiling at as petty a jest as ever moved a light heart—and I was not above the every-day smiling any more than the every-day discomforts, which bore about as much proportion to real trial, as the other did to real joy.

Jamie did not return at the time of my mother's first expectation. She wrote telling me so, and bidding me defer the visit I had promised till he should come; for he was somewhat stronger, and she was high in hope. I laid down her letter with a strange, cold foresight of her disappointment. *I* knew as if it

had been specially revealed to me, that Jamie would never return.

And when the spring began to green with its faint down of vegetation the broad level of these unfenced Bavarian fields, the news I looked for came. It was not less a shock to me that I had looked for it with this heavy pertinacity of conviction; and it seemed to me, in the first force of the blow, that I had never truly known before the strong affection I bore my brother. Jamie was dead—dead—could it be true?—out of the reach of any sign of love, however anxious, beyond the most clinging grasp of tenderness. My first impulse was to deny, to hope madly for some contradiction; to say in my heart, with wild repetitions, “It is not possible!—it is not possible!” to snatch up my travelling staff, and go marching desolately over land and sea, to find it all a fable, and fabrication, and dream. Then the wildest visions of him came upon me. I caught sight of a passing figure, so far off as to be beyond my recog-

niton, and set out after it with a mad impulse of pursuit, with difficulty restraining the cry which rose loudly to my lips, and full of a desperate certainty that this was he. There came a summons to the door of the house I lived in. The heavy dew burst upon my brow. I listened with such eagerness of listening as even *he* had never cost me before, thinking he had come at last. Not Jamie dead, and in the spirit, a ghostly visitant, before whom my human senses would shrink and quail; but Jamie living, with the light upon his brow, and the heart in his smile. If I thought at all of going home to comfort my mother, I banished the idea immediately; remembering that he knew I was in Wurtzburg, and coming here when I was away, might depart into the wide, unknown world again, and be found of us no more. Strong and real as it was wild, this delusion obtained almost complete mastery over me. I think I must have been strangely subject to delusions at this period of my life.

And the fancy kept me in a singular excitement of expectation. Even though I tried to conceal from myself that I did so, I kept my lodging in perpetual readiness, as though he might come at any moment; and with a sense of positive guilt and shame, found myself once hinting to Gottfried my expectation of a visitor. Gottfried did not comprehend my sudden start and self-interruption, my confusion and paleness; for some vague sense of a need to hide and conceal, and keep him secret when he came, as we had done on his return to Ailieford, attended on my fevered anticipation of Jamie's visit; but neither superstition nor fear mingled with my excitement: I expected no spirit, but a living man.

Coldly crushing down all these fancies, came my mother's next letter, enclosing Sybil's more detailed account of Jamie's end. My mother herself said very little: her heart was broken; she could not speak of her precious dead. I knew well how her memory would hoard up

every memorial of him, and recal in secret all his words and ways; but my mother's grief was not voluble. Sybil's letter, on the contrary, was long; detailing all he said and all he looked in the last days of his illness; and I have seen few things which struck me as more heroic in their self-restraint than this record of our poor Jamie's death. If my mother's grief could not bear expression, I knew well the silent force and intensity, at most the mere inarticulate wailing which it would wring out of Sybil's heart. I knew how she would veil and shroud in the inmost depths her secret idol, and carry on with outward silence this deep heart-worship of the dead. Yet the young widow, forlorn and desolate, lived over every particular of her anguish, for satisfaction to the mother whose claim upon him was close as her own. The letter sent to me was not Sybil's letter, but a painful copy made for me by my mother's own hand—a hand that might tremble over the task, but could not entrust it to another.

Strong as my own affliction was, I felt it shrink before the magnitude of theirs ; and I laid up the letter with humility and reverence as something sacred, both for the writer's and the transcriber's sake.

And for myself, I consented at last to the fact my reason could dispute no longer. My fantastic excitement died, my real mourning began, and the pathetic words he said, as the end drew visibly near, became clear and distinct, as though I had heard them, to my memory and my heart. All the broken expressions of humble faith, so eagerly grasped at by the chronicler, all the trembling faint assurances of his hope and trust, and full reliance upon the Lord, whom Jamie had so seldom *spoken* of before—and his tender remembrance of ourselves. Such sad yearnings came over me as I sat in my solitary room, and wept out undisturbed my solitary tears—such low calls upon his name as I startled myself with, in the midst of the burst of sobbing grief which would not

be repressed—such faint interrupted prayers as fell out of my heart. Ah, Jamie, brother! poor wandering soul that has found out home at last—if your life was like a broken fragment—your heart oppressed with failure and shipwreck, mishap, and guilt—yet were you dearly loved all your life long—and when you died, most bitterly, and with great anguish, wept.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT I did not go home—the grief of bereavement had an effect on me not dissimilar to the grief which immediately preceded it. Still more poignant, more bitter, and less easily submitted to than the loss of Greta, was this dark irresistible death, whom in my own person I encountered now for the first time. But the dull, dead force of reality and unchangeableness differs widely from the fretting disappointments of less certain calamities. When the heart has nothing left but submission—not even a shred of hope or possibility to trust to—the heart

yields to inevitable necessity, and learns to submit. I sank into composure and quietness—into the calm of deep and uncommunicated sorrow—but this weight seemed to fix me even more certainly to my foreign dwelling-place. I began to have no wish beyond its walls—no speculation outside of its circle of pupils and companions. I wrote to my mother constantly—it was almost the only active thing I did, which remained to evidence that my individual self had some other duties than those belonging to Wurtzburg's sole teacher of English.

And by this time I had reached full manhood. I had reached, too, such measure of competence as contented me, and was less willing to stray away into uncertainty and begin my work again. I looked behind me much—I did not very clearly see before. New convulsions and trials might await me there—I was ignorant of them—but new hopes did not await—I felt confident of that—for I would have despised myself could I have dreamed of a second Greta. It was pos-

sible that her star should rise in the darkened sky from which Mary had fallen—but not possible that another should take Greta's place. So that I found myself bound, circumscribed, and limited—constrained to make up my mind certainly and conclusively to the solitude which now indeed began to grow familiar and congenial to me.

And I heard after some time that Sybil, widowed and desolate, was not to return. Some kindly Christian family had taken her in, at the first stroke of her bereavement, and were now anxious to keep her, in charge of their children, who had come to cling very fondly to the young widow—and Sybil thought she had no right to reject the means presented to her for her own maintenance and the advantage of her child—for our little Elizabeth it seemed was as much a favourite as her mother, and would have a higher training there, under Sybil's own eye, than anything which even my mother's limited means, and far less the earn-

ings of the impoverished widow could give her at home. So Sybil concluded to accept the offer of her friends, and stayed in Canada beside her husband's grave.

For five years I remained undisturbed in Wurtzburg, settling down into a quiet townsman of the quiet far away city. The time of life when one can content one's self with studies and speculations, and courses of thought, began to come upon me, no longer mingled with the ideal rhapsodies of youth. I became a student of laws and principles as I had been of languages once; and extended my passive tendency to observation, into channels less open and visible than of old. I am inclined to think that there was little wisdom in this; little came of it at least, for any purpose of use, though I wrote disquisitions, which myself read and criticised at the moment not unfavourably, but which have been thrown aside as so much lumber since. For it takes a mighty time to teach us what it is we can do, or to content us with

doing that. A memory slow to lose impressions, and something of an apprehensive eye, enabled me to note with tolerable truth the common life that lay under the daylight on either hand. But with true perversity I neglected that, and sought to fit the limited optic to things of larger range. What with my ambition too high, my motive too small, this time of my life was very unproductive. I was a quiet citizen of Wurtzburg, I performed my educational duties tolerably; I laid by year after year some little provision for going home; I spent an amount of time in solitary thought and meditation, which few men I fancy have been able to give, and wandering half-abstracted about the precincts of the town, furnished my memory with a rarer picture-gallery in my own immediate inalienable possession than many a princely noble prides himself upon. Beyond this I did nothing more.

Some three or four times Greta came back with her husband—by-and-bye with a sweet

little child beside her, to her father's house. I never saw her without emotion—emotion strong and sad, but always sweet. I was peaceful in my dim composure now—my grief had abated—my heart was calm; but nothing faint or neutral, like my own feelings, was on Greta's fair bright woman brow. I did not envy her the sunshine, heaven knows, but gave thanks for it with almost a deeper gratitude than for blessings of my own; nor did I grudge to her husband the gladness of this warm and genial light. I think I made no ungracious contrast between their lot and mine—but I felt wherein they differed, and felt it fully. I could not shut either my heart or my eyes to that.

When I had come nearly to the end of my eighth year in Wurtzburg—and years not unhappy were the quiet and uneventful ones which I pass without record—a chance encounter with a wandering Englishman communicated to myself the travellers' madness. After so long an interval of sober plodding I went upon my

way again, this time impelled by no spirit of fire or passion, and seeking no new home. I said good-bye to my Wurtzburg friends—to Madam Kleine, who, still youthful, spirited, light of heart, and enjoying without intermission all the usual pleasures of her life, had felt a hundred times less, than I did even now, her daughter's absence—to Gottfried, himself a house-father by this time, and whose latest born had been called Wilhelm in my honour—and to the many other kindly neighbours who were interested in my comings and goings; good-bye, but not farewell—for I had full purpose of speedy return. I came in the evening sunshine, when the deep peace of home seemed to descend upon the house-tops of the quiet city, in those long golden rays that streamed upon their pinnacles and towers—but the morning light broke sweetly on the Maine, and lighted all those ancient roofs with a smile of hopeful greeting, when I went away.

To many old-renowned, heart-stirring places,

famous in the world's history—to many an antique town of science and philosophy—to many a graceful shrine of ancient art. I had no bonds nor restrictions on me. I went where I would—I studied here—I taught there—in this place I only loitered idly with no object or pursuit—a day in one town, a month in another, I followed the counsel of my own will. Sad was the freedom I had in this respect—for no one took heed of the length of my absence or wearied over my delay. If I could but satisfy myself, I had no sweet bondage on me of satisfying another, and I left no one behind to grudge me my long holiday—to dream out apprehensions of danger, or urge my coming home.

“ You should go here—you should go there,” said one with whom I made a passing friendship on the way ; “ my time is limited, I cannot be long absent—but you should take full advantage of your opportunities—you have no one waiting for you at home.”

He meant it simply as the words were said, and not a shadow of self-gratulation, conscious at least or intended, was in the speech ; but forlorn and silent I shrunk away from him, and went to my strange room, in the strange inn, to which we had come together, with a heavy heart. I sat down in the gaunt apartment, before the waning light, sullen of brow and dark of thought. I think I sounded all the depths of my remembrance in that desolate hour—but out of them all I suddenly started with a freshness of vigour, a boyish revival of heart. I thought of my own room at Ailieford, constantly ready for me, with that pale moonlight which made ghastly these alien hills, stealing in quietly from the window to the floor, and climbing the bedside like a curious child, to see whose face it was, which lay once more upon the unused pillow—and I saw my mother, with tears of joy upon her cheeks for her son's return. Yes, there was one wherever I wandered, who waited for me with

a constant love, putting the love of wives and dearest children to shame.

“ True loves I may get mony a ane,
But minnie ne'er anither.”

I said to myself, with a glow of warmth at my heart ; and I wrote to her that I was coming home.

Before my mother could have received my letter, there came one from her to me which threw a deeper sadness still upon my fancies. My mother was ill—my mother was old—she might be gone before I could reach her—I might never see her face again in this life, let me haste as I would. I had been trifling away the years and the hours, as if I possessed them in my own right, and owed no duty therein ; but what would my heart say to me if death stepped in once more, and pronounced impossible the tardy atonement which, for the sake of my own solitude, I was now so anxious to make.

“I am ill, Willie,” wrote my mother, “even if the doctor never said a word to me, I would know by myself that death was near at hand—and I would fain you came to see me before I went to see Jamie. You have been long away, and I would not blame you—you went to ease your heart, and you stayed because Providence gave you success and prosperity—but you may come now, Willie, for your mother’s sake, to let me see your face once more before I die. I hear folk say I have never got the better of my poor Jamie’s loss—they say very true—but I am getting better of it now, thinking to meet with him again in another place. I often think I might have given you a better upbringing, all you bairns, and learnt you more to think upon your latter end, and number your days; maybe I was too careful about things of this life, and forgot in a measure the life to come—for poverty is a sore bondage, Willie, and keeps down the thoughts. But I mind aye my poor laddie’s last words, ‘Mighty to save—

mighty to save.' Jamie is safe in His hand, that keeps the weakest of the flock, and I know you have serious thoughts, my dear Willie, and I am thankful you are getting time and space to consider your ways. Andrew is to be made an elder by-and-bye—that should be a good sign—and your father, honest man, reads his Bible as he never used to do, and does what he can—though maybe I still am impatient sometimes—to comfort me. So I hope we will all have a full meeting, and no a break in the whole family of us when life is past for you as well as me.

“You are not to think I have been without comfort all this time. It was a great disappointment when Sibby wrote to say she was staying in Canada, for I thought the little bairn, my own name-daughter too, would have been a great comfort to me; but you would not think what a fine bairn of his years Andrew's little Robbie has turned—only eleven come Candlemas, but as clever as many a boy of

There was a beautiful young thing in her
 eyes which a few more women to me in
 London was always the subject of my
 I would like you to take special notice of
 little Annie, if you should ever come home
 when I'm going myself. For I'll not be long
 long years, and speak of you often, and of
 the little Annie, whom I never can see in
 this world. Speaking of this, Willie my own,
 if you should ever marry yourself, and have
 children, call one of them after your brother.
 Andrew has six now, but not a Jamie among
 them, though four of them are boys; and it
 looks as if he had passed it over of set
 purpose, for Christina has an uncle of the
 name in his line.

"You will think I am just wandering into
 an old woman's common fancies, and maybe
 so I am; but that does not change the serious
 place I stand in, being on the brink of the
 grave, Willie, and very near my latter end.

You are not to think I mean to upbraid my dear son—a dutiful son and a great comfort you have been to me many a day, and never said a hasty word to your mother all your life, and were a support to my heart in respect of him that's gone—and I do not say you *must* come to let me see you once more; but if you can, Willie, haste you home; you have little time to see your mother in, and I think when I'm gone Ailieford will be a cauldribe place.—though maybe it is only my vanity. If I should never see you again, take my farewell, my dear son Willie; but I will see you either in this world or a better—and I go to him who never can return to me.”

I rose up from reading this letter with a strong tremor upon me—a heavy and dark presentiment in my mind—and without either pause or preparation, set out upon my journey. I was far in the depths of

inland France when it reached me, and travelling, by cumbrous diligence and post, had not quickened into its present pace. But all the haste that was possible I made, pressing on day and night, crossing the channel in a storm, which at another time I should scarcely have cared to face, and hurrying on with hardly an hour's rest between the journeys from London to Edinburgh. When I reached these familiar streets again, and once more after so many years sought the Moulisburgh coach, my heart was nearly bursting with its intolerable strain of anxiety. I could not afford to lose time in walking to Ailieford; but driving along the dark roads at a pace that might have been dangerous had any passengers been there, I reached my own home late on a dark spring night. There was light—the faint lamp of the watcher—in the window of my mother's room, and I saw it crossed by frequent shadows. Now at the very threshold I paused

and faltered ; but Marget's face suddenly appeared upon me, worn and pale, sparing me further question. I saw without words that my mother too was gone.

CHAPTER X.

YES, she was gone—going, her hope-lamp brilliant in her hand, out of the farthest limit of the valley into the light beyond—but my terror had hastened to the ultimate conclusion some half hour earlier than it came. There was life enough in her pale eyelids to open once again, sense enough in her failing ear to catch my cry of anguish as I threw myself beside her bed on my knees, and strength in her faint lips once again—once again—to say my name. She put her feeble hands within mine; she smiled a last smile of love and

tenderness unspeakable into my face. She said "Willie, Willie!" with a passing flush of joy upon her pallid brow. If she heard, or could understand the flood of words which poured to my lips, or if indeed I did speak them aloud in my agony, I cannot tell; but I know that thus, with a saint's content upon her face, my mother passed away.

My strong excitement could not rest; the attendants, awed and trembling, withdrew before me. My highly-strained nerves had reached to such a point of tension, that the climax might have brought me death; and they say I madly forbade all interference with her, and commanding them away, sat down myself to watch by my dead. What I remember of this sad time, is my sudden awaking in the depth and silence of midnight to see my father struggling with hard sobs, and to note a little boy hang shivering, weeping, holding by the doorway, on the threshold of the room. Some one behind tried to draw

the child away; he only wept and sobbed the more, and clung the closer, till at last he sank down upon the floor, and lay there passive, weeping aloud hysterically in the first violent sorrow of a child.

I remember that there came across my mind then the words of my mother's letter, vivid and clear as though she had just spoken them. I resigned the cold hands I had been holding in my own, I gave up my place by the bed of the dead, and rising, lifted my little nephew from the ground, and carried him to my own old room, where we sat together, he and I, strangers as we were, and in the darkness wept like one heart. By-and-bye the child's tears stayed, and by some faint light coming in from the window, I saw his wistful, wondering eyes fixed on my face. The little heart was very desolate—full of awe, terror and grief—but still could not understand the man's passion of bereavement—the strong sense of loneli-

ness and world-estrangement which fastened upon me.

After a few melancholy days came my mother's funeral. Moody and silent, lost in my own thoughts and my own grief, my father, whose heart was stunned and dumb, and Andrew, whose decent sorrow reached no extremity, went on before me as the other mourners of our little procession dispersed from the grave. I stood by and saw it covered—saw the wet sod laid down again, and then was left alone beside my mother's resting-place, under a cold, pale sky of spring, silent with my own heart.

I sat down upon an adjoining hillock ; I fixed my dry eyes on the new-covered grave. Like a child, I could say nothing but mother—mother ! that first appeal of helplessness—that last cry of love ! And then there came before me in review all those long years of absence. No passion

to excuse them—no necessity to compel; wilful exile, self-debarred from all the opportunities of home, of love and kindness—from all the means of comforting this dearest of dear friends—from all the daily possibilities of doing pleasure to her much-trying heart. Too late—for ever and for ever too late—and herself gone away with those uncheered and desolated years, where tardy tokens even of the truest tenderness could reach her never more. Bitterly accusing, my heart rose up against myself—condemned me as a traitor to one of the dearest trusts of life—branded me in my own eyes as a thankless child—made me well-nigh a murderer—a parricide in the fierce exaggeration of its grief. Just then the wind stirred faintly, rustling the long grass over the churchyard stones, and some other sound of human neighbourhood disturbed my solitude. I looked up; some one stood before me leaning upon a head-

stone, and looked down gravely, intently, with a strange, watchful interest upon me.

Who is this? Ten long years of storm and sunshine—of life, with all its manifold experiences, have passed over us both since we met last; but the widow's veil that droops over her face cannot obscure from me the sober shining of those eyes: the widow's cap that covers her braids of hair cannot disguise the clear, cold daylight of Mary Burnet's brow. Whence she comes, where she has lived all this time, and how, I neither ask nor can tell, nor why she lingers thus in her superiority of calm, unhesitating judgment, while I am lost in the first fire and passion of my self-condemning grief. I only know she is here.

And Mary can look at the grave before her with unmoistened eyes. She does ill at such a time to connect herself with my mother's memory; but perhaps there is

more feeling than I give her credit for, in this low-spoken question: "Did you come home in time?"

"She knew me—she spoke to me," I answered faintly; and then, with a start of sudden vehement impatience, I turned upon herself.

"I think you should upbraid me too—you—it would become you well! say I should have stayed at home and helped to comfort her—and be sure for every word you can say, my heart will ring echoes a hundred-fold. Mary! what is it you seek here? have I not enough besides, that *you* should come to crown all?"

"I seek nothing here," said Mary, with her plain speech and sober look. "I was only passing, and saw you sitting by the grave. Yes, Willie Mitchell, you have been long away. What made you stay abroad so long?"

I started up with the bitter anger of

provoked grief in my heart. "Look here, what we have done between us!" I cried, my own hot tears blinding me. "My mother—my good, kind, gentle mother—killed there, and gone away desolate into her grave—ten years of selfish solitude and petty care passed over me—my heart estranged from my own home—my mind excited out of all endurance of the life I might have led—my very country and tongue grown distasteful to me—and all my natural duties forsaken and cast aside! Who has been the worker in all, but you—and you come to meet me here!"

"Or any other place, Willie Mitchell," said Mary, quietly. "You need not think I will heed these furies now. What is it I have done to either you, or your family, or your mother? I saw we could never be happy together—I told you so—was there anything wrong in that? and then, without

my will or knowledge—you may be very sure I did not seek to meet you then—I saw you again with John. If you went off in one of your mad fits at that time, was I to blame? was it any fault of mine? I know there are some who never will learn, and if you put the blame on another person when the blame lies with your own hastiness—with your own impatience of being contradicted or crossed—you are very little likely to mend. I never did you harm, nor wished you harm all my life. I did what I thought best for myself. I might be wrong sometimes, like any other; but I did it because Mary Burnet thought it best, and not because it would vex Willie Mitchell. Did you think everything was to yield to what you wanted? Did you think you had a right to quarrel with Providence for marrying me to another man? and then, when ill came of all your wild fits, your self-will,

and what you did for your own pleasure, you think you can lay the blame on me !”

And again, as many another time, my mind assented and owned that she was right. Yes, after her own contracted fashion—after her own mode and rule of life, Mary Burnet walked contented and complacent, looking upon all the well-marked boundary-lines, and all the full-observed decorums of which she made no transgression ; and to the letter and the rule was wise and prudent, fully assured of what she would be at, and without scruple at the spirit that might lie under, accomplishing, undiverted, her intent and will. She did no harm, according to her code, when she first crazed the heart, which, by her creed, had no right to be so susceptible—which indeed showed itself fool and blind enough in putting power like this within her calm and passionless hands. Her own act was

no evil—a natural privilege of her womanhood: for its consequences she had no responsibility—the thought did not touch her careful balance of measured right and wrong.

And I sat down again, silent and silenced; that we should have controversy, she and I, was a thing so vain and fruitless—I, over whom so many fantastical distinctions of feeling found weight and mastery—she, with her smooth regulations and rigid order of good seeming and propriety. I gave her the argument into her own hands. My judgment, now in its full age and growth, claimed a wider range than Mary's, and my heart no longer struggled to make me willingly captive to Mary's narrow will.

“It is easy always to blame other folk,” said Mary again, but this time with more conciliation in her tone. “I thought you, so long abroad, would have come down to soberer notions at your years. What good

is it aye repining and turning back on what's past—and what good is it letting our lives be blighted because in one thing we cannot have our own will? You would not wonder at what I would do, Willie—maybe you think me hard-hearted—at least you know that I can guide my own feelings, and never let *them* get mastery over me; but Sibby Wood used to be a different person—far more like yourself. What would you say to hear that Sibby had married again?"

"I would say it was untrue whoever told me," said I hastily; but though this recalled some curiosity to my mind, I began to grow faint and listless, and to weary for the end of this uncongenial conversation.

"I have been told so, and I would not say it was untrue," said Mary, "nor wish it either if Sibby, poor thing, has done well for herself this time. I would like to part friends, Willie Mitchell—I never did you

any harm, nor thought you any harm all my life—and I am sorry for your loss. Will you say good-bye like a friend?”

I held out my hand to her over my mother's grave. Anger, jealousy, resentment were long since dead—even the fierce burst of irritation with which my heart had risen to see her here, died away into pure distaste and indifference. I desired that she should be gone; I felt it like a profaning of my mother's sacred memory that a thought of *her* could be supposed to intrude upon the holy grief of the funeral day. I was impatient of her presence, her voice, her words—impatient that she should have the faintest ground of supposing that my old delusion in respect of her survived. But I gave her my hand—I touched her's mechanically—then with a slight cold bow of courtesy, I turned away my head. When I looked again, Mary Burnet's steady figure was moving away at its composed pace towards

the town—that step which never faltered, that pace which no emotion could quicken into indecorous speed—yet this had been my earliest idol—the first love of my youth.

I found out afterwards, that Mary had married, as I fancied when I saw them, her cousin—that her uncle, whom both her husband and she had thought of pleasing by this union, was on the contrary grievously disappointed, and never could be but partially reconciled. Mary—I would give her credit for the true qualities which belonged to her nature—had no sooner really taken the yoke of wifehood upon her, than she set herself with all her might to raise her husband's position and her own. No one could speak of her conduct, in this respect, in any but the highest terms. All that was duty, incumbent on her, was done with positive devotion—and the children she had

were cared for with a wisdom of solicitude worthy all honour. She could not appreciate the ideal motives and impulses which had effect upon me—she knew no force of ideal love—no enthusiasm of faithfulness—no delicacy of high regard and tenderness for one to whom no legal bond united her; but when the legal bond was made, Mary Burnet was a true wife, a household mistress without reproach, doing the everyday acknowledged duties which came within her range of vision, without respect for their painfulness or undue shrinking from any self-humiliation. Her husband died, with no great thing attained, and little provision made for the family he left behind him. Mary now was striving bravely, like a true woman and mother, for her children's sake. What, though my heart shrank from her in the force of its rebound from the old power and influence to which her nature

had no right—my fantastic standard was not the rule for Mary—and judged by her own proper measure, she deserved my censure as little as she had once deserved my disproportioned praise.

CHAPTER XI.

SYBIL had kept up a regular, though not very frequent correspondence with my mother ; but now, no one seemed to know when her last letter had come, or what its contents were. Nothing of Mary's story had reached their ears at Ailieford—nothing ; and I shut my mind against the rumour, and was convinced it deserved no faith.

And walking along Princes Street—through the place so strangely familiar, which yet seemed to have gone so far away from me

as if generations had come and passed since I saw it last—I caught a glimpse of Donald Clerk leaning out over his warehouse-door. The warehouse seemed enlarged, and stirring with greater business than ever; himself had grown an old man, gaunt and grim, with a hungry, lurking fever in his eye; and I saw how the porters in the underground cellar shrank before his caustic, sneering commendations, his thunders of vituperation. “Od, man, he’s turning a fiercer auld sinner, every day—a puir man has nae peace of his life in Donald Clerk’s employ,” said, with feeling, the Geordie who had once compassionated our poor fugitive, as he paused at the corner of the North Bridge to exchange a consolatory pinch of snuff with a friend he encountered there. I was content with this passing bit of information, and sought no further intercourse with Donald Clerk.

But it became necessary that I should resign my idle life of wandering, and begin

again the work of every day. My sister-in-law Christina was very eager to recall to my recollection her own old plan for my establishment, and with simple faith in my acquirements pronounced me fully fit for the rule of even such a mansion as Loretto Lodge, and such a household as the family of young gentlemen gathered there. True, Christina repudiated with indignation the delicate suggestion of Andrew that I should "take up" with my old love once more and realize at last the home which I had once dreamed of, with Mary Burnet at its head. Christina's wrath blazed high at the thought; but Christina had some other match, far more eligible in prospect for me, and introduced me to many Moulisburgh young ladies with emphasis and *empressement* at which I could not but smile. But Moulisburgh at that time was intolerable to me. I seemed to see about its roads and houses, ghosts of a thousand home-spent hours which might have been—

and in many a dreary reverie, as I went and came towards Ailieford, beheld visions of myself upon the way, tenderly comforting and supporting the mother who had gone away uncomforted and unsupported by any care of mine into her solitary grave.

My father, whose heart had never learned to speak, and whose life was intrenched about with so many little self-regards and observances relapsed quietly into his usual routine. He still went and came about the necessary business which had been lessened and lightened to suit his declining years—still pored over book or newspaper, and consulted with Margaret about little precautions and cares necessary, as he thought, for his health and comfort. The old man was heart-stricken and desolate when you could come in at his inner life; but his inner life was so numbed and overlaid that it was hard to come at it—and his little round of personal comforts

were great solace to him, and gave occupation enough to keep his mind engaged. He felt no want of me. If I supplied him with a fuller quantity of reading for his solitary nights, he was very well content that I should do with myself what I would—and little Robbie was a better companion than I, with all my gravity and silence, could ever hope to be.

Little Robbie clung to me with a strange affection which touched my heart. I would have gladly taken the little fellow with me when I went to Edinburgh; but Christina was a very loving mother—she could not part with her son. So when I came out now and then on a Saturday afternoon, after my old fashion, Robbie, very spruce, with his fresh face and Sabbath dress, in honour of his Uncle Willie, whom his mother had elevated into the position of family gentleman, came proudly to meet me—and very

proudly bore me company, asking ceaseless questions about my travels, and the strange places I had seen.

I was now a mature man—over Dante's arch and culmination of life, my five-and-thirtieth year—a hermit, knowing myself to occupy none but the most secondary and casual place in any living heart. True, I had learned to know capabilities in myself which I had never known before; and coming back to the old scenes, felt myself in many respects a being of higher class and fuller existence than the boy who had lived there before; but, alas! the boy, even in his foolish frenzies, even in his feverish disappointment, had many a fair year before him, all sweet and brilliant with fanciful hope, which now lay under the clouds of memory to me—had in the world too some who loved him dearly—a mother, whose heart was open to every thought of his—a brother, far away, and sadly banished, whose pulse

would yet stir warmly to any joy of Willie's. Now they were gone. I stood apart and separated—knowing some friends and kindness, some acquaintance and attentions of courtesy, which I could not have reached before—but in my heart and in my soul alone.

And about a year after my return, another blow struck more dully, but with an added pain and heaviness upon my mind. I found a letter waiting me one night upon the table of my solitary parlour, addressed in a hand unknown to me, and bearing the post-mark of a distant Highland town. I opened it with little curiosity; but after the enclosure was broken, I was startled into interest by perceiving Sybil's hand. She had not written since my mother's death, and we had never heard of her all the time.

I did not pause to read the other note in which this letter was enclosed; nor even, I think, did I notice till afterwards the heavy

black border on the paper ; for the first sentence of Sybil's letter struck me with cold disappointment and offence. Again, this constant practical desecration of the one true worthy love, which seemed to me enough for heart and life, whatever sadness it might bring ; but I curbed my hasty flush of anger, and read on.

“ I cannot tell what you will say to hear that I am married ; nor must I tell you now, dear Willie, what a great pang and struggle it cost me to take this step. I think I have separated myself from all my other life. I almost think, if I ever win there, that they will look coldly on me in heaven. I think myself I will shrink out of Jamie's sight, and be afraid to show my burning face to him. I did it for my bairn's sake ; God knows at what cost of misery to myself ; and now that it is done, and Elizabeth is provided for, I try to be content, and bear what must be borne. But Willie, brother,

do not condemn me—if you could know how hard and dreadful it is to think that you have parted yourself from your own, even in Heaven! It is wrong to say this; it is wrong to doubt the blessedness that's there, or to think of anything but Himself, the Chief, who gives us hope of reaching to His own company; but my heart was so fain at thought of being beside my own again, ever till this weary year.

“ And fast as pain and weakness can carry me, I am hurrying away. My dear bairn is safe in the charge of an upright, tender-hearted man, who has been far better to me than I have ever deserved at his hands, and who will take kindly care of her for her mother's sake. I warned him he was taking a dead heart, when, after long battle with myself, I came the length of consent. I did not deceive *him*; I only deceived myself with thinking it was possible that I could endure a life like this; and there is something re-

maining to tell you, Willie—something that may even make your thoughts of me harder—that seems to divide me more, and yet that I cannot but thank God for, with a joy in my heart. I have another new-born bairn in my arms—a poor little delicate sea-born baby, who will never see his mother's face in this life. Woe's me, Willie! think how hard and sore it is—I am almost feared to take my little bairn into my heart—ashamed to tell you he is here.

“But my Elizabeth is very fond and very proud of her little brother. Promise me you will never say a word to put her heart from him—for, poor thing! she knows and thinks no evil, though many a time I have wondered what fancies were under the wistful looks she used to give me, when my heart was battling hard with itself for her sake. So far as worldly prospects go, she will be very well; but she is like me, Willie—far too like her mother for her own peace; and though I

know she will be as tenderly taken care of, and as well brought up as if she was his own child, I wish I could hope that you would sometimes see her, as she comes to be a woman. I know he will have a jealousy of you, even in spite of himself; and I am afraid, when I am gone, he will call Bessie by his own name; but, for her father's sake, and her mother's sake, Willie, see her sometimes, when she comes to woman's years—even though you are but coldly received in her home.

“I think I have nothing more to say now. I am within two or three days of my end; and though my heart faints to think how those that have gone before me may look on me, I have good hope that I am going home to His kingdom and rest. Willie, my dear and only brother, many a trouble we have come through together—many a weary hour we have shared—fare you well, and God be with you. I think you will cast no stone at me.”

The letter was unsigned. As clearly as though I had looked into her struggling heart, I knew that Sybil's mind recoiled from telling me the new name she bore, and that, with her self-shame and shrinking delicacy, she could not call herself again by Jamie's name.

It was some time before I was able to turn to the other note; when I did, I thought I could trace, in the firm, clear characters, the momentary faltering with which allusion to Sybil was made, what manner of man this was. His honour, his strength of feeling, his involuntary haughtiness towards myself, his tenacious appropriation, and terror of any sharer in the memory which now alone remained of my poor sister, Sibby Wood.

“ Sir,

“ The inclosed letter, written immediately before her death, by my late lamented wife, I inclose to you by her desire. You will,

I trust, spare me entering into any details ; a task for which I feel myself quite unable. She lies in my own family burying-place, the death having taken place when we were only two days' voyage from the port.

“ Elizabeth is well ; but as she is a very susceptible child by nature, and has suffered greatly from the late distressing event, you will allow me to suggest to you that a meeting with unknown relatives would be very unlikely to have a strengthening effect upon either her health or nerves. She is much occupied with her brother, and if she is left to my care, will have my full attention, and all the advantages I could confer on my own child : so that I hope, unless advantages equal or superior can be offered to her, that her own prospects may be considered, before any attempt at interference is made.

“ I am, Sir,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ LEWIS METHVEN.”

It was with some little heat and resentment that I separated the letter of Mr. Lewis Methven from the last words of her whom he called his wife. Seven years of widowhood, solitary and apart, might indeed have been supposed to weaken any claims we had on Sybil: *we* had! I forgot it was I, only I, who could or would make any claim; but when Sybil herself so touchingly acknowledged my right of brotherhood, it seemed hard to me that a stranger should step in to alienate from us her very dust, and rob us of her child. But what could *I* do for her child? Take her within my own guardianship, accustom her to my nomade life, make her the daily companion of a man whose own vigour had been eaten up and lost in crowding fantasies? Nay, nay, I could not do Sybil's representative such wrong; and even my impulse of at least writing as her nearest relative to Elizabeth Mitchell was overcome by reluctance to interfere with

what might be a happier and more prosperous life for her. Making inquiries diligently, I found that Lewis Methven was a man of wealth and influence in his district; and what was I, that I should step in with any hasty act of mine, to deprive the orphan of her secured and competent home?

CHAPTER XII.

FOR some years following this I remained in Edinburgh in moderate content and comfort. I found society perhaps more congenial and natural after all—certainly a great deal more like myself, and sharing to a very much larger degree my own principles and feelings than my Teutonic friends could do — and by-and-bye I reached to really desirable society such as one would be proud of reaching anywhere, though I had nothing to depend on but the pen which I began to use occasionally, and my faculty

of teaching, no longer English, but the kindly German, which had become familiar to me as my own language—Greta's tongue—and it occurs to me strangely, that I made no effort to seek out Greta now that we were within one country. Neglecting, without cause or motive, things which would be agreeable to myself, being at the same time so natural that it would be impossible for a stranger to explain the neglect by any other supposition than that of some untold secret motive, seems a characteristic of mine. It was not that I had pain in seeing Greta—blessings on her sweet heart, and gracious fortune, in all places and times!—had she crossed my path of her own will, I should have rejoiced; but I clung to my quiet corner, having once settled in it, and made no effort to seek her out.

My pen which I began to use, as I have said, was used ambitiously at this period; I wrote after my German fashion, of things

abstruse and abstract, occasionally in a metaphysical vein, oftenest in a vague strain of observation of laws, and principles, and thoughts—matters which Providence had not qualified me to observe very clearly—leaving my own natural sphere untouched—yet I was tolerated by many, patronized by some, and I think it must have been just the accession of a periodical fit of restlessness which suddenly awakened me to perceive how very poor and very stupid this stuff was wherewith I was making wise. The discovery was startling. I threw away my papers and books for one while, thinking it only a fit of weariness—when I returned to them my eyes were still clearer. I set myself down as a pertinacious oracle uttering torrents of common-place, and thrust my pen into the fire indignantly, feeling something as if it had betrayed me to my own dishonour.

There was a temporary lull in my teaching, and withdrawal of my pupils, such a thing as

I ought to have calculated upon, and had indeed both looked for and passed through before; I was impatient now, and had come to a time of life besides, when I could defy the old condemnation, and had even learned to feel that "thou shalt not excel" was perhaps as much a necessity of my being as a sentence of my fate. Sadly free and unrestrained as I was, with no home ties clinging upon me, no one sufficiently interested in myself to take any pains to detain me, I had nothing to do but shake hands and go away. Even the tenacious clinging of little Robbie, and his hot, childish tears were something to think of afterwards—but no one else had time to waste a sigh on me when I went out solitary and unobserved upon the world again.

But this time I went upon the world with hosts of introductions. My good friends thrust them on me, and I accepted passively, letters which implied, as I knew, just so much

civility and common-place politeness. I went away thus introduced and fortified. I strayed through many of the oldest and most famous towns in England, lingered in university seats, in quaint, retired cathedral cities, where clerical magnates listened drowsily to the passing hum and murmur of the far away excluded world. These calm retreats did not suit my wayward mood. Stranded and beached as my vessel always was when in repose, I liked to hear the sea dashing round me, ringing upon rock and headland, and even sometimes to catch the spray of its commotion in my face. Quiet waters rippling up upon a long warm beach of sunny sand, and all the din and all the danger, breakers, and surfs, and storms removed out of sight, was not the place for me.

So, after a considerable length of roaming among famed scenes and people of some dignity, I obeyed once again the perverse impulse of my own will. I settled in a nar-

rowed sphere, dropped out of my world of literature and learning, laid my pretensions by—and without any very strong inducing motive that I can remember, suddenly found myself in a plebeian quarter of the bustling town of Liverpool, no longer a professor of the modern languages, but schoolmaster to a set of sunburnt, clouded boys, in the painful mysteries of the tongues of old.

And my little English parlour, with its many-coloured carpet carefully pursuing the line of wall into every corner—with its little mahogany chiffonier, its miniature sofa, and the half-dozen chairs which could scarcely find standing-room round the small table, with its elaborate cover—was not more unlike Madam Kleine's spacious, cold, many-windowed Salle than this English town, so full of din and ceaseless activity, was unlike sunny Wurtzburg on the Maine, where pleasure was the chiefest business. But from my little lodging, a room in which I could

scarcely turn myself, and where the guide-wife of the ballad's "three skips on the floor," would have been the merest impossibility, I looked out upon a noble glimpse of sky and sea worthy any country. True, there is little beauty in yonder bare ridges of yellow sand, and not much in the line of Cheshire coast, a lower elevation than the sloping vineyards of the Steinberg—with its scattered, straggling line of houses gathered here and there into a cluster—but to me there is something grand at all times in sight of this great river going forth like another Abraham into the unknown sea. You tell me every league is mapped and charted, and every danger known—I only know that there are shipwreck stories many a one, murmuring night and day in the hoarse surf which beats upon this dull, unfeatured coast between us and the Cambrian Dee—and that yonder the horizon stretches out its long, bright blank, hiding the world

of unknown waters into which our river and its ships render up in faith their fate—and I think of the pilgrim on his journey not knowing whither he went, when I see the noble current pass away under the sunshine, into this blank of unexplored and unseen light.

The chances are, that one time and another I have said enough about the Mersey. Nothing knows the busy river of any beauty in itself—nothing knows the town, which cares not, if its subject geni do but work enough, whether it is a glorious Hercules or a strong Caliban that drags its daily burden. But there were other things of interest and moment to me in my new locality which cost me more puzzling observation than the river. As upon a new country, a primitive formation, curious and important, I came suddenly and unawares; felt my feet stumbling upon undiscovered mountains, fell headlong into dim gulfs and valleys, roamed deep into paths that knew no ending—and saw

before me, crowded into hordes and masses, sending up indistinct voices into the night, a maze of life unwitting of method or utterance, a ferment of existence, mistily brooding sometimes over the great problem to which it had lost the key—more usually, knowing neither key nor problem, so busy with its physical capacities, that the knowledge of any other had died out of its heart.

But I am not dealing with abstract social politics, nor with modes and means of life among the working men of Liverpool. Both have interested me greatly since I stepped out of my own standing-ground—smile young patrician at the brief descent! to share in one degree, and witness in a greater, the life of the Order which at least outnumbered us all—and which wraps itself in a mailed defence of pride, prejudice, and self-estimation to the full as strong and as invincible as that which bucklers the other extremity of our classed

and graduated ranks. I only pause to say how much my own mind became occupied, not only with the class mistakes and misbeliefs so common on this level, but with the individual human creatures composing it. In such a place as Liverpool one finds no society properly so-called—coteries in abundance—knots of good people concerned about a special church, about a particular charity, whose public intercourse begets a private friendship—promoters of kindred pleasures, and the little clusters of people who know each other by force of circumstances without any other particular bond of connection than an equality of means, or vicinity of place. But for anything distinct from this, and higher—for anything at all approaching what are at least the ideal uses of society—you must seek them—if not solely in Utopia, at least in some other region than our great commercial towns. I myself by right of the place I now held was shut out inevitably

from any intercourse with the superior class of my temporary dwelling-place. Let me not deck myself in borrowed feathers—merchants, or even merchant's managers and principal men, were not likely to condescend to me—and it might be that my mind made only a virtue of necessity by turning itself upon my nearest neighbours, the working men.

And your poor schoolmaster, mark you, observes the class from another platform than that occupied by your philanthropic observer, who writes himself knight, or lord, or gentleman. Their poverty had no ideal charm to me—no interest of singular contradiction to my own lot—myself, perhaps, had felt a harder pinch than some of my young begrimed engineers would ever know. This, again, I fancy is hardly to the purpose; what I would say is, that here, withdrawn, as I had the hap to be, from all friendship of my equals, and thrown upon a new country full of interest, what natural faculty I had

of noticing and marking life came into fuller occupation than it had ever found before. In place of the pen of ambition of which I had made a hasty holocaust, I took up a new and less pretentious implement—and wrote what the world calls novels, telling the world so far as it chose to listen, what my ears heard and my eyes saw.

And so now behold me writing myself “author of” a brace of stories, falsely called works of fiction—teaching the higher branches of education in the Foundry School—living as Mrs. Formby’s lodger in her little parlour and best bedroom—waited on with various degrees of diligence by Mrs. Formby’s Mary Helen—knowing no society but of my own thoughts, little relaxation but what I take from books, receiving now and then the sober letters of Andrew, the schoolboy performances of his little son—settling down day by day into a narrower orbit, a straighter limit of content, out of reach of all the

loves and friendships, all the kindlier dependencies of human life—growing stagnant as I fear, my heart dulling slowly, insensibly, my mind closed into a self-absorbed, un-speculating quiet, and myself gradually drawing to the end of my five-and-fortieth year.

One thing alone, in this chill period, came to me wild and strong with the gales which had played about my earlier course of life; and even it, to every one but me, was a mere newspaper story, a tale of ordinary crime and not extraordinary resistance to its inevitable punishment. I read in an Edinburgh newspaper, sent me, wittingly or unwittingly I cannot tell which, by Andrew, of a man long an encourager of thieves and receiver of their spoil, whom justice at length had tracked and laid its clutch upon—of the destruction of his establishment, and the discovery of many hitherto untraced

villanies, gradually cleared up by means of the secrets of his den. This was the important part of the case so far as the interests of the public and of justice were concerned; but there remained something to stir with vague interest and wonder the heart which had grown so chill within my solitary breast. A wild plan of escape had been tried to deliver the culprit; his sister, a person of unblemished character, perfectly clear of any participation in his guilt, had exchanged dresses with him in his cell, after the plan of old romance. The effort was perfectly vain of course, and the attempt immediately detected, though it had been made with the most elaborate precautions and care.

I did not need to read the names. Poor Geordie Cockburn! foiled even in the last attempt to save him—your fate was harder than mine.

And Tom was now a convict bound for the penal colony. Even so; but the stroke of retribution strikes its heaviest on another than the sinner.

CHAPTER XIII.

COMING down to breakfast one summer morning, unquickened by either hope or apprehension that the postman newly past brought anything of interest to me, I found upon my little breakfast-table, beside my solitary plate, a letter with a broad, ghastly band of black. I took it up with fear, for my father now, at the end of another ten years, when I myself began to feel the approaches of age, grew an old man, and made such a messenger alarming. Again the post-mark of the distant Highland town, the address

in a strange hand. I broke the seal; it was a simple card of intimation, announcing to me the day and hour on which, at his own house, Lewis Methven, Esq. died.

I had never claimed, or tried to claim, my niece Elizabeth Mitchell; I had even neglected her mother's request to see the child as she grew a woman, consoling myself for the neglect by thinking my own counsels very little likely to be useful to her, and my interference not unlike to shake her hold upon her present guardian. So the girl knew nothing of her friends, for Andrew, prudent always, saw no occasion for laying himself open to possible ultimate responsibility by making offers of family regard to the young orphan; and Christina, despite a little indignant demonstration of displeasure at the heartlessness of shutting out the motherless Elizabeth from all her nearest kindred, acquiesced in her husband's conclusion at last. Dulled feeling and

indolent self-occupation restrained me, I suppose. I know the reasons I gave to myself were such paltry and feeble ones, that some stronger motive must have lain below them unrevealed.

I was roused by this intimation to a stronger interest in the matter, and curiously began to recal the baby of our old Edinburgh home. Poor child! the sharer of its father's flight—the unwitting partaker of its mother's preparations; and I remembered with a pang, the loud glee with which the infant startled us, over the last sad meal we ever took together, and all my own vague fancies that in this little one might be fulfilled at last the fitting fate of her sad mother. What manner of heart was she now? Trained out of all likeness to her own blood and family, a transcript of the haughty uprightness of the only father she had ever known—a Highland gentlewoman with all her prejudices enlisted for another family, and nothing

of her mother's gracious nature—nothing of our poor Jamie's better part. I thought upon her with some chill and involuntary self-reproach. Her mother's trust had been but so many words to me.

For a few days my mind continued full of the subject. Some purpose of even now tardily executing Sybil's commission entered my mind ; but our school holidays had not yet arrived, and several weeks must pass before I was free. I intended to write too immediately ; but it somehow happened that I did not write, and another eight days passed in my usual indolence, with no inquiry made about Sybil's child, and no notice taken of her guardian's death.

Then there came to me another letter. Strangely passive and lifeless as my mind had grown, I was still interested about this, and opened the enclosure with some emotion. It was from Elizabeth herself.

“ My dear Uncle,

“ I think it very strange I should never have written to you nor heard from you before, and it may perhaps make you think ill of me, that I should write so closely upon my father’s death. I beg your pardon, Uncle Willie, for calling little Jamie’s father mine, to you ; but he has been very good—very kind to me since ever I can remember, and I have been like his own child until now. It chills me now to find that even papa must have made so little account of me, and that all his friends look on me as a kind of alien. Do not think he forbade me writing to you, uncle, while he lived ; he never did that ; I only knew and felt he would rather I was content with him ; and though I looked and longed many a year for seeing you or hearing from you, as my mother told me I should, I was not bold enough to write when I

was a child, and when I grew a woman I began to fear that my own father's friends had forgotten that he ever had a daughter, and would not care to hear from me.

“I was only ten when we came from Canada, but I remember everything about the voyage, when poor little Jamie was born and my mother died: My mother told me you were sure to come to see me, and would take care of me and comfort me; and I cannot tell you how I used to pine, nor how I expected, and thought every stranger upon the road was my uncle coming at last to the poor little girl that looked for him so drearily. I think my mother's death must have been a very great affliction to papa, and he took little notice of me or even of the baby for a long time; but we had a pleasant house, and servants, and no hardships like what I had sometimes seen my mother bear before; and though I was never very merry,

I suppose I had just as happy a life as most others, and soon began to go to school, and felt less lonely every day. Then papa grew very fond of Jamie, and then, poor little fellow! he had his accident; and I was very anxious, and had a great deal of occupation attending to him, and papa grew very kind to me too. We got some friends in the neighbourhood—we began to see more people, and this was how our life passed until now.

“Papa’s illness was severe and long, and I think he was pleased with me then, though he said little; but when he bade the rest farewell before he died, he had not a word for me more than a servant, though he called me ‘My dear.’ Now, uncle, I find he has said nothing about me to any one, but has just been content to leave me here, so very poor and friendless, without so much as bidding one of his friends be kind to me. I did not want anything from him—he has been very

kind—he has kept me like his own daughter ; but I see now that I never had any place, even as little Jamie's sister, in his thoughts. I do not think I deserved this ; and now it turns out that, though papa himself lived at considerable expense, and our house was kept like a gentleman's house, he has not been rich nor able to make much provision for his poor little son. There is no will, and the furniture must be sold to pay some debts, and Jamie will have nothing but an annuity of fifty pounds a-year, which was settled on my mother when she married. That is fixed and secure to him, and he is clever, poor little fellow ! and may be able, perhaps, for some of the professions, if his health strengthens ; and I think—I have got a very good education, uncle—that if I only had something to do myself, I might keep Jamie, and be able to get good masters for him, and do justice to his mind, poor little man ! even on his fifty pounds.

“I am afraid—I am afraid, uncle, you will think me very cold-hearted to write in this calculating way, so soon after the death of the only friend I have ever known ; but I think it was cruel of papa to leave no message for me or about me, and even to appoint no one to take care of little Jamie. If he had been rich, I dare say some one might have been ready enough to take him ; but, requiring so much care as he does, strangers are not likely to think the little income he has, enough to make up to them for all their trouble. Papa has no near friends—cousins only and connexions, and they are all much puzzled what to do with him, and call him—*my* little brother, my mother’s baby, Jamie—‘the poor little boy.’ When I hear them, my face burns, I grow almost fierce ; but what can I do but cry, and take him away, and be more careful of him than ever ? They have come to no decision yet what is to be done with him, and they never take notice of

me ; but I have a strong temptation to run away some night, and bring my little brother. Nobody will ever take care of him like me ; and to part with Jamie would break my heart.

“ Dear uncle, write to me what I must do. If I came to you, and tried to get some pupils, do you think I could make enough to live ? I would not burden you, uncle ; but I think, if you were sending for me, and offering to take charge of Jamie, they perhaps might consent. I have got a very good education. I think I could teach other girls quite as well as I was taught myself ; and perhaps I might make as much as would keep both of us, and save Jamie’s little income for him, till he came to be a man. What if he should never grow strong, poor little fellow ! and no true friend but me, and only these cold cousins to look to, in all the world ?

“ I am anxious to leave home—I mean to

leave this place; and, but for Jamie's sake, I would have come away, instead of writing, and begged you to take me in, for it will be easier for me to leave now than it might be perhaps in a week or two. My dear uncle, you will perhaps think I am asking a great deal, being only a stranger; but I am your brother's daughter, and my poor mother's eldest child, and if you would only write me, for her sake, such a letter as I could show *them*, offering to take charge of Jamie—he never shall be any trouble to you, uncle, and you will soon be as fond of him as I am—I would thank you all my life. In another week the sale is to be, and I would be very glad to get away before it comes.

“ELIZABETH MITCHELL.”

Elizabeth Mitchell! My heart was strangely stirred. Half woman, half child, the letter appealed to me, with a singular right and claim upon my interest, very new and very

unusual to my isolation ; and very strange too, was the strong, half-maternal love in the young mind, which felt responsibility and trust so much more strongly in regard to this child, than I had done in regard to her. I ceased to speculate on the baby looks of my niece, Elizabeth ; ceased to think of her in her long streaming robes, with a smile, or to remember with a sigh how her little form was wrapped in her mother's shawl, on her mother's dreary journeys. It became me to rouse myself from my habitual dulness and inaction ; it became me to rise up from my indolent, reclining frame of spirit, to uncover my head in becoming honour to the woman, while I gave the young ingenuous heart appealing to me the kindest counsel in my power. I will not deny that an under-current of perturbation, half pleasurable, half annoying, suggested to me the singular change which this little parlour, into which my individual person fitted snugly enough,

like an instrument into its case, must undergo, if it became even a temporary sitting-room for a refined young woman and a delicate child; nor that it was a question with me, put half consciously, but left unanswered, how I myself, with all my formal and stiffening habits, would appear under the change. My first step, however, taken in the evening of the same day, was to write to my niece at once, and without hesitation, such a letter as would content herself, I thought, and might sway her little brother's friends. This little brother, I confess, I felt rather uncertain about—not very clear in my own mind that I should feel sufficiently prepossessed, to satisfy Elizabeth, in favour of Mr. Lewis Methven's son. Jamie too—the name which should have been a claim upon my kindness, jarred upon my delicacy—the son of Sibby's second husband, called by my brother's name—and I felt a little haughtiness, and even disgust, as I wondered how the child came

by it, and whether it could be possible that Sibby herself—Sibby, so pure of mind, and fastidious of feeling, could have committed so strange a blunder, as to call her baby thus, of her own will. My thoughts on this subject, however, had no influence on my letter. I wrote it with some fervour, for Elizabeth's sake; and proceeded afterwards to throw into a little ferment of consultation my puzzled landlady, Mrs. Formby, and my curious attendant, Mary Helen. It was no small problem, with their scant accommodation, to devise decorous means for the reception of my guests.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME five or six days after this, I was startled in my little class-room, by a message from the outer school that a young lady was waiting there to see me.

It was June, and very near the afternoon hour of dismissal, so our pupils were proportionably restless, listless, heated and noisy. I hurried, not without some anxiety, out of the subdued hubbub of my own smaller apartment, into the aggravated dust and clamour of this. The outer school was of considerable size, a long room, supported

on slim bare pillars of iron, fitted up with a gaunt sloping gallery of unpainted wood, which filled one end and overshadowed the rest, and with benches and desks on the lower level entirely correspondent in their dingy colour and most homely simplicity of form. The gallery at the moment was crowded with a mass of fatigued children, some practising a painful attention—some rubbing their eyes with jacket-sleeves and corners of aprons, and by these means keeping up a staring wakefulness, wonderful to see—the more alert playing tricks upon the drowsier—the whole in a state promising anything but edification from the last lesson, which was being administered, with many interruptions and impatient calls upon their attention, by a teacher as much worn out as they.

The evening sun streamed in from the windows at the other end—streamed in dustily, throwing itself aslant on the black

iron pillars, the dingy, ink-stained, unoccupied desks, the coloured travesties and caricatures of innocent creatures, wild and tame, which hung upon the walls. By this lower side of the room I entered, and, entering, saw before me, beside one of the windows, a slight girlish figure, in mourning, turning the face which I could not see, towards the gallery and its unruly assemblage, and bending down to speak to and direct to the same quarter the eyes of a little crippled boy, very slight and delicate of form, whose hand she held tenderly between her own.

I cannot tell what singular emotions stirred within me, when my eye fell on the head bending forward with a certain graceful heaviness, like a drooping lily, upon the slight curve of the slender shoulders, and on the white shapely hand, ungloved and gleaming out of its sable drapery, in which the child's small fingers lay enclosed.

Was this Sybil Wood again, in all the unconscious pathos of her natural grace, standing before my eyes in the living world once more? But that is not Sybil's rich raven hair which escapes from under the heavy veil and reveals itself full in its bright colour against the black dress it falls upon. No—not Sybil's! and with a still warmer gush, my heart flows to my eyes—Jamie, my lost brother! so often as I have seen the sunlight cling caressingly round your own joyous youthful forehead, touching into fuller warmth and brightness these self-same curls of golden brown!

My heart was full; I had to stand still where I was to compose myself, before attempting to meet these strangers. But while I paused, the boy's quick eye caught note of me. "Look!" I heard him exclaim under his breath, "look, he has come!"

Elizabeth turned round; in the first glance I did not see her face, arrested as I was by

the pair of quick, acute, almost elvish, dark eyes, which gleamed upon me from the lower level, and took in my whole person and character with one bold rapid survey. My niece advanced to me quickly—but she did not hold out her own hands, or claim in her own person my ready, if somewhat faltering welcome. Holding the child fast, she drew him forward—put into mine, with an eager appealing look, his small thin hand. “Uncle, this is little Jamie.” The uncle had much ado, thus appealed to, to keep within himself and inaudible, the swell of sobbing laughter which suddenly possessed his breast.

Little Jamie himself, by no means supplicatory or pathetic, held me fast with the keen inquiry of his half defiant eyes. “How does he intend to receive her? this is my concern,” said the boy’s fixed and peremptory look. To content them both and control myself was no easy matter. I took the

child's hand with one of mine, grasped my niece in the other, bade her welcome with a tremulous voice, and no very clear understanding of what I said—for there again, shining on me full of tears, out from under the fair pale brow of Sybil Wood, were my dead brother's sunny eyes.

Sunny eyes!—eyes which would never consent to have the light quenched fully out of them, yet full of all the beautiful depths of possible sadness, which even in their earliest childhood gave a foreshadowed sorrow to Sybil's face. The long rich eyelashes were her mother's—and her mother's were the delicate features—the unusual poetic refinement that touched every line with a beauty of the mind and of the spirit—but in their warmer colour, and in the smile which I could discover lying under those half-restrained tears, the eyes were our Jamie's changeful eyes.

Beautiful is a great word—I am always

slow of using it—and I think I never gave it before consciously even to my sweet-hearted Greta—but my niece Elizabeth was beautiful to me.

I took them hastily into my class-room. I dismissed my wondering scholars—and then we passed through all these little dingy streets together, and climbing our bright Everton Hill with my niece upon my arm, and little Jamie holding me fast by one hand, while he wielded his crutch with the other, I led my strangers home.

My own mind was in a singular state of quiet excitation—an underflow of deep and long quiescent feeling, a suffusion over these of amusement, and even half-concealed delight. To see my niece disappear under the guidance of the extremely curious, excited and admiring Mary Helen, to hear her light foot returning down-stairs, to watch her come in, with her graceful head uncovered, her outer wrappings laid aside,

to take my own seat silently, and look as unmoved as I could, while Elizabeth assumed hers, presiding over my little table as if she felt it her natural occupation and place, and through all, to note continually fixed upon me—upon me, who had so long felt myself the privileged observer of all societies I formed part of—continually watching me, with a curve of the little brow, a quick, sidelong elevation of the little impetuous head—the dark gleaming elfin eyes, that gave force and meaning to little Jamie's face.

“We were here before, uncle,” said Elizabeth, as she gave me my cup of tea, “we came in a coach from the place where we landed—and then your landlady directed the man how to drive us to the school; Jamie does not walk a great deal, you know, uncle. I was afraid he would be wearied coming up the hill.

“But I'm not wearied.” My little critic

spoke abruptly, and would not withdraw his eyes from me.

“Come, little man, you have made your survey,” said I, at last, with a smile. “It is time to deliver your judgment, Jamie—what do you think of me?”

A quick, momentary flush crossed the child’s face, and he cast down his keen eyes abashed and shy—but raising them again instantly, fixed them once more with a less scrutinizing but quite as earnest look upon my face.

“I think you’ll like Bessie, there, and be good to her,” said the boy still more abruptly. “That’s what I’m caring for.”

“And what about yourself, little fellow?”

“I’ll grow up and be a man,” said little Jamie. “Nobody could do much harm to me, nor break my heart—and if I was old enough, I would like to see them just try to meddle with her!”

And a sudden red hue of passion crossed the thin white cheeks again, and I saw a hot tear, which Jamie would have felt himself eternally disgraced by shedding, glitter over his eye. Here was a little rebel to exercise my prowess upon; but my heart was touched by the mutual protection which these two orphans gave each other. The real and constant solicitude with which Elizabeth, like a young mother, guarded him—the eager jealousy with which he set himself sentinel, to see that she was not defrauded of her due honour—the appreciation which he already felt to be her right.

“Jamie is to be a great man, uncle,” said Elizabeth—and she added with an unconscious saddening of tone, which I perceived the little keen observer take diligent note of, as I myself did, “I am to be his housekeeper—and we are to live in Edinburgh or London till we are rich enough to have a house of our

own in the country—for we have made all our plans already.”

“It’s no fun,” said Jamie, indignantly lowering upon her with a momentary frown, “you need not laugh, Bessie—for I know what I’ll do.”

But Elizabeth did laugh—it was only for an instant, and the sound died away in a little burst of tears.

“I was only thinking of poor papa,” she said softly, as she rose from the table and went to the window. Then I saw great tears swelling large and full into Jamie’s eyes, and his breast heaved, and he drew his breath hard with proud resistance to the child’s fit of crying which was so very near conquering his manhood—but first one great blot fell upon Jamie’s sleeve, and then another upon the table before him. The boy cast one defiant frowning look at me, to satisfy himself that I had not observed him shed them, and then

he seized his little crutch and shuffled up to his room, where half-an-hour after, I heard him sobbing convulsively as I passed the door.

“Will you like Jamie, uncle?” said Elizabeth, wistfully, turning to me, after her eyes had followed him out of the room, and we had listened together silently to the stamp of his crutch upon the narrow stair “He is not like other boys, perhaps, poor little fellow—shall you like him, uncle?”

“Yes,” said I almost as abruptly as the child himself could have answered. “I shall like him, do not fear. Are you not going to comfort him, Elizabeth?”

“No, uncle—he would not like it,” said my niece, “he has to be left to himself often, when other children would be petted and soothed; and Jamie was very fond of papa—I say papa, because Jamie said it, and to make some distinction between him and

my true father; uncle, you are not displeased?"

"No, I am not displeased," I answered, "Mr. Methven *was* kind to you, Elizabeth, after all."

"Oh he was kind — very kind," said Elizabeth, covering her face to hide the natural tears which would make themselves evident upon her cheek. "I was hurt and wounded at first, uncle, to think he should have minded me so little; but now, when I have Jamie safe, and we are both here with you, I can think of him justly. I think no one had ever a better father. I think no one was ever so ungrateful as me."

And the orphan wept sore. I cannot tell whether a little natural jealousy made me feel myself defrauded by this testimony of strong regard towards the protector who had shielded all her most susceptible years. I know that my own evident and acknowledged motive

was to divert her grief, and turn her thoughts to a new channel. So I asked her how she procured the consent of the friends, and got her little brother away ?

“ It is three days ago, now,” said Elizabeth, composing herself with difficulty. “ I had heard something to hurry me—that is, uncle, I had heard of some people coming—coming back—that I did not wish to meet. I was very anxious to be gone before they came—and papa’s friends all the time they were making out lists, and arranging what was to be sold, were having meetings day after day and disputing what was to be done with poor Jamie—for it is common to think he is ill-tempered, and gives a great deal of trouble, though I am sure nothing could be more foolish or untrue. So none of them would take him themselves, and they could come to no settlement about it. I was very anxious and excited, uncle ; I went in to them that

night—I told them nobody had so good a right to Jamie as me—that I was not afraid of the trouble, or of what he would cost me, and that they might keep his income if they liked, and save it for him till he came to be a man, if they would only let himself come with me; and then I said we were going to you, to live with you. They asked me if I was sure you would be content to take us in? I thought I could answer for you at once, though I had never seen you; *they* laughed at my confidence, and said you would not—but then, by good fortune, just at that moment your letter came. Then I left them no time to think; I said I myself *would* go tomorrow—that I could not on any account stay another day—and they were taken by surprise and consented. We had a very long journey—we slept one night on the road, and last night were at sea; but I think Jamie is not tired much; and we are

here safe beside you. It was very good of you to write so kindly, uncle—very good—and you think you will like poor little Jamie?”

“Yes,” said I somewhat vacantly; “but how did he come by his name? Sybil—your mother, Elizabeth—surely never called him so?”

“It was his grandfather’s name—his grandfather Methven’s name,” said Elizabeth. “My mother died so soon, uncle—so very soon after the baby was born—he was only the baby, then, poor little fellow—for he did not get his name till we came home.”

I was satisfied—and being so, I ventured on another question. “Will you tell me, then, who these people were, whom you felt so unwilling to meet—friends or no friends, my dear? why did you hurry away before them?”

A flush covered my niece's cheek—her lip quivered, her eye filled; "I think I must go to Jamie, uncle," she said, hastily, "and I can tell you this another time."

CHAPTER XV.

“AND now, uncle, what am I to do?” asked Elizabeth, as we lingered at our little breakfast table, next morning. I looked up inquiringly, not comprehending the question.

“I do not mean that,” she added at once. “I mean, how am I to begin, uncle—how am I to set about my new work? I think I can teach; I have taught Jamie many a time, and liked it; but I don’t know how to get pupils; and we have not come to

burden you, uncle. You must tell me how to begin."

"Is a housekeeper so expensive a luxury, then?" said I. "I think I am able to afford one at present. Will you think I am taking a great liberty if I call this young lady, Bessie, as you do, little man?"

"No," said the boy, again with a momentary shyness; but he still had not relaxed his intent and jealous watch over all my looks and movements.

"Well then, Bessie," said I, "you must know that I have had a little money lately, over and above my income. See, there are a couple of books yonder, in the corner. Nobody knows that they are great performances or appreciates them as anything remarkable; but they have brought me in something additional to my ordinary means. So I propose that myself and little Jamie here be your only pupils for a time; we will provide you quite enough occupation, I

fancy. Hush! I have not been much accustomed to such indulgences; and this is a luxury I can afford."

"But, uncle—" began Elizabeth, hastily.

"Not a word; when you make a man the head of a family, you give him some domestic rule, I hope," I answered, smiling. "Come, I have had little authority all my life; if you two orphan children are to be bairns of mine, you must submit yourselves to me. What do you say, little philosopher, is not that sound doctrine?"

"Do you write books?" demanded Jamie; and again he searched me through and through with his suspicious eyes.

"Not books—only some stories," said I; "but that is no answer to my question. Bessie, are you content?"

"I do not know, uncle—I do not know;" Elizabeth bent her head, and played nervously with the table-cloth. "I shall think I have been very presumptuous in coming, if I

am not to work for myself, now that I am here."

"You shall work for yourself; and in the meantime, you see, I must go away to my school," said I, rising. "Take your charge out of doors a little, Elizabeth, up to the top of this brae here, to see the river—and make acquaintance with my books, and with your household arrangements, to-day—we shall have more talk at night; and you, Jamie, my boy, shall have lessons to learn, while Bessie is housewife; or should Bessie be something greater than a housewife, think you?" I added, hastily, as the child's brow gathered into an ominous frown.

"It's her that knows best," said the boy, boldly confronting me, and grasping his little crutch. "She should be what she likes—for you never saw her till last night."

"Hush, Jamie!" Elizabeth was as solicitous that I should please Jamie as that Jamie should please me.

“He is quite right,” said I, laying my hand for a moment upon the little erect head, which seemed considerably more than half inclined to take my caress as an insult, “and we shall do nothing she does not like, trust me for that ; but now I must go away.”

I went away with a smile of amusement on my lip. This little brother’s championship was no trifling matter to encounter ; and I caught his watchful glance through the window, seeing me safely away. But though little Jamie’s suspicion amused me, it took my heart by storm. I could almost fancy some charm, as potent as that which witched the lion into a maiden’s guardian, had roused the proud, defiant manhood in the breast of this little crippled boy.

And I myself had a motive for speedy return to-night, which freshened the wind upon my cheek, and made my step light as a youth’s. No need to loiter along the dusty summer highway, or cast half-jealous looks

upon the children playing in the sun. Myself had an interest at home to-day, and two such young hearts waiting for me there as few of the common-place homes about me, I fancied, could supply; and when I came past the window of my little parlour—the vacant window from which of old no face had looked but my own, or the curious, half-clandestine face of Mary Helen, making stealthy investigations among my books and papers, and glancing up now and then, lest my unseasonable approach should discover her curiosity—I saw the eager eyes of little Jamie, just looking over the edge of the blind, from where he rested, perched upon his knees on one of the chairs within; and over Jamie's head the fair appearance of my niece, Elizabeth, standing behind him, caressing with her hand his keen, half-frowning brow, and, like him, looking out for me.

And it was Elizabeth who opened the door for me. I was far above the necessity now

of waiting on the threshold without, while Mary Helen finished her back-door gossip with our next neighbour. Coming in, I found my books—my own particular unappreciated children—occupying the foremost place upon the table; while Jamie clambered down off his chair, with considerably more respect for me in his watchful eyes. To have written a book, was an extraordinary achievement with Jamie; good or bad, a mighty thing accomplished; and I saw he was moved, most grievously against his will, by a little awe of me.

But day by day, as we lived together—as he watched me away in the morning, and again upon his knees, elevated on the chair, looked for my return at night—the jealousy died out of Jamie's eyes. By various little tokens which I, observing all and saying nothing, could see that his sister eagerly remarked, I found that my little critic at last

gave in his reluctant approval of me. I did appreciate Bessie—Bessie's jealous guardian could deny it no longer; and though he still defied any demonstration of kindness towards himself, Jamie condescended to spring out of the room upon his crutch, to bring my hat to me; and appropriated my vacant hand, without hesitation, when we went upon our evening walks. Often have I wondered what their intercourse was, left day after day together as they were—these two, so strangely different, so nearly and so tenderly allied. The youthful woman, full of all high visionary musings, with her long reveries, half dream, half thought; her little shy flushes of unwitting enthusiasm; her grave, conscious responsibility, the sobering touch of her mother-love; and the little acute, penetrating child, self-willed and strong of nature, with his constitutional quickness of observation, his clear-sighted search into all things presented to

him ; his perfect submission to her in some things, and unquestioned supremacy in others. They were always interested in each other's society—what manner of intercourse was theirs ?

Some ten days after their arrival, when we had settled into a wonderful composure of family life, very much to my delight and astonishment, the first novelty having so much worn off, that I was able to pursue my usual occupations, without feeling my politeness constrained to notice my companions—we were seated together in our usual fashion at sunset. This was our hour for walking, in most evenings ; but Jamie had been with me at school to-day, and was too much tired to go out again—though you hardly could have fancied so much, to see the quickness with which these dark eyes glanced up their half-frowning inquiry at every motion which was made, or sound heard in the little

room. Jamie was learning his lessons, and had a despot's intolerance of being disturbed.

I sat myself at my desk writing. Solitary as I had been for so many years, it was not easy for these two to disturb me; and at this moment, as it happened, my pen hung idly in my fingers, and the pause which they, I suppose, interpreted as a fit of profound thought on my part, was in reality a little rest of pleased and happy abstraction. Elizabeth sat at the window, a little table before her, her work in her hand—and my niece's graceful head stooped forward as usual, with a spell of meditation on it, impossible to misinterpret. I saw she was away, absorbed and lost in her own fairy land—where this charmed region lay, or what were its lights and its shadows, I could not tell—but I could tell with unfailing certainty that she wandered in it now. There

was no chance of disturbing *her*. Passing sounds and passing voices might float in faintly to her dream—but none of them could break it, or disturb the haze of potent fancy which wrapped her heart about.

Only Jamie, himself the most restless little spirit that ever fretted mortal nerves, remained aware of any interruptions to the silence, or disturbable by them; and I watched with amusement the starts and upward gleams of discomposure with which he testified his sensitiveness; how he threw about his small nervous limbs, how his head darted up and down in its rapid changes of posture—and the half frown upon the curved forehead, the half comical passion of impatience in the dark eyes.

At this moment the postman's knock, universal awakener of interest and curiosity, resounded through our little house. Elizabeth looked up—and something which struck

me like a gleam of intense excitement and anxiety flashed out of her lifted eyes. My first idea was to smile at the interest thus suddenly aroused, and to assure her that my correspondence was of a most unexciting nature; but I stayed in time, and held my peace, for it was easy to see, from the flush of burning colour, and the wavering of deep and painful paleness, that my niece's anxiety was of a far more exclusively personal character than anything having reference to me.

There ensued a parley—to myself scarcely audible—between the postman and Mary Helen; but the younger ears that listened, made it out before I could. “Miss Methven—it's for you, Bessie,” cried the boy, whose every sense had the acuteness of a savage; and before he spoke, Elizabeth had risen—risen with that intense calm and rapidity of motion which I had seen so often in her mother—and passed like a spirit to the door. The voices

hushed suddenly, as the low tone of hers trembled on the air; then the same light step hurried up-stairs, and we heard it pass immediately into the apartment overhead—her own room.

Miss Methven—I had indeed guessed before that Elizabeth had been accustomed to be called by her guardian's name; but unconsciously the sound of it startled me into sudden jealousy and half displeasure. I was suspicious of her correspondent, almost half-distrustful of herself; and when looking up, I caught the watchful look of little Jamie fixed upon me, with keen and eager penetration, as if to inquire whether Elizabeth's unknown correspondent would be agreeable to me, my annoyance came to a climax. This little elf of a boy, I fancied, was admitted more fully to my niece's confidence than I; and, without considering how little concern I had shown for her former life, or

how short a time she had been with me, I started up and paced the room, restless and disturbed. Like a sharp-witted watch-dog, following the motions of some suspicious intruder, Jamie fixed me with his eye. Could I intend to interfere with Bessie—to check her actions, or curb her will? And I saw the fierce frown of defiance curl again upon the little forehead. Prompt and ready was Bessie's champion—fully awake to the first hostile movement, and armed to the teeth in defence.

It was some time before Elizabeth returned to the room, and when she did, I thought she had been weeping, though it was evident that every trace of it had been carefully effaced, and some little time even spent at her toilet before she joined us; but she resumed her work, her seat, her silence, and lingered there in the twilight, behind the little window-curtain, even after we had

candles placed upon the table. I cannot tell the degree of restlessness and impatience which by this time had come upon me; and Jamie, with what I could almost think a distinct intention of provoking me, found excuse after excuse for sitting up beyond his usual bed-time, till I felt that my niece could have no opportunity, however much inclined she might be, to admit me to her confidence to-night.

CHAPTER XVI.

THEY had both retired for the night—Elizabeth and her watchful brother—and I sat alone in my parlour, for the first time feeling myself eased when they went away. That I had as yet very little title to be received into the confidence of a mind so maidenly and delicate, was very true ; but this had not the effect upon me it might and should have had. I felt a vague right—a very distinct annoyance and restless displeasure—and the “ Miss Methven ” still rung in my ear against my will.

It was growing late, nearly midnight, when through the silence I heard a soft footstep stealing down-stairs—then a hesitating sound half asking admittance, half essaying to open the closed door—and then the door *was* opened timidly, and Elizabeth's face appeared behind. "Uncle, may I come in?"

She came in—I could see she was considerably agitated—and drawing close to me, where I could only partially see her face, sat down; a moment's silence followed—of waiting on my part—of preparation I think on Elizabeth's—and I could see she held a letter half-concealed in her hand.

"I want to ask your advice, uncle," she said at last, beginning hastily and going on with a rapidity that soon increased her agitation so far as to make her breathless. "It is a case—a case I have to give counsel in, myself. I know somebody—a woman—a

young girl—who has been brought up, uncle, in a station she has no natural right to—and has been considered a rich man's daughter, and a lady herself when she was nothing. In these times she met a—another person—still higher than herself—and after they had been acquainted a long time, it went farther than mere friendship; and he—for he was quite young too, and did not know the world—spoke to her—uncle, you know what I mean—and they went through a foolish country form, and called themselves betrothed. I mean *he* did—I never—I mean she said nothing at all, but just let him have his way. Then it came, uncle, that death and misfortune came upon her house—and he was away at the time. So she found out she was quite poor and desolate, and would have to work for her bread—and she took serious thought with herself what she should do. She was very different now from what she used to be

—and though it was a great trial, she thought she would write him a letter, and say he must never think of her more—and so just go away herself and leave the place, and never let him know where she had gone—she did it, uncle ; but some way he found it out—and—and—and—he has written to me again to-day.”

The last words burst from her lips with a great gasp—her heart had got the mastery of her delicate, shrinking reserve—she could keep up the faint disguise no longer—and hiding her face in her hands, Elizabeth wept and sobbed by my side—the tears trickling through her fingers—wetting the letter—the cause of all this passion of mingled happiness, distress, and affection—which she pressed against her brow.

“And what has he written, my poor child?” said I, as tenderly as it was in me to speak.

It was some time before Elizabeth could raise her head—even then she let her hair droop over her flushed and tear-wet cheek, and shaded her brow with her hand—and then she wavered long, looking at the letter as if it were a thing too sacred for any eye but her own—I saw the self-discussion. I saw the long struggle between womanly reluctance, shy and timid, afraid to betray its own trembling happiness—afraid to show how dearly it was regarded—and the impulse of frank and full confession which had brought her with her story to me. At last it was decided in my favour—once or twice the hand which held it rose and fell—and at last with a half-desperate haste, the letter was placed before me on the table.

“Uncle, look at itself.”

Her head drooped again, half under her supporting arm, and I, remembering certain old fantasies of my own, opened the rustling

paper as quietly as it was possible to open it. The letter was such a letter as I might once have written myself—full of a young man's fervour and passionate eloquence. He had newly found a trace of her he said—he could not come himself on the instant, for his brother was ill, and his presence needed—but why—why—what possible reason could there be for her desertion of him? Had he not a right to be consulted in every important step she took—was it not his certain privilege—a thing which scarcely she herself had any power to alienate—to share whatever sorrow, whatever misfortune, she might have to bear—and what cause could there be in the “poverty!”—I almost thought I could see the beautiful youthful scorn with which the emphasis was made—with which she tried to daunt him. Poverty!—why if they were both poor, what happiness would be hindered thereby?—did *he* not know she would work

with him nobly—and could not *she* understand how he almost grudged his own wealth because it stood in the way of working for her, with a true man's heart and hands. My eyes filled as I read. So much of warm, true, genuine nature, so much of the strong enthusiasm of youth had not refreshed my eyes for many a day. I fancy I had taken long, at least to the apprehension of the agitated observer beside me, in reading the letter, for I saw as I concluded it, that she had slightly changed her position, so as to watch through the lattice-work of her own half-curved hair and supporting fingers, the changes of my face. But when she saw me make an evident conclusion, Elizabeth's face, veiled as it was, turned noiselessly away from me again. She would not look up to meet my answering eye.

I folded the letter up into her hand once more. "My child," said I, with the caressing

usage which another language had taught me, "I used to fancy long ago, when you were an infant, that your mother's soul was stealing into you, that it lay with you to accomplish your mother's fate. Sybil, poor heart, had all the shadow—you are to win the sunshine—Elizabeth, I would tell you, you were rich, however poor he was—deal with it reverently, little one—you scarcely know what it is, though it makes you happy—this is not a heart to throw away."

"Oh, uncle!" I am not sure that a tear out of my own eyes did not mingle with those most blessed tears of hers which fell upon my hand.

"But I must not do it—I must not do it," exclaimed Elizabeth, starting violently after a few minutes had passed. "He is a gentleman, almost noble—very noble I know, in nature," and she ventured to throw back

her shadowing hair, and to reveal to me for a moment, the kindling face, flushed and dilated with its joy of pride—"but almost so in family and birth besides. Uncle, listen to me—I am in very grave and sober earnest. What do you think the county ladies would say to *me*? It is well known now that I was not papa's child—no one knows what I am, nor how I came to be treated like his daughter—and will I go, think you, to take away honour or place from *him*? You may say it is fantastic, uncle—I cannot help it—I cannot help it—I am not his equal, I am born in a different class, to a different life and different prospects. It would be said that he demeaned himself—he *would* demean himself. Yes, yes, it is true, I am proud—proud both for him and me."

And a passion of another kind—not of joy, or pride, or agitated happiness—but of

a kind still more womanish and natural than all these—the impulse of self-sacrifice and self-resignation shone in Elizabeth's face. "No, no, no"—her lips pressed firmly together—her features moved. I looked at her in her high strain of resolution, beautiful, sad, determined. Twenty years ago I should have applauded and confirmed it—now I strove with all my might of argument to turn its strength aside.

"Your mother would have done honour to any station—as you yourself will," said I. "Your father—my own poor Jamie—had many a fault belonging to our lower class, very miserable, very ruinous ; but there was even refinement, and a natural gentleness in him. Yourself—but it is best for the youth here to tell you what yourself are, Elizabeth My child, happiness is not to be lightly cast away. It seems to me you may have it here, for the acceptance. I know life better

than you. I have seen how seldom a second chance comes, when the first is thrown away."

"I will look for no second chance, uncle," said Elizabeth, interrupting me proudly. Simple heart! it did not occur to her how nature after all would long to be happy in many a still and lonely hour, after it had renounced its hopes.

"The morning and the evening come to us all," said I, gravely; "but there is a long, dull day between, when the heart sickens for the sun. More than one hope has set for me, Elizabeth; you must hear my sober knowledge; I cannot see you wilfully cloud your own life and cloud another's without warning. No earthly bar is between this young man and you—and I ask you, as he does, why—why—what would you reject him for?"

"She ought to be a lady of his own

class—she ought to be his equal,” said Elizabeth, under her breath. “I am neither; and I will not drag him down below his natural station—I will not have people say he has made an unworthy alliance. Oh, uncle! no, do not speak to me; I must not do it—I am too proud; but even *he* must not stoop to me.”

There was a considerable pause. Yes, she was very proud; sensitive, imaginative, fanciful pride—but it swayed her mightily.

“And what do you propose to yourself in atonement?” said I, with some harshness—I believe I was cruel in this speech, and wilfully so.

“I propose no atonement to myself,” said Elizabeth, faintly, but with dignity, “none. When such a thing has to be done, it is not a matter of calculation, uncle, and one knows nothing can atone; but there are many things remaining, I

know—and poor little cripple Jamie, who has no one but me to care for him in all the world.”

I had reached to the heart of her motive now ; but inexpressibly touched as I was by the low sighing tone of this last sentence, I could answer nothing. Then Elizabeth laid another letter before me, and rose to go away.

“I wrote this before I came down,” she said. “Give it to me in the morning, uncle—then I will send it away. Good night.”

Good night ! She was gone, and I sat solitary once more to read another youthful heart—a heart most sad, most delicate, most true, which did only the more reveal and endear itself in this renunciation—such a renunciation as I felt the writer of the other letter never could and never would content himself with. But as to me, so

to him, Elizabeth made no mention of the last and closest motive which induced her to reject him. "Little cripple Jamie" did not at all figure in his sister's letter. And but that she had made allusion to him as a consolation for her sacrifice, even I would never have suspected how much effect he had upon this sacrifice as a cause.

I fear I smiled as I gave her back the letter next morning; for I saw her eye quicken into a half suspicion—and I said nothing to dissuade her from sending it. Written in all sincerity as it was, the guileless heart shone through its every line too clearly to let the receiver despair, and I knew very well, that he who could himself feel so warmly would never accept a dismissal like this.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME days of unbroken outward tranquillity passed over us. I could not shut my eyes to the involuntary restlessness which poor Elizabeth endeavoured to disguise, sometimes under perfect silence, sometimes under an assumed and painful gaiety. I knew myself the bitter misery of that interval, when the haunting, intrusive hope will interpose to keep the fevered heart on a constant rack of peradventures; and I felt for my poor child in the agony of expectation which she could neither banish nor subdue.

At first, it is true, my sympathy was not of a very engrossing kind ; I was almost amused to mark how nature gave the lie to resolution—and the heart perversely sickened with hope for the reversal of the sentence which itself had wilfully spoken—for I was very confident myself of the happiest issue to this little drama. But day by day passed over us—day by day—and Elizabeth's cheek paled and her beauty grew sad and majestic, and I saw her force her heaving breast and panting breath into measured stillness and calm ; and over myself, as I sat and watched her, came a faintness of disappointed hope. I had never seen the young writer of Elizabeth's letter ; yet it pained me grievously to think that he could acquiesce—that the love which promised so well was after all so hollow and so faint.

Day after day—day after day—alas, my

sad Elizabeth ! and I, who knew the cause so well, could think how she laboured to persuade herself that this was just as she desired it to be, and tried in vain to be glad that her will was acquiesced in so readily, and her decision accepted ; and with a strange pathetic quiver in her pale lip, I saw her sometimes take the hand of Jamie within her own, and press it tremulously between the fingers which closed over it with a nervous gripe most eloquent and expressive to me. Yes, little brother, you are all—all but the half-stranger uncle, on whom her heart yet has scarcely learned to repose ; and you cannot discover, not even with the keenest glance of these dark, watchful, penetrating eyes, what a sacrifice has been made for you, nor the secret share you have in this trial which she has brought upon herself.

Day by day—alas ! still day by day ; she

has brought it on herself—it was her own will—and even her wounded pride takes solace in the thought—and Elizabeth bears her grief womanfully, with fortitude and composure, though I can see how every nerve is strained to the exertion, and what a constant thrill and motion are in her delicate veins. I said she would fulfil her mother's fate—alas! poor Sybil has not exhausted all the shadows—the sunshine is hard to come at, long of shining—and now I must look on again, unhelping and incapable of help, while this heart break before my eyes.

For myself, I have no sooner got these living objects of interest before me, than my mind falls back into its natural standing-ground—becomes again spectator, counsellor, friend—most commonly passive looker-on and observer, with all my own identity merged in the more real existences I see

at my side. It may be that this is a usual thing with persons in such a position as mine; but very certain it was that to me, little Jamie perched upon his chair, his lesson-book in his hand, his crutch within his reach, his small nervous fingers twitching about the leaves of his book, or entangled in the black locks on his forehead—with this curve of impatient carefulness on his brow, this watchful, half-suspicious inquiry in his eyes, had a reality of life which myself wanted entirely. The child was more than usually alert and on the watch at this time. He saw his sister's change of mood; he saw the strong and stately control which she imposed upon herself; and I saw he cast about perpetually, in the mind not yet old enough to realize this grief, to find out the cause.

And Jamie by this time had come to approve of me—having first ascertained that

I had no hand in Elizabeth's concealed and restrained distress—with considerable heartiness. I think his desire to cheer her taught the boy some wiles besides, unusual to his nature; and I was a good deal surprised one of those mornings to be accosted at our breakfast-table with an abrupt "Uncle, when I grow a man, what am I to be?"

I think he had never given me this title before, and the sound called a faint gleam out of Elizabeth's eyes.

"What do you think yourself?" said I.

"I don't care—that is, whatever would be soonest," said Jamie, boldly. "A doctor, or a lawyer, or an engineer—one of them—whatever I can begin soonest; but I think an engineer myself."

"An engineer! That is almost as bad as your old fancies," said Elizabeth, with a smile. "Jamie had very dignified notions

about his profession once, uncle ; he wavered for a long time between—”

“ I say, Bessie, don't !” Poor little fellow ! his cheeks burned with hot shame. Jamie felt himself quite disgraced now, when he recalled the humble crafts he had been enamoured of in his more childish days.

“ For I'm in earnest now,” said Jamie ; “ and I don't mean an engineer like all the moleskin men in the foundry ; I mean a man that builds bridges, and designs grand things—lighthouses and big works in iron ; that's what I'm meaning ; and you'll see I'll do as grand things as any of them, Bessie. I should be fit in eight years. Uncle, is eighteen not old enough ? She was happier-like in the country than here. I want to be able to take her to some place like home.”

Elizabeth had listened to the first part of this speech with a half-abstracted smile ; but

as the boy, after his quick, abrupt fashion, said the last words, her composure deserted her, a little gush of tears came to her eyes, and pausing for an instant, with an effort at self-control, quite vain and unsuccessful, she at length rose and hurried away.

And Jamie's eyes, unused to express anything pathetic, turned to me with a strange wonder, when they had watched her out of the room. I saw he would fain have cried for company ; but even stronger than Jamie's loving sympathy was Jamie's indomitable pride. The moisture came to his eyes—he would not shed it in my sight, if the humiliation could have accomplished for him the envied maturity of eighteen years.

“ Take no notice that she is sad ; she will be better soon,” I said, hurriedly ; and Jamie had his own reasons for rubbing his jacket-sleeve over his eyes, and hurrying to gather his books together, and making ready for

school, where he now accompanied me every day.

I did not feel that I could quite pass this scene without notice, though since the evening of our first and sole interview on the subject, Elizabeth had said nothing to me, nor I to her; but when she entered the room again, quite composed, though with a quivering lip and pallid cheek, I took her hand into mine, and drew her to the window.

“Did you make any change in the letter you showed me, Elizabeth, before you sent it away?”

“Yes, uncle.” She met my look firmly for a moment, and then bent her head, with a still more visible quiver upon all her features. “You smiled when you gave it back to me, and never advised me not to send it; so I thought it must be weak. I said something more—a little more. It has fulfilled

its purpose, uncle"—she concluded hastily, looking up with a sudden start of pride, and withdrawing her hand; "it has accomplished what I wished it to do. Let us speak of it no more."

Poor youthful heart! We left her standing thus, agitated but firm, trembling over all her frame, yet nerved to the full endurance, and bearing it without a murmur—and went away—I casting many a sorrowful thought back to her, while many a keen, inquiring look from Jamie's eyes were darted behind him through the vacant air, even after our parlour-window had faded in the distance. Jamie had set all his faculties to work. He would not ask, but he was determined to know.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAD almost to threaten my pupil with the dread possibility of disgrace, before I could secure his attention to-day ; for Jamie's eyes began to brood, with a strange inward, searching light, very different from the usual vivid, half-contemptuous observation which he threw around him in our little school-room. For my own part, nothing disturbed the customary routine ; so much of what is mechanical mixes always in the work of every-day.

But Jamie would not be disgraced—could not submit, for a single hour or lesson, to be less than pre-eminent; though when the sultry afternoon came on us, with its broad, intrusive sunshine, its langour and its weariness, I saw, by his unusual fatigue, the effort this had cost him. We walked home together, listless, exhausted, and silent; the little crutch stumping heavily by my side, the nervous impatient hand, lying hot and still in mine.

Elizabeth was not looking for us at the window, but it seemed to me that more than one person occupied the little room; and Mary Helen, eagerly on the outlook, opened the door before we could knock. "Please, Sir, there's company," said Mary Helen, in a breathless whisper: "a lady and a gentleman, and a boy. They came in a carriage—a real gentleman's carriage—and they've been here above an hour."

I held Jamie back—it was not easy—and myself went in with my usual deliberation. I thought it proper that Elizabeth and her friends, whoever these might be, should have full note of my approach. I heard a rustling within of feminine garments; I heard a step advancing—and I opened the parlour door.

Who is this rising to meet me? Not my niece, Elizabeth, with her lofty and saddened beauty—her cheek, on which the faint blooming rose has faded—her eye, so capable of grief—her shy and reserved youthfulness; but blessings on this bright matron brow, which sorrow has never clouded—blessings on the face, so simple—sweet, to which these years have taught nothing unbecoming a pure soul to know; blessings on the smile, half-timid still, that greets me—the look of warm and friendly pleasure, which lights up all the soft, fair features, to me no less delightful than of old; and the wistful gentle

eyes, that gaze into my face with all the inquiring interest of their youthful glance. Greta, sweet heart! what do you here?

And Greta comes to meet me, holding out both her hands, and saying "Friend, friend," in her old home tongue, with smiles so affectionate and joyful, that they almost reach to tears. "All this time in England, and we have not seen you! Ah! that was not kind—that was cruel; and what a pang it might have saved these two poor hearts, if we had but known that this new guardian was the same who gave little Greta, in Wurtzburg, her ring of pearls!"

And she held up to me the dimpled, pretty hand, fuller in its outline than it used to be; and it was some time before my eyes strayed beyond her sweet, kind, animated face, to note the other person, who, with a manly blush, and diffidence, and frankness, advanced to offer me his hand.

Not Greta's husband. Something like what Arthur Morton had been, when seventeen years ago he carried home his bride; but of a loftier rank of nature, unless my eyes and my heart deceived me. No, no, my child Elizabeth—no need to falter explanations—to shrink into your corner, with that blush of shame—to feel yourself so suddenly overpowered and conquered, cast down, as from an imaginary elevation, before your uncle's eye. True, I would fain laugh aloud the laugh of satisfaction and self-complacence, with which sooth prophets are always ready to say, "I knew how it would be;" but a deeper pleasure interposes to save your shrinking, Bessie, and I am suddenly floating out on such a current of joy and pride for you, that laughter is discountenanced and put to flight, before the happier something which feels almost like tears.

There is a pause, and no one quite knows

how to begin the necessary explanation, till Elizabeth, murmuring something which no one can hear, hastily disappears out of the room. Jamie has found an old acquaintance in this fair-haired son of Greta's, who throws back his mother's German curls from his broad, open English brow; and Greta herself now has Jamie's keen dark face regarding her jealously, as he looks up from his stool at her knee; while the young stranger seeks me by the window, impatient to tell his tale.

“My brother has been very ill,” he said, hurriedly, “in my house, and in extremity. I could not leave him. This has been the sole reason of my delay.”

“Your brother is Arthur Morton?” I asked, with interest—I confess being greatly more concerned to hear of his connection with Greta, than to learn the reason for his

silence, which I saw had been already, in the most important quarter, fully explained.

“Yes.” But Francis Morton did not agree with me in thinking this relationship had anything like an equal interest with sundry other matters involved. “I waited till Greta could come with me. She has come by her own self-denial, and a sacrifice on Arthur’s part, considerable for an invalid to make; but I thought Elizabeth would be less hard to move, if my sister came with me.”

I smiled. I fear, in the commotion of my own old thoughts, so long undisturbed and quiescent, I was but an indifferent listener to this story of the stronger and more potent influence, which claimed a right to absorb all interest in itself.

“You do not know me,” said the young man, eagerly, “and I do not mean to call myself worthy of her; but I think she will

be happy with me—I think so; and you know Greta, who will answer for me in some degree. Will you give me your consent?”

“My consent is involved in Elizabeth’s,” said I. “I see no reason to withhold it; nor any right I have to bar her from the choice of her own heart. Let us speak of this hereafter. We are all somewhat agitated; but be sure you will find no unreasonable opposition in me.”

The young man grasped my hand warmly; then by-and-bye we reached some degree of composure, a consummation kindly hastened by Greta’s stories of cousins Franz, and Max, and Eberhard—of Madam Brigitta, who has now a dozen little flaxen Teutons around her—of our own Gottfried’s plentiful flock—and of the Wilhelm Kleine, twelve years old, who bears his name in honour of me. These old recollections make a pleasant

bond between even the stranger and myself, and set us at our ease. He, too, has been at Wurtzburg — has heard, years ago, of the English stranger, whom the good town-folk took into their hearts; and the embarrassment of our new circumstances wears away under the kindly connecting influence which brings us together like old friends.

For this is that same little brother of Monsieur Arthur's, whose superior prospective wealth and importance puzzled good Madam Kleine of old. The boy has his mother's lands in the far north, to make him richer than his brother, who keeps the paternal acres in Northumberland; and they tell me it was under the eye of this refined and delicate mother, not long since dead, that his intercourse with my niece began. There is so much to be told, so much to hear—for Greta is almost voluble about that part of her

life which is unknown to me, and questions me with the minutest interest concerning mine—that this little romance of to-day falls strangely into the shade, and I am startled into the extremest wonder, when Greta breaks off abruptly, in the midst of a mother's story about the little daughter, her own darling and favourite, whom I must see without delay, to tell me that she must return instantly to her invalid husband, and that Elizabeth goes with her to the north.

I looked at Elizabeth in some surprise. Was it so? Did she indeed choose to forsake me so suddenly?

“No, no,” said Elizabeth, half rising to meet my look. “I am with my uncle—I am at home.”

And she turned half round towards the earnest face which followed all her movements. The young man's first look was of

blank disappointment and vexation—then it gradually changed, brightened, flushed at last into full and proud approval.

“Yes,” I heard him say to her in a whisper, “you are right; out of the one home into the other—from your fit and natural guardian to *me*.”

And the glow, brightening and deepening every moment, flashed into a very glory in his shining eyes, as he said this triumphant *me*. Elizabeth made no audible answer, but the colour wavered and fluttered upon her delicate cheek, reddening into sudden crimson, paling into momentary whiteness; and her graceful head stooped slightly forward, as in a tacit half consent.

And Greta, next day, went back on her long journey to the sick room she had left for Elizabeth’s sake; but Greta’s young brother did not immediately go away—and

I was aware of some incipient offence ere long, in Elizabeth's stately treatment of her betrothed. He *would* haunt so pertinaciously this little house of mine.

And now, I myself became full of arrangements, of superintendencies, of care; for very soon—very soon—in little more than weeks from this time—was fixed with my hearty sanction my niece's wedding-day.

Little Jamie, all this time, had been looking on, with a conscious jealous watchfulness, which amused me; for the child was not jealous of his own claims disregarded, or his own person slighted. Perhaps he felt his hold upon his sister's affection far too strong for that; but I knew quite another and a far nobler sentiment in the keen scrutiny of Jamie's gleaming eyes. That no one made infringement on her honour; that no one did her injustice; that among us, she bore

her full and due estimation, her own proper dignity, her sufficient place, was Jamie's constant object, never lost sight of; and woe was unto me, when in an unguarded moment I ventured upon an innocent jest, a smile of kindly mirth at Elizabeth's expense. I shall not soon forget the curl of the disdainful lip, the flash of the passionate eye, nor the fierce contempt and defiance with which I, at most times Jamie's friend and favourite, was dared and bearded, when I had the presumption to smile at Jamie's sister. The boy champion, enthusiast and fanatic already, could not tolerate this.

Various intentions on my own part fermented in my mind; my torpor was effectually roused and broken; I could never settle again into the unbroken level of my former life; my heart awoke to seek affections, my mind to demand friends—and I was casting about for

an issue from the temporary confusion, when Jamie, having received me again into his favour, cut the knot for me.

“When Elizabeth goes away,” he said, abruptly, one day as we returned from the final dismissal of my scholars before the holidays, “uncle, where are we to go?”

We! I was startled. I had not before associated this little imp with myself, though it was impossible to deny that he at once interested and influenced me more entirely every day.

“I could be your secretary the time I’m learning my profession;” and he darted his small nervous head upwards, with its side-long elevation, and gave a leap upon his crutch as he hung by my hand.

“So you think you will stay with me, Jamie?” I was even a little moved. The child seemed to have clutched me down

again into humanity—conferred on me a home.

“ Yes.”

We said no more—but it took little deliberation now to make up my mind.

CHAPTER XIX.

My mind was made up. A longing—I know not whether it belonged to the approaches of old age, or to a natural softening of temper and feelings—possessed me now for the old kindly places, the habitations of my youth. My father still occupied the old house at Ailieford, a harmless, solitary old man, from whom all activity, or wish for activity, had gradually departed. I thought I would go home with my charge, my new child—would wipe my pen, and take it with me, to use it, if it might be used, and to

make again cheerfully, even at my years, another beginning of life.

After some little discussion Elizabeth acquiesced. It was not quite suitable certainly to carry home her little brother with her in those very earliest days, before she had reached her new home, or realized her new life; and it was Jamie's own will and proposition that he should go with me, confirmed most promptly by himself when called upon. So there was no reasonable objection to be made, and the last obstacle was quietly removed out of Mr. Francis Morton's way.

At one time my arrangement went the length of a half proposal to have the ceremony, which should conclude all these plans and settlements, performed in our old home; for I did not fear now, with smiles and pleasure, all false humiliation long ago forgotten, to show to Greta the chateau of her youthful fancy. I paused, and recalled

other attendant circumstances in time. My mother was there no longer to give it the harmonious dignity and honour of her presence — my mother, who, perfectly fit and suitable for her own sphere, would have looked amiss in no other, however elevated; and sober shop-keeping Andrew, and his good comely unrefined wife, rose up before me, no small contrast to the bride whose head, bowed over her work, shone under the sunshine by my side. So I kept my proposition to myself. Time enough, in less exciting circumstances, to introduce Elizabeth to the substantial aunt and uncle, who would have patronized her with some loftiness a little time ago, had they known her poor and orphaned, and to the merry boy and girl cousins, who never could have been like Elizabeth, whatever their sphere.

By-and-bye the marriage came—the marriage past: a vision of fair ladies—a glorious

flash of bridal dress, charming, poor Mrs. Formby's Mary Helen out of all possible content with her own sober fate, her printed cotton gown, her engineer lover, and filling her little head with wild Utopian dreams of the glories of ladies'-maids. Greta was there, and Greta's pretty little half-blown rose of a daughter, a sweet young bridesmaid to my statelier flower; and very languid and exhausted our little rooms looked when all this unwonted grandeur swept away, with clank of wheels, and stamp of horses, as it came.

Away out of all the dawn's grey dimness, out of the early storms, the rains of anguish that brought her morrow in—away out of the clouds that for a moment darkened her own particular sky with shade and tears—away into the prosperous world, the fresh, sweet sunshine, not yet ripened into its noon-day prime. With Sybil's face and Sybil's

heart, away out of the gloom where this sad mother stumbled and was lost—away into the light and to the comfort, to fulfil the happier fate!

And it was with a long-drawn sigh of joy, that I called myself true prophet once again. Yet it is a sad thing this marrying; and I could not but fancy how like death and everlasting removal it would have been, had Elizabeth been born my child—my life-long comfort—and had she thus obeyed her own independent fate, and gone away.

My own removal followed very speedily. I was comparatively rich at this time, though Elizabeth's marriage was somewhat costly, thanks to the pride in which we both agreed; but still a little sum of money—I am afraid a quite infinitesimal sum to wealthy ideas—survived, to help my flitting and re-establishment. I made a hasty visit to Ailieford myself, to set certain preparations and additions

in progress; and Marget, with grumbling, but not without satisfaction and a sense of dignity, engaged a young assistant for herself. I had a room fitted up as my own study—or rather I had it built in the first instance, a little detached solitary apartment in the garden—and the furniture was somewhat brightened and somewhat increased. Not that I had grounds for supposing that taste in furniture, or any very quick apprehension of the beauties of upholstery distinguished Jamie; but I had a foolish half anxiety to give him at once the warm natural prejudice in favour of his home.

It was an August evening when we came within sight of Ailieford. The great trees on the road bent towards each other, throwing an arch of foliage over the ascending way—and a sky of summer's fullest blue, cloudless and unbroken, filled up every crevice of the fluttering network of leaves. At this point,

just where the old mansion-house of Ailieford looked out gaunt and hollow-eyed upon the road, I made my boy descend from the little vehicle which carried us. The path was rough with great roots developed like veins upon a strong man's hand, and a soft bank of turf rose as high as our heads, on this side of the way, with the great bole of an elm tree bursting through its velvet curb, and many a scrambling hawthorn hanging on its shoulders. Long elfin arms of brambles, half-ripe berries already clustering thick upon them, reached over to us from the other side, and touches of delicate colour, golden and purple, little nameless wild flowers hiding in the nested grass, enlivened the soft green of the way-side brae. The pears hang heavy still on the old strong branches; the little ruddy apples clustering under their leaves, begin to brown with fervid sunshine; and still the sun gleams red in the glistening windows,

which shine to your curious eyes, little Jamie, as if they were beaten of ruddy gold. Yes, the air is rife with sound, musical with all the hum of Nature's hour of play and rest—and no pale shadow of time departed, no faces shining out of this sweet daylight, loving looks that never can shine again, figures looking forth from the doorway yonder, waiting for the slow returning wanderer, which never can watch or wait to hail his coming more—come in between your eyes, my boy, and all the quiet kindness and beauty of this little house and homestead. Yes, Jamie, pause and look at the grey walls, the weather-stained roof, the windows glowing red under the sun—for this is home.

Myself slept that night under my father's roof, in my old home, with strange emotions. My father's house—the old man himself was glad to see me in his inexpressive way—

but old as I was, the name charmed me with a singular sense of security and repose. It was not only the old fresh boyish life—the old vivid joys and griefs which came back to me in every corner of their ancient local habitation—it was not that I recollected so clearly every turn and crevice, every mark upon the wall, almost every pebble in the garden ways; but because my heart had come home, and, no longer numb or stagnant, confessed itself at rest, and was content at last.

CHAPTER XX.

“HE was a young lad in the days when I kent him—I wouldna say but he’s aulder than our Geordie noo; but, eh, Sirs! wha could hae thought of Geordie taking ae turn of single life and Willie Mitchell anither, being baith of them just as glaiket and thoughtless as ither young folk in their day. I’ve cause to mind of Willie Mitchell; it was a puir weirdless laddie, a brother of his, that had the first hand in leading my Tam away—and then came the sair distress of him marrying. Sirs, to think of my

Tam, that might have kent sae muckle better, taking up wi' a jaud like yon! but upbringing's naething, guid example's naething—there's no a thing of ony value in this world, but real strength and pith, and grace in folk's ain heart. Ye may say that; guid friends are nae good—warning's nae good—disgrace, and trouble, and punishments warst of a'—and ye may as weel gang and preach to a whinstane quarry, or bid back the sea when it's in the flow, as think ye can stop a puir lad on the road to his ain destruction, if he winna stop of his ain will. I'm a very auld woman now, with a great experience, and I had ance a big family a' at my fit, fechting up amang my hands. Now there's Jessie, my auldest, sair trysted with troubles of her ain; Tam away yonder, and ane feared to believe what he says, that he's reformed noo, and a new man; Bell a hunder miles or mair off this

place, married upon an Englishman ; Peter, poor callant ! dead afore his mother—and no ane left but Geordie—Geordie a single woman, her leelane if it wasna for me. Eh, Sirs !”

I went in at this moment to the kitchen of the little house, one stair up from the High Street of Moulisburgh, where Miss Geordie Cockburn, milliner and dressmaker, pursued her business, and interrupted her mother’s soliloquy—for soliloquy it was, in spite of its conversational form. As she delivered it, she trotted about in her old fashion, from the deal table before the window to the fire-place. Mrs. Cockburn was still a thrifty housewife ; still tolerably active, tolerably stout, but somewhat downcast in her mien and expression, as well as in the strain of her reverie. It was some time before I convinced her of my identity ; for I saw that, even though Mrs. Cockburn’s reason

assured her that I was "maybe aulder than our Geordie noo," her imagination still expected to see the youth whom she had known of old as Willie Mitchell. "Bless me, the laddie! he's turned a grand grey-haired gentleman, that might be faither to the callant I used to ken," was Mrs. Cockburn's exclamation at last; and it was still with some hesitation that she wiped her hand upon her apron, and gave it to me to shake.

I was then ushered into the work-room with some solemnity, to see Geordie. Geordie was not there at the moment, though her work, thrown down hastily before her presiding chair, at the head of the long work-table, confirmed the explanation of the two girls, who sat very demurely on either side, busy with their pretty occupation, that "Miss Geordie had gone to the little parlour, just for a moment, to speak to somebody."

Geordie's mother, with a stream of audible comment on the folly of "leaving these bits of lassies to themselves in wark hours, and no hauding them near close enough at their seam," went away to seek her; and I lingered between the window and Geordie's chair, not without frequent glances at my silent companions.

I suppose I was concluded not to look dangerous, for by-and-bye, one of them softly opened a drawer before her, in which lay open just such a dingy, well-worn circulating library volume as Geordie Cockburn herself had pored over twenty years ago; the rustling of the bright silken ribbons intermitted; one-half at least of the little subdued coughs, and half titters of consciousness ceased. A very pretty head, well-formed and braided with bright hair, leaned over the open drawer; but I was roused from my half-musing obser-

vation, by a whisper of some impatience from the other, "Eh, Robina! it's no fair; you're reading it a' to yoursel'."

At this moment, some little stir in the passage without drew me towards the door of the work-room, in expectation of meeting my old friend; but Geordie did not yet make her appearance, and instead of seeing herself, I heard a voice, unmistakably hers, addressing some unseen companion, "Houts, woman, you're no to greet. I've seen mony a waur story come a' out to a happy end. Thae things aye come right at last."

"No aye, Miss Geordie," said a low girlish voice, half weeping. "I ken better than that—if it was only yoursel'—"

"Whisht, bairn, whisht! naebody maun speak about mysel'," said Geordie, hurriedly. "I had other things to think of in my young days; and mine was a' ended before it ever began, Mary, thanks to mysel' and ither folk."

Whisht, lassie—what are you greeting at? You maunna gang out of this house with red e'en. And just you mind what I tell you—thae things a' come right at the last; and never heed, Mary Burnet, what your mother says."

I confess I was startled by the name; but even that did not divert my attention from Geordie's sage counsel—for well I knew, remembering her of old, with all the intense romance and craving for excitement which was in her nature, what manner of story it was which had just been confided to Geordie's experienced ear.

A minute or two longer, and her visitor was dismissed; then I heard the instant resumption of Mrs. Cockburn's interrupted monologue, broken by Geordie's wondering exclamation: "What do you say, mother?—auld friend—a gentleman—wanting me?"

The door opened, and she came in.

Geordie Cockburn was only about forty ; but many things in her life had conspired to make her old. I think I could have nowhere failed to recognise the face, which, fading out of all the softer lines of youth, had scarcely changed its expression by the faintest shade. Her hair was grey over her grey forehead—grey, thin, tightly drawn back from the cheeks, which had shrunk out of their youthful contour, and the eyes, which looked out with eccentric light from the grey overlapping eye-lids, which seemed the only thing about her face fuller than absolute necessity required. Upon her head she wore a half cap, leaving all the scanty hair, and the little knot in which it was gathered] behind, distinctly visible, but surrounding with narrow lappets of net and ribbons, neutral hued like herself, the face, which, harsh as its development was, and grim its colour, was in no degree austere or hard in its expression. A

certain jauntiness of bearing, and little toss of the head, gave something of the comic element to Geordie Cockburn's tall thin figure, endued as it was with a dress entirely adapted for the exhibition of all its angles. She was taking her needle, with its streamer of silken thread, from her waist, and putting her thimble on her finger as she came in.

Coming in, she made a sudden pause before me; I fancy the change on me must have been considerably greater than on herself—for it was with a puzzled air and some embarrassment that Geordie contemplated me. "It's some mistake," she said at last, her head slightly waving backward as she spoke. "My mother—though she aye keeps a real sensible woman at the bottom, when ye can get at it—fails in her memory nows and thens—maybe it was Miss Cockburn, the merchant's daughter down in the row, that you wanted to see?"

“It was Geordie Cockburn I wanted—and I am glad to see her so little changed,” said I, with a smile.

“I canna name you—I canna name you,” said Geordie, after a long pause of consideration. “I think I *have* seen the face before somewhere. Eh? stop a wee!”

And a dusky red, not unlike the old half-smothered glow of Mrs. Cockburn’s parlour fire came suddenly over Geordie’s face. She looked at me earnestly, stooping her head forward—she twisted round her fingers again and again, till it lost all its fresh colour, her long silken thread. The grey surface of her forehead puckered into its ancient “gloom,” a fierce gleam shot out of her eyes. “I see—it’s Willie Mitchell,” said Geordie, drawing a hard breath. “What could my mother no tell me for? So it’s him!”

I stood still, waiting a more friendly

recognition—Geordie's composure was considerably disturbed.

“So it's you!—weel, I'll no deny you were an auld friend,” she said at last, extending me her hand. “Eh, man, you've turned auld! but you've come hame again, Willie Mitchell; I'll warrant you've come to settle down in your ain place, and follow your business at hame like a man?”

“Even so, Geordie,” answered I.

“We were like no other fate the last time we parted,” said Geordie, with a twinkle as of a tear, under her eyelid, “but I heard they were a' gane belonging to you. I thought you had nae tie to hame.”

“My father is living still,” said I, “and it is home, Geordie, lonely though it may be.”

“It's just as folk feel,” said Geordie, half solemnly; “for my part, they would haunt every corner to me; I would have stayed

away if I had been you, and no come hame to a desolate auld house and a solitary auld man after a' the life and a' the pleasure had died away."

And again I saw the moisture glittering in Geordie's eyes; her middle age softened into the early falling night—Geordie's memory went back kindly to the delusion of her early youth; and as world-worn fathers and mothers find comfort in remembering their babies dead when themselves draw near their end, so Geordie went back upon the old love of fancy, and had a dreamy pleasure in it, a sadness soft and gentle, lightening her real sorrow as with a positive relief; and my poor Jamie was a vision of solace to Geordie Cockburn now—a visionary hero—fit centre for the little romance of possibilities which memory could still weave out of her accomplished fate.

“You’ll be glad to hear yon woman’s dead,” said Geordie, mysteriously, after a pause. “I’m no saying I’m very charitable where she’s concerned—but she could only have turned waur and waur if she had lived a hundred year. She was ower hardened for ony good. We’re no so ill as you, Willie Mitchell, though I might think at one time we were waur. Tam, poor fellow, is living and doing well—my mother would maybe tell you—we had a letter in the spring of the year. Eh, man, what I’ve gaen through since I saw you last!”

“I heard—I heard at the time, what trouble you had with him,” said I, unguardedly.

“Trouble with *him*? I just wish you would mind your ain concerns, Willie Mitchell. Ye needna gang so far as to look to *our* family for an ill-doing son;

nae occasion to step o'er your ain door. Trouble! it sets you weel, the like of you!"

"I mean no evil, Geordie," said I, quietly. "I know it so well myself, that I have privilege to speak."

Geordie was softened. "It's a' past now, whatever you like to call it," she said, "and we're in a very quiet way, my mother and me. Are you aye in the auld writing line, or what are you doing yoursel'?"

"I have some boys with me," said I, "half-teacher, half-writer, Geordie—in a very quiet way, like you."

"But you're not to take up a great school like what your mind was set on long ago?" said Geordie. "Eh, man, just to see how things change. I was in the parlour the now, with little Mary Burnet, hearing something she was feared to tell her mother. If I didna think you had

gotten the better of that lang ago, I wouldna have mentioned the name. But Mary Burnet was your first sweetheart, I mind. Do you ken she's a widow now?"

"Yes."

"She's a very decent woman, and strives for her family," said Geordie, with some importance; "but when the bairn's bit heart is sair, as it was the day, she comes and tells me."

A few more words, and Geordie had taken her seat again, had rethreaded her needle, and I went away, pondering the changes of which she spoke. Yes, Mary Burnet was a good mother, a creditable household head—yet the young heart under her charge—say it was a very foolish one, fluttering with a hundred girlish fancies which its mother never knew—fled when its emotion ran over, to solitary Miss Geordie Cockburn, to pour its sore imaginary youthful

troubles into her sympathetic ear. I smiled within myself as I went back to the home, which for myself was no longer lonely; there seemed a strange significant retribution—slow-coming justice, calm and even-handed, judging between Mary Burnet and me.

And now the autumn days come and go, mornings and evenings sweet with dew and sunshine. Our bride has been here, beautiful in the joy of her youth, and Jamie and I have engagements for visits to the English north, which is south to us, and for the Scottish north, which once was home to my imp "of fame," as I hope to see him one day. Greta has two sons with me, being educated in my house at Ailieford, which, now no dream chateau, has more than once brightened under the sunshine of Greta's kindly eyes. But my own boy, mind of my mind, heart of my heart,

is the little alien Jamie, whose very name I grudged to him once, but whose watchful eyes, no longer jealous of his friend-guardian, are only alert to seek means of serving me now. Strange change has past upon my life, strange awakening come to the exhausted soil, on which so many withered hopes have fallen; and there is not a dream of all my old ambitions that does not start into glowing action now, when I see by my side this little undeveloped giant, stirring in all his nerves and pulses with the power that grows unconsciously upon him every day. For Jamie will be a great man yet despite the physical misfortune which is so much a part of himself and his character, that I would miss something in him if it could be cured. I make him heir to my own hopes, secure of a strong identity replacing the vagueness of my youthful dreams—and no one can tell the triumph

and pride I have in this boy, the "little cripple Jamie," whom Elizabeth took sadly to her heart for comforter—whom I, looking further than Elizabeth, know to be one of those who will influence most nobly the world in which she trembled for him, left alone. Left alone! the words cease to have any dreary echoes in their cadence, either for my boy or me.

THE END.

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