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A BROKEN FAITH.

VOL. I.





A BROKEN FAITH

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“GLENCAIRN,” “ONLY A LOVE STORY,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A BROKEN FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

When the game began between them for a jest,
He played King and she played Queen to match the
best!

.
Pleasure with dry lips, and Pain that walks by night,
All the sting and all the stain of long delight ;

These were things she knew not of, that knew not of
her,

When she played at half a love with half a lover.

SWINBURNE.

THEY looked at each other, face to face,
strangers meeting for the first time,
He and She. In that hour a new volume in

each life was opened, though undreamt-of then by either of the two; in that hour the seed was sown, though it was long before they were to know what harvest they should reap from it.

She was a child in all but years the day she saw him first—a girl who lived under the delusion that she was a woman of the world, and would have opened her great innocent eyes in astonishment and aggrieved dignity if you had told her that she was only an ignorant child still. An only daughter, a petted darling, who never had a crumple in her bed of rose-leaves, who had never shed a tear save when some April shower flecked with a passing cloud her sunny sky, whom love had never touched, to whom sorrow was a mere name, and pain a far-off possibility, her history a blank, her heart a fair white page, ready for the master-hand to write his name.

He was a man who had few bitter enemies and many warm friends; a man who had done a little good in his life and a great deal of evil, who bore in some circles a character that could scarcely have been painted blacker, and in others was tenderly regarded as a maligned and misunderstood individual; a man whom those men who knew him best deemed capricious and inconsistent in good and ill, whom many women loved and a few hated—and had good cause to hate,—an artist who was half a poet at heart, and to whom his art was more than love, who played at love and flung love aside as an outworn plaything, and lived his real life only for and in his art.

Fate threw these two together without a warning, whispering no presentiment in either ear.

It was at a little country railway-station, scarcely more than a shed, that she came

into the train in which he was travelling from London. She was rather late, and sprang hastily into the carriage where he was ensconced in a corner behind his newspaper. They were not alone, however; two old ladies—sisters evidently, spinsters presumably—were nodding behind their veils in the further corners of the carriage, which places they had chosen with the complacent remark that they “had the command of the window between them.” The mother who was seeing her daughter off found time to cast a hasty and satisfied glance at the highly respectable aspect of these sister spinsters between her hurried kisses and farewells.

Then the train moved off, and they two were sitting face to face, wakeful, while the old ladies relapsed into the dose from which the entrance of the new-comer had temporarily aroused them.

She looked at him presently, with the slight and casual interest which a fellow-traveller usually inspires, an interest which deepened a little as she gradually became conscious that he was devoting a great deal more of his attention to her than to the newspaper he still held in his hand, though the study of police-courts and politics seemed somehow to have palled upon him since her appearance as his *vis-à-vis*.

He regarded her half critically, half admiringly, as it was his habit to regard any and every pretty woman. Once or twice, as she looked up unexpectedly, their eyes met, but his look, although the element of admiration in it was evident, had not such intentness as to annoy or embarrass her. He was one of that class of men whose name is legion, who would break some half of the Commandments unscrupulously, but who would not be guilty of the vulgarity of staring; and

she was not a girl on whom a man could turn one glance of over-bold admiration.

The artist's first thought just now in looking at a pretty face was whether it would be a suitable model for either of the female figures in the picture which, at present, stood half finished on his easel in his London studio. After a careful inspection of his *vis-à-vis*, he decided that she was "pretty, very pretty, but she would not do." For the face of the white-clad girl in the foreground he wanted more fire and bloom and brilliance; for the sombre mourning figure who stood as a shadow beside that bright vision, he must have more expression and passion.

This young, fresh face of his fellow-passenger would not be available as a model for either; it was too calm and colourless for the one, too bright and cloudless for the

other. It was a pity, for certainly she was a beautiful creature. He reflected, as he looked at her, that hers was a face without a history, yet a face full of possibilities, whose passionless sweetness was so charged with latent expression that it must surely have a history some day.

There was a certain nobility of outline in her features, small and delicate as they were, that seemed to fit them well to express deep feeling, though as yet there had been no seal of sorrow set upon their smooth, untroubled fairness. There was strength, he decided, in the brow and chin, yet something of weakness in the tender, child-like lips. The most noticeable thing about her expression was its utter purity and innocence. He thought he had never till now seen a face so perfectly his ideal of that white Una before the power of whose purity the lion crouched. It was Una in

her hallowed maidenhood, chaste as cool moonlight on the snowy slopes of the Jungfrau, but Una before her Red Cross knight was lured from her side, before she woke to find herself deserted and alone.

This girl's hair was dark, and soft and fine as silk, her skin fair as a snowdrop, with the faintest dream of a rose-leaf flush just warming her cheek; her eyes were of that nameless changeful colour we call "grey" for want of a better term—those eyes which, when you look close into them, have yellow rays in the iris which give a golden tinge to their shifting hues; and he noticed that they had those long black curled lashes which he deemed among the most excellent things in women.

She was sufficiently aware of being regarded with admiration—was indeed sufficiently accustomed to that process, and had the element of coquetry sufficiently devel-

oped in her—to feign complete unconsciousness of his attention, and yet to requite it, when his eyes were turned away, by girlish glances of inspection, too guileless to be shy, too indifferent to be furtive.

Her ideas of manly beauty comprised—firstly, features of statuesque regularity; and next—naturally, as she was herself slight and delicate-looking—a figure of the massive and muscular type. Her opposite neighbour did not come up to either of these demands, and she did not consider him at all handsome.

She gathered at first a general impression of dark Spanish-looking eyes, a colourless olive complexion, and black hair growing low on the forehead. She liked—or thought she liked—the blond and blue-eyed Saxon type of manhood. Still as she came to closer observation of the face opposite her, with the pale and somewhat hol-

lowed cheeks, the level black brows and deep-set eyes, the expression half sad, half stern about the mouth, whose almost feminine sensitiveness the heavy moustache did not hide, she decided that, if not handsome, he was at least interesting.

The train went on, and the landscape seemed to glide by them mile after mile—did not fly past them, for the train had dropped the distinction of being “express” at the last great junction, and was taking its time, puffing steadily and leisurely up inclines, coiling cautiously around curves, and stopping at every little wayside station on the chance of picking up passengers who were not forthcoming. It was a silent journey on the whole, for the two old ladies slept peacefully most of the way, and the young lady did not appear talkatively inclined. Once her opposite neighbour offered her his *Times*, and it was accepted with

a pretty and gracious smile ; and once he offered to shut the window with a similar result.

Yet, although there was no conversation between them, each could have repeated the other's features by heart by the time they arrived at their not very protracted journey's end.

"Charlton!" said the girl, half to herself, looking out of the window as the train drew up.

"Charlton!" echoed the artist. "Your station?" preparing to open the door for her.

"Yes," she said, busying herself collecting two bags, a parcel, and a railway novel.

"Mine too," he observed, and swinging himself on to the platform, offered his hand to help her descend.

As they glanced along the platform, they were immediately besieged by all the staff

of porters (numbering only two), officiously inquiring, "Any luggage?" while from the background a stately footman appeared, and advancing to the pair, touched his hat to the young lady.

"For Lakeside, madam? The carriage is here. Her ladyship desired me to say she was sorry she was prevented coming to meet you." Then he turned to the gentleman, and repeated his formula, minus the message, "For Lakeside, sir? The carriage is here."

The assiduous porters hastened to relieve the arrivals of their bags, while the footman solemnly proceeded to fling open the door of a handsome barouche which was waiting outside the station, drawn by a pair of beautiful bays with satin-shining coats and silver-bright harness.

"So we are to be fellow-travellers still?" observed the artist, smiling, and looking

into his companion's face more freely than he had hitherto done.

“So it seems,” she assented; the colour deepening in her cheek.

She was often impatient with herself for the readiness with which her delicate and transparent complexion flushed and paled. She need not have minded, for if it were sometimes embarrassing, it was always becoming.

“I don't know what is the orthodox way of beginning acquaintance without any introduction,” he said, looking at her with an amused and interested smile, as the footman mounted the box, the coachman gently flicked his whip, and the bays, who had been pawing impatiently, tossed their heads and set off at a brisk pace. “But as it's evident we are both to be guests at Lakeside, I think we might venture on considering ourselves privileged to speak?”

“Even *before* the magic formula of introduction?” she questioned, gaily.

“It is heterodox, I’m afraid. But Lady Manville is responsible. Do you think it a necessity that we should wait until that cabalistic spell is spoken before we look upon each other as fellow-creatures?”

“Not at all. But if the ceremony of an introduction be necessary, I don’t see why we should not perform it for ourselves!” she added, laughingly, a little feminine curiosity possibly moving her to this remark.

“Why not, indeed? Shall we begin, like the two travellers in a romance, by our names and histories?”

“My history would not take long to tell,” she replied, lightly, “not long enough to be worth telling!”

“And mine too long!” he replied, whether in joke or earnest she was not quite sure.

He looked into her eyes and smiled; he was in no hurry to turn away his gaze, as he noticed the flickering gold lights in the large grey eyes, the stainless cream-white of the complexion, in which the stream of sunshine, pitiless to every tiniest defect, could point out no flaw, and through whose clearness a flush of rose mantled and faded under his look.

“But names come before histories?” he observed, half interrogatively.

“Mine is rather an uncommon one, I think,” she responded. “I mean my Christian name. Here it is in correct orthography,” she added, after just a moment’s hesitation. She took up the novel which lay on her lap, and turned to the fly-leaf, where he read, written in a fair, female hand,

Athelyn Hastings.

“I don’t think it is, properly speaking, a Christian name at all,” she added, explana-

torily, "it was mamma's maiden name."

"It's uncommon—and pretty! But," he added, "there is one item of information wanting. Miss?—or Mrs. Hastings?"

"Miss, of course," she replied, with a glance of unaffected surprise.

"So I imagined," he said, "though why 'of course'? Am I a magician, to read the history you would not tell? And now am I to return confidence?"

"It would be only fair, I think."

He opened a pocket-book and pulled out a card.

"I think this is an original way of getting through an introduction," she said, with an amused smile dimpling about her soft, child-like lips.

"I think it is decidedly a satisfactory way," he observed, as she glanced down on the card, and read,

Harold Parkhurst.

It was a name beginning to be known in the world of art ; it was on the way to becoming a key to open the gates of almost any artistic circle ; there were other circles to which it would probably neither now nor ever, and most certainly not now, prove a satisfactory letter of credit. But to Miss Hastings it was quite unknown. Either as man or artist, black sheep or rising star, she had never heard of him. Looking at her as she read his name, he saw this, and saw it not without a faint twinge of ruffled vanity. He would have liked this girl to have known his pictures and recognised his name.

They had certainly needed no ceremony of introduction, formal or informal, to set them at ease with each other. They had "got on" together from the first words they exchanged. Miss Hastings had none of the shyness of a girl unaccustomed to society, nor any of the reserve of self-consciousness

and caution. Her *naïvetè* was rather of serene self-possession and gaiety than of simplicity, and through her gaiety, which was simply the effervescent light-heartedness of perfect youth and health, there ran a thread of girlish coquetry. She liked Mr. Parkhurst at first speech, if not at first sight, and was well aware of and well pleased with his admiration; and he, on his part, was charmed, as he was charmed on an average once a fortnight during the season.

By the time they arrived at Lakeside they were as good friends as if their acquaintance had been reckoned by weeks instead of hours, and their hostess—who met them in the inner hall with apologies for not meeting them sooner, and marshalled them immediately into the drawing-room to take a cup of tea—might be pardoned for the forgetful-

ness that caused Mr. Parkhurst presently to observe to her—

“By-the-by, Lady Manville, you have omitted to present me to this young lady.”

“Don’t you know each other, then? Oh, I forgot! Well, you seem to have made acquaintance very satisfactorily without any good offices of mine, so I shan’t apologise. Athelyn, my dear, have you found out how very agreeable Mr. Parkhurst can make himself—when he likes?”

Lady Manville was a sparkling little brunette of barely one-and-twenty years old, whom Sir John had fallen in love with before she left the schoolroom, and brought home to Lakeside, dragged by enthusiastic tenantry under triumphal arches, with an illumination “Welcome the Bride!” when she was eighteen. Sir John himself, who succeeded to the baronetcy before he came

into tailcoats, was but a few years older than his wife, and a happier young couple were not to be pointed out in the county.

Lady Manville was “a *little* bit of a flirt,” some of her friends said. Enemies she had none, else they doubtless would have said the same; but if Sir John did not object to his wife’s manner to his friends, no one else had any right to do so. He did not flirt at all himself, because he did not care very much for ladies’ society, except his wife’s; he liked the country better than London, outdoor life better than indoor, the hunting-field better than the drawing-room, and his dogs and horses better than anything in the world—except his wife again, and their baby son and heir.

Lakeside, with its gay young hostess, and its host, to whom no epithet seemed so applicable as “jolly,” was the pleasantest house possible to stay in. Everyone felt

at home there; all did as they liked, and enjoyed a serene consciousness that, in pleasing themselves, they were pleasing their host and hostess. The house was always full of guests, and though "each went his own way at his own pace," the ways never clashed. Breakfast began when the first person appeared in the breakfast-room, and went on, while full and fasting members of the party came and went, until the last had made his meal. Luncheon was conducted very much on the same principle, nor was it even a crime to be late for dinner; often one or two places were vacant until the soup and fish had gone round, and it was not unknown for the host himself, if the wary fox or tantalising partridge had inveigled him further than he intended, to be conspicuous by his absence from that social gathering.

The parties at Lakeside were generally

an odd *mêlée*. Sir John and Lady Manville observed not the slightest method or selection in their composition, but invited people from all corners of the civilised world, and jumbled them together pell-mell into one party; and the mixture was frequently more successful than if the *menu* had been carefully concocted.

They had met Mr. Parkhurst the previous season in London; both husband and wife were pleased with him, and totally ignored—if indeed they had ever been made aware of—the invisible and yet to some eyes most legible label which Rumour had affixed to him,

“Dangerous! Husbands and mothers, beware!”

Athelyn Hastings had been a school-fellow of Sophy Manville’s, and though the two young women were not inseparably intimate or confidential friends, they liked

each other well, and Athelyn generally went once or twice a year to pay a brief visit to Lakeside. Beside these two, there were now under that roof a dashing young cavalry officer—a charming young married woman, stage-struck, and separated from a husband who according to her account was a very black sheep indeed—a six-foot high curate who scandalised half his parishioners by hunting and waltzing, his younger sister,—and a handsome young Jewess, reported to be a great heiress if she married to please her father, a sallow picturesque widower who completed the party.

It generally happened that people staying at Lakeside fell into pairs immediately, and adhered to the arrangement of the first day or evening more or less faithfully according to the degree of congeniality discovered. It generally also happened that they paired off in the very way which to the eye of the

chaperon—or indeed from any worldly point of view—would have seemed most undesirable. Thus in the present party, the impecunious artist, Harold Parkhurst, about whom no one knew much, and of whom the little that was known shut him out from many a well-guarded fold, was always at the side of that

“Tocherless lass wi’ a lang pedigree,”

Athelyn Hastings; the hunting curate fell helplessly at the feet of the would-be actress; the officer, whose family wished him to pay court to a certain high-born cousin, hovered around the Jewish heiress; the coffee-coloured merchant with the piercing Israelitish eyes appeared struck with the curate’s pretty Puritan-looking little sister.

There was not an unattractive woman there; indeed there was seldom a lady visiting at Lakeside who was not either pretty or fascinating, or clever or eccentric,

or a gentleman who was not either an eligible *parti* or made up for his lack of substantial recommendations by his attractive qualities or his well-known name, nor did it matter in what line his celebrity had been attained, whether he were musician, artist, or author, whether he had discovered a silver mine, resided with royalty, invented a locomotive machine, or owned the most famous horse of the day.

The host and hostess had good cause to be satisfied with their collection of fair women; and notwithstanding the superb black eyes and Juno figure of Miss Montefiore, and the bewitching dimples and Cupid's bow mouth of Mrs. Sinclair, there was no rival loveliness that eclipsed Athelyn Hastings. Mr. Parkhurst decided this on the first day that he was of the party; and the second day found him more faithfully rooted in his opinion than the first.

Sometimes as he watched her among a group on the lawn, with a coquettish hat shading her face, with flowers newly-plucked in her idle white hands, her slim figure lithe as a willow-wand, her light, dainty step, her trimly shod feet that

“Like little mice peeped in and out
As if they feared the light!”

she seemed to him a fragile piece of pink and white porcelain that one rough touch would break. Then again when she had sunk curled up in careless grace in a low easy-chair, and was looking up and laughing her low sweet heart-whole laugh, he thought she was like a soft, white kitten purring and playing as it basked in the sunshine. And again when she came softly out on the verandah in the moonlight in a white dress, and stood silent as a picture among the ivy-clad pillars, she looked in his eyes like a pale, pure snowdrop timidly and trustfully

lifting its "one sweet bell and green leaves four" through the frost. Still, whatever she reminded him of, it was always something fair and frail and delicate, not made to stand the rough winds of the world. It was only the surface he knew of Athelyn Hastings; it was all that she knew of herself as yet.

Hers was but a three days' visit; it was on a Saturday afternoon that she and Mr. Parkhurst were fellow-travellers to Lakeside; and on Monday night he said to her,

"Are you really going to-morrow?"

They had strolled out from the billiard-room, where a lively and somewhat noisy group were playing "pool," and were sitting on one of the rustic benches in the verandah, half in the shadows of the drooping trails of ivy from the roof, half in a streak of moonlight.

"To-morrow, yes."

“It’s a short visit.” He had a brusque, half interrogative way of speaking sometimes, that either pleased or displeased people from a very early stage of acquaintance. It pleased Athelyn Hastings.

“Three days,” she answered.

“Is it only that? Seems longer somehow,” he said.

“Yes,” she agreed, acknowledging the truth unwittingly, as if she were only speaking to herself. “But I thought you were regretting its shortness just now?” she added laughingly.

“So I was. Sounds paradoxical, doesn’t it? There’s a good deal of truth in paradox. Don’t you think it’s very possible for three days, or one day, or one hour, to be too little, and yet a good deal too much?”

“If the day be good, *can* one have too much of it?” she answered, gaily, but casting a half shy, half coquettish, question-

ing glance up from under her long lashes—a glance that even in the dim cloudy moonlight was not wholly lost.

“Poisoned with sweet fruit, as he found too late!” quoted Mr. Parkhurst. “Where’s that line from, Miss Hastings?” he added, with one of his brusque changes of tone. One of the attractions he found in her was that he had already discovered her to be as well up in all his favourite poets as if she had studied them expressly to fit herself for his taste.

Athelyn named correctly “King Arthur’s Tomb;” and then there was a pause.

“When shall I see you again?” he said, suddenly.

“Very possibly never, I should think.”

“Why not?”

“I do not see any probability of our meeting; I don’t visit here above once or twice a year; and London is such a great

place—one's chances of meeting anyone there are small."

"Yes, they're small," he agreed, "but we *shall* meet, I think. Will you promise me a welcome, if we do?"

"Yes," she answered, softly, half hesitating, and a little coquettishly withal, "I think I may safely promise that, if we meet within a reasonable time."

They are only flirting, or they think they are only flirting. Athelyn, in her gentle quiet way, is open to the accusation of being "a little bit of a coquette." She has often played at romance, just for half an hour's amusement—played with it lightly, almost carelessly, with perfect impunity. It is nothing startlingly new to her that a man should wish to meet her again. No one has ever yet breathed words of real love to her. Love is a thing with which she

has never been brought into absolute contact at all, and of which, when she thinks, it is generally to consider with Aurora Leigh that—

“ Love

Is something awful which one dares not touch

So early of mornings!”

But her life is by no means barren of that gentle element of drawing-room flirtation which, in the mild form wherein she practises it, does not soar beyond aspirations for “another waltz,” and “yet another,” and at the last “just one turn more!”—rivalries for the honour of handing an ice,—hinted possibilities of meeting at the *fête* next week, tacit tryst made and kept at next Tuesday’s *soirée*. She promises Harold Parkhurst a welcome just as she has promised others in her day; she thinks she is flirting no more and no less than she has done with this young officer or that hand-

some barrister, only there is just a touch of a new shyness about her now which she does not herself understand.

“Within a reasonable time,” he says, repeating her last words. “How long a strain can a woman’s memory endure without rebelling and crying out that it is unreasonable?”

“Do not ask me insoluble conundrums,” she replies, lightly, but with that undertone of winning softness which comes naturally to her voice.

The moon is looking in between the tree-tops and under the hanging ivy full upon these two. He turns and gazes at her, and seems in no haste to take the thread of conversation up again.

The cool chaste moonlight is shedding a white glory on her half lifted face and on her silvery pale dress and paler hands ; she looks as spiritual and frail as a snow-maiden

that would melt and die under the sun's first warm kiss.

"Do you know," he says, with something of irrelevance, "of what lines you remind me, so that they seem to have been written for you?"

"I can't imagine. Nothing uncomplimentary, I hope?"

"I opened on them by chance in Tennyson to-day; they seem to me so fitted for *you* to-night. I don't know why."

"Well, what *are* they?"

"Ah, Maud, you milk-white fawn, you are all unmeet for a wife,
You have but fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life!"

"I do not think they are complimentary," she says, with a little playful pretence of a pout.

"But you plead guilty to their being appropriate?"

Athelyn pleads neither guilty nor inno-

cent; she is silent, wondering with a new-born wonder—*are* they appropriate to her?—is she, after all, but a useless pet fawn to play and frolic and feed on roses?

Harold Parkhurst's next question is a somewhat startling one.

“Miss Hastings, are you engaged?”

“Engaged? No!” looking up in some surprise.

“The field is free, then?”

But she cannot answer him. “No” would be false; and besides she could as soon cut off one of her pretty little fingers as say to him, “No; the field is not free.” “Yes” trembles on her lips; but she will not and cannot utter it. That new shyness, a strange sweet shyness that makes her a puzzle to herself, holds her silent.

Parkhurst is not, however, a man to be balked of an answer.

“*Is* the field free?” he repeats, bending

closer, and looking straight in her face.

Then the "Yes" will be spoken, although speech is not so easy a matter as usual, for her heart is fluttering most unaccountably. But "Yes" seems bold and bare standing alone. She follows it up with a vague and feeble "I suppose so," uttered with an attempt at languid indifference.

He answers not a word, only in the moonlight his dark eyes look piercingly down into the depths of hers. She is silent and still as a bird fixed under the snake's glamouring gaze. They seem unequally matched, these two, like the bird and snake—like a child playing with its tin toy-sword suddenly confronted by an armed man. Yet the game is less unfair than on the surface it seems. One shield Athelyn has, who seems so defenceless—one weapon that alone can combat all his armoury. With all her simple little coquetries, she is innocent as a

child and pure as the virgin Saint Dorothea. Her unsullied whiteness of soul is evident in her every look, her every tone ; it shines around her like a visible halo to Harold Parkhurst's eyes. Her heart is like the closed and folded bud of the lily. One day of summer sunshine will open it ; but this she does not know yet, nor he either.

Only he wonders, for what man shall this white flower bloom ? And something that is not all vanity stirs him with the old ambition, the old purpose that has stirred him often before ; and his wonder becomes a resolve.

The next morning they part, and his last words to her are,

“ Good-bye—for a time. We shall meet again ! ”

CHAPTER II.

IN THE FOLD.

And fresh from the deeps of the summer the breeze
across them blew,
But nought of the earth's desire or the lapse of time
they knew.

MORRIS.

FERN COTTAGE, near the little village of Monksfield, is Athelyn Hastings's home. It is one of those pretty English country dwellings which combine a certain old-fashioned picturesqueness outside with all modern comforts in the interior. It is not often indeed that the picturesque and the comfortable are so harmoniously wedded. The house is small certainly; you could, by

a very little compression and cutting down, have packed the whole of it into the great hall at Lakeside ; and its garden, orchard, stable-yard, and all could be comfortably put away in any one corner of the Lakeside grounds. A modern auctioneer would undoubtedly put it up as a "Bijou," and however glowingly he might describe it, in Athelyn's eyes he would not exaggerate its charms.

She loves it as a girl of her nature almost invariably loves her home ; but although this is her home properly so-called, she has another domicile almost equally dear. Her grandfather's house in London is really, as well as by title of courtesy and affection, a home to her and her mother. To old Mr. Hastings, alone in the world now save for these two women, his daughter-in-law is dear even as his own daughter would have been. As far as one human

being can fill another's place, she had filled the place of that lost daughter whose friend and early playmate she was.

As Alice Athelyn, his daughter's dearest friend, then as Alice Hastings, his son's idolised bride, she was a favourite of the father's always; and when within a few months he was bereft of both son and daughter, the widowed bride, left desolate like him, was the one link left to bind him to life. He had still a duty remaining, to support and strengthen the poor stricken girl who clung to him in their mutual sorrow; and when her child was born he found there was still some hope and comfort in the world for him and her. When this the child of their lost Edgar looked up at them with Edgar's eyes, it seemed he was not utterly gone from them.

Edgar Hastings had bought Fern Cottage and settled it on his young wife; every path

in the grounds had been laid out according to his design, every room furnished and decorated to suit his taste. It was there that they had spent most of the few happy months of their married life; it was small wonder that Alice Hastings could not bear to part with it and let it pass to strangers. So she lives there with her daughter, but has her home under her father-in-law's roof whenever she chooses.

Between these two homes Athelyn has grown up, the spoilt darling, the light and life of both. It would be hard to say in which household she is most beloved, most petted when present, most missed when absent. Two lives are devoted to her; to two human creatures she is their hope in the future, their joy in the present, their comfort in the past. They tend and guard this flower as parents do, nursing it from seed to shoot and watching it with anxious

care from shoot to bud—all that it may bloom in some other garden; for they see, now that she has grown to womanhood, their flower is too fair to blossom long for them alone. “She is all that is left me of my boy,” her grandfather says, when he bursts out into irrepressible confidences about her. “She is my other self,” Mrs. Hastings says, fondly, when people remark on the likeness between the mother and daughter.

They are wonderfully alike, certainly—the same soft and delicate, yet classic line of feature; the same innocent Cupid’s bow lips and cream-white complexion, only there is more strength about Athelyn’s chin, more intellect about her brow. Mrs. Hastings has fairer hair, and her almond-shaped blue eyes have not the depth and light of those grey eyes of her daughter’s.

Athelyn is freely confidential with her

mother, partly because of the loving and perfect sympathy between them, partly because she has never had anything to conceal. All her harmless, careless play in the drawing-room game of flirtation is known to Mrs. Hastings, who watches it as she would watch a pet kitten frisking with a ball of wool, knowing that it is merely like the kitten's play with Athelyn—as yet! but still watching for the day when it shall be more. She has never seen the flame of a conscious blush burn on Athelyn's cheek, nor the tremor of a secret trouble stir the sweet, passionless face; but she knows the warmth and depth of the girl's affectionate heart well enough to be very sure the day of conscious blushes and tremors is to come.

When Athelyn returned from Lakeside, she talked, of course, among other things, about Harold Parkhurst, and her manner

of referring to him betrayed that he had certainly been in her eyes the most interesting person there; but she had been lightly interested for an evening or a day in other people—in the man who, at a given party, had waltzed the oftenest with her, or induced her to linger the longest over a strawberry ice in the conservatory, or whispered in her ear the compliment that came the nearest to originality of all the vapid flattery that was lavished upon her. Somehow she had not given Mrs. Hastings the impression that this last acquaintance of a day or two, although it had probably not been destitute of the elements of coquetry on the one side and of admiration on the other, had been anything more than the rest.

Athelyn practises no intentional reserve; it is an involuntary, and even unconscious instinct that leads her to talk in the lightest,

gayest tone of Harold Parkhurst. She is not quite sure whether she likes him or not ; he is something new to her, and she has not quite made up her mind about him ; but of one thing she is sure—though only in the inmost recesses of her still unstirred, and somewhat vain, little heart—and that is that *he* admires *her* extremely. She would not admit this to anyone—would not even word it to herself, but the triumphant consciousness is there. He haunts her thoughts a good deal, but in those secret maiden reveries he appears less as a possible conqueror than as a possible conquest.

It never occurs to her that looks can lie or words delude, or that the game which she plays so innocently for sugar-plums is oftentimes played out to a bitter end, and for a stake heavier than life. She is by nature unsuspecting even to obtuseness ; she has mixed enough in society to fancy she knows

the world, whereas, all the world she knows is one great drawing-room, pervaded by a white kid-gloved humanity with polished platitudes on its lips. If the gauntest wolf only flung a fleecy hide over his head, Athelyn Hastings would open the door of the fold to him and innocently welcome him in. She knows herself as little as she knows the great world through which she moves like one carried in a soft, close-curtained litter, fancying that the light filtered in through those rose-colour blinds is day, and that there is no darker shade than that of the sweet-scented flowering branch which sways across the window as she passes, and taps at the glass as if with a message from the outer world.

In her soft secret flutters of pleasure in Mr. Parkhurst's admiration, her vague wandering day-dreams of meeting him again—beyond which meeting she does not look

—she has no faintest glimmer or perception of any possibilities of danger or suffering, to herself or him. She smiles to herself with a coy, half shy satisfaction as she recollects that his last words to her were, “We shall meet again!” When, two or three weeks after her visit to Lakeside, a letter comes from Lady Manville, bearing another invitation to her, desiring her company at a ball which is being somewhat hastily got up in honour of her little ladyship’s birthday, Athelyn’s pleasure in accepting it is heightened by the picture her imagination immediately paints—of Mr. Parkhurst inscribing his name on her programme for many waltzes! and dashed by the reflection sober reason hastens to suggest that, as he has visited there so lately and is no very intimate friend, it is not altogether probable that he will be invited to repeat his visit—unless they are short of gentlemen. This

is a state of things Athelyn usually dislikes as heartily as the rest of her sex and age ; but under the present circumstances she finds herself actually regarding it as a consummation devoutly to be wished.

She has not, however, to wait until her arrival at Lakeside for the solution of the interesting question—"to meet, or not to meet, again?" One morning she goes out, according to her usual custom, into the yard to distribute divers relics of the household breakfast among the live stock. They all know very well what her appearance means ; the hens cluster cackling round her ; the tawny collie-dog barks frantically and dances wildly on his hind legs, pawing the air and tugging at his chain. From behind the closed stable-door come the scratchings of eager paws and the impatient yelps of the imprisoned terriers. The old brown retriever, Kitty, who is of maturer

years and more staid disposition, comes leisurely out of her kennel and sits down patiently by Athelyn's side, thumping the ground expectantly with her feathery tail, while her young mistress scatters the first shower of bread-crumbs to the fowls.

A speckled hen of pushing disposition gets the lion's share, until Athelyn hits upon the happy device of flinging a large and tempting crust to a remote corner of the yard, whither the greedy fowl immediately rushes, neglecting the shower of crumbs that are falling at her feet, and affording an excellent moral—which nobody heeds.

“Now that's all! not a crumb more for you!” Athelyn observes to the fowls, the bread being all crumbled and scattered. “Bones would not be good for you—nor bacon-rind. Dogs' turn now.”

Collie, comprehending these words, utters

an agonised bark and bounds more frantically than ever. Kitty, wagging her heavy and majestic tail with somewhat more vigour, and complacently ignoring Collie's agitation, follows close at Athelyn's heels as she steps to the stable and opens the door, on which two white terriers burst out, tumbling over and over each other in their hurry, and yelping with joy, while the pony's neigh joins the chorus, and out of the way of the uncontrollable dogs the perturbed hens scatter far and wide, all except the greedy speckled fowl, who is still choking and cackling over a big crust; but she too takes flight and shelter behind a coop when one of the terriers, rather in playfulness than in hostility, makes a pounce on her booty.

Athelyn has no hat on; her hair hangs untidily, if becomingly, down her back, tied with a careless knot of pink ribbon; she

has not a brooch or an ornament ; her dress is a simple brown holland morning-robe of plainest make. This, perhaps, is well, as the dogs in their eager affection, stimulated by the plate she bears, are no respecters of toilette. Tim, on his hind legs, is scratching her dress with impatient paws ; Jim has jumped up and nearly knocked the plate out of her hand in a vain attempt to lick her face ; Collie, now unchained, is leaping up to her other shoulder ; even Kitty, with roused animation, stands before her barking loud demands at last.

“ Down—all of you ! ” the girl says, laughing, holding the plate up above her head, and with the other hand repelling their too demonstrative attentions.

She is quite unconscious that any eyes are on her, though the yard is to a certain extent open to public view ; its outer wall is low, and its gate lower ; but

passers-by are rare along the lane that skirts their grounds; and she has heard no footsteps. Nevertheless somebody who, she little thinks, is near has come along the lane and paused, and is looking over the gate.

Harold Parkhurst sees Athelyn in a new light. She is not now the frail white hot-house flower, the dainty Parian statuette. He sees her with the sunshine of home around her, living on "the level of everyday's most quiet need." She seems not the Athelyn he had known—yet perhaps a sweeter one than he had dreamed.

"A creature not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food.

Suddenly conscious that there is a human presence near, she turns and sees him, and blushes her quick, bright, ever-ready blush as she meets his gaze with lovely startled eyes.

Woman-like, her first thought is of her old holland morning-dress, her loose-hanging, ruffled hair, the delf plate of bones in her hand, the paw-marks of the demonstrative dogs on her skirt. It is not like this that she had wished him to see her again!

“Miss Hastings, do I disturb the proceedings?” he inquires, smiling. Her answer is lost in the vociferations of the three younger dogs, who have rushed helter-skelter towards the stranger, and with their noses to the gate stand all in a row barking in tones that vary between hostility and questioning. By the time Athelyn has quieted them, and shaken hands with Mr. Parkhurst across the gate with her one free hand, the startled blush has faded out of her face, and she has subsided into her usual sweet tranquillity again.

“How did you come here?” she asks, naïvely, uttering the first question that rises to her lips.

“By steam, by wheels, and on foot—if you only mean ‘how?’” he answers. “But if you mean *why* did I come here—?”

He pauses.

“Well,” she says, gaily, “*why* then?”

“In plain English, I came to see *you*,” he replies. “Is the English *too* plain?”

His dark Spanish eyes speak even more boldly and plainly than his words. Their open admiration vaguely troubles her; she does not dislike it; but she averts her own look from it, and her fitful colour comes and goes.

“Whatever you came for, it is very inhospitable of me to keep this barrier between us,” she says, with just a shade of embarrassment marring the lightness of her tone. “Will you walk round to the front door, or if you do not mind the dogs, perhaps you will come in this way?”

“I like dogs,” he says, “chickens too, and

ponies particularly," he adds, observing that a sleek, fat black pony has come out of the stable, and is pattering across the yard to Athelyn's side.

So Mr. Parkhurst comes in and is introduced to all the menagerie. Kitty, who is busy with a bone and takes most things in life easily now that her frisky youth is past, bestows little notice on him; Collie, anxious to atone and apologise for his first suspicion, fawns upon him as if he had been his long-lost master; Tim and Jim, the white terriers (one of whom is spotless, while the other has a tawny splash over one eye, which gives a rakish look to his otherwise meek and honest countenance), consent to exhibit each his one accomplishment,—he of the tawny spot standing up on his hind legs, with the last bone but one of the plateful on his nose, tossing and catching it at word of command, while his less talented but more

thorough-bred half-brother can only shake paws, giving one paw after another in a great hurry, with one eye squinting up to the last bone, which he knows from experience will be the reward of merit.

“Now Topsy must not be neglected,” says Athelyn, turning to the pony. “I have a nice carrot for her. See, Mr. Parkhurst, I will put it in my pocket, and you will see, she’s so clever, she will find it; she will put her nose in and eat it.”

Topsy, having accomplished this feat, assisted by the prominence with which three quarters of the carrot were left projecting from the pocket, ate two lumps of sugar from Mr. Parkhurst’s hand, in which operation Athelyn evidently regarded him as the favoured party. Feeding Topsy was a privilege, and it was considered a condescension on Topsy’s part to nibble a piece of sugar from a strange palm.

Mr. Parkhurst looked at the pair with a smile, as the girl stood with her arm round the pony's neck, patting its sleek, black nose. Athelyn at home, among the household pets, Athelyn feeding them with carrots and bones, her interest apparently centred in the accomplishments of the various quadrupeds, proudly showing them off, and never doubting that he must be equally interested with herself, was a pleasant sight. Probably he would not have liked it so well, if it had not been in utter contrast to the ideal Athelyn he had had in his mind's eye as he walked down the lane.

The *tête-à-tête* was speedily interrupted. Cook looked out of the window, and straightway reported to Mrs. Hastings that "a gentleman was talking to Miss Athelyn in the yard." Mrs. Hastings forthwith appeared upon the scene; an informal introduction and explanation followed, and Mr.

Parkhurst was invited into the drawing-room, whither, as Athelyn observed, apologetically, she should have ushered him before, had it not been for her anxiety to exhibit all Topsy's tricks.

Mr. Parkhurst looked at Athelyn's mother, and smiled admiringly. Her resemblance to her daughter pleased him first. Besides, she was a young-looking woman, as graceful as she was handsome; her Quaker-grey dress suited her delicate face; and the little lace cap on her head was to the full as becoming and picturesque as it was matronly. Mrs. Hastings in her turn looked at the visitor, and was favourably impressed. Women generally liked Harold Parkhurst at first sight; handsome women read in his look his admiration for them; plain women warmed gratefully to a certain *empressement* in his manner, which sprang from a kindly wish that no creature of the female sex

should feel neglected while he was by. He might forget to bow to the plain woman next time he saw her; but at the moment he was talking to her he would look devoted.

Mrs. Hastings knew instinctively that he thought her beautiful; she saw too very quickly that she owed to her likeness to Athelyn half her beauty in his eyes. Her personal and maternal vanity were alike gratified; and the cautious courtesy and glacial gentleness of her manner at first reception of him rapidly thawed and warmed. In ten minutes she liked him; in twenty she thought him charming.

Harold Parkhurst had a curious mixture of two manners, one was polished and ingratiating, courteous and fluent; the other had a certain brusquerie that yet generally proved rather attractive than repellent to

women, and gave him a dangerous air of sincerity.

“And are you visiting in this neighbourhood, Mr. Parkhurst?” inquired Mrs. Hastings, with curiosity a little more veiled than her daughter’s had been.

“I am on a little sketching tour,” he answered. “I have been making a study of that ruined church at Oakley. Being so near here, I thought I would venture on the liberty of calling to inquire for Miss Hastings. I was half afraid you would deem it intrusive?”

He paused for a re-assurance, and received it, Mrs. Hastings’s manner amply verifying the kind courtesy of her words.

“Thanks !” he said, with the most winning deference in his look, that made the one syllable more eloquent than if he had wasted a volume of words.

“I am making my way towards Lakeside,” he continued, “where Sir John has been kind enough to invite me——”

“For Tuesday night?” inquired Athelyn, with interest.

“Yes. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you there?—and Mrs. Hastings?”

“Athelyn is going. About myself I am not sure,” Mrs. Hastings said. She had declined the invitation for herself; Athelyn generally went to visit her old school-fellow at Lakeside alone; and her mother knew that on this occasion she was only invited as a compliment, as Lakeside would be crowded from garret to ground-floor. But she felt a sort of uncertainty as Mr. Parkhurst put his question. Would it be well, she wondered, if she were to be with Athelyn there? Certainly she had already declined the invitation; but—ought she to let Athelyn go alone?

She watched her child's face and manner attentively. She read, though no other eye could have detected, the faint traces of a consciousness that Mr. Parkhurst admired her, of a pleasure in his admiration. She read no more. No secret stir ruffled the serenity of Athelyn's look; no shadowy consciousness clouded the frank gaze of her eyes. She looked very happy, as tranquil as light-hearted; and her gay laugh rang out oftener than ever in its soft mirth. Athelyn possessed that rare and charming gift—a really musical laugh, low and delicate-toned, yet full of pure heart-whole merriment.

Presently Mrs. Hastings's hospitable spirit suggested to her forcibly that she ought to ask Mr. Parkhurst to stay to luncheon. It was true that he had been a stranger to her till that hour, and that his presenting himself at her door was not in accordance with

strict form and ceremony. Still he was a friend of Sir John Manville's; and he was certainly charming, and evidently admired Athelyn respectfully and sincerely.

So after a little silent argument between caution and hospitality, wherein the latter naturally and speedily got the better, the invitation was cordially given—and unhesitatingly accepted. Then, at a hint from her mother, Athelyn disappeared, and took the opportunity not only to convey a message to the cook, but to effect various changes in her toilette. She left the room in her holland gown and loose-streaming hair; she returned, not looking a bit prettier, a lilac-and-white sylph, with rings on her fingers and her hair twisted up in sleek dark coils on the top of her head.

Luncheon, it appeared, would be a little late; meanwhile would Mr. Parkhurst like to walk round the garden? Mr. Parkhurst

would like nothing better. So while Mrs. Hastings in her turn vanished, possibly on household cares intent, Athelyn and the guest went out in the garden.

“I hope you did not breakfast *very* early?” Athelyn observed, laughingly.

“Was I so ravenous at Lakeside? did I leave such an impression on your mind that you are afraid I’ve brought too wolfish an appetite with me now?”

“Only for your own sake—for I think it right to warn you that when our cook hints that luncheon may be a little late it will probably be more than an hour behind time. The normal state of things is that it is a *little* late. Cook is an excellent person—with the one small drawback of unpunctuality.”

“The later she is to-day the better. The later luncheon, the longer I am here. Couldn’t we manage some catastrophe in

the kitchen to put off the evil-hour still further?"

"You won't think the hour evil by the time it comes, I warn you."

"Shall I not? Between *you* and luncheon, do you think my choice will incline to the latter?"

"You will be placed in no such painful dilemma," she said, demurely. "You will have me and luncheon too. Did you suppose I was not going to share the meal?"

"I didn't suppose your ethereality went that length, though you don't look very much of the earth, earthy! I'm aware that I shall have you at the luncheon-table. But—I'd rather have you here. *This is* being with you; *that* won't be!"

Such hours as these fly fast, yet, fleet as they are, they leave deep footprints.

Harold Parkhurst and Athelyn pay no heed to the time as they wander up and

down the winding paths—across the lawn—around the orchard. The grounds of Fern Cottage not being extensive, they pass over and over the same paths in a seemingly unending round. If they were told it was to be unending, probably in this first hour they would not grumble much.

There is not a cloud in the perfect sapphire vault above them; the June sun laves all the earth in a golden glory; only under the trees there are patches of cool sweet shadow. Two great horse-chestnut-trees that stand sentinel by the orchard-gate are masses of snowy blossom still; the white petals shower down on the grassy carpet beneath as a little warm breeze stirs softly among the leaves. All the flowers are in their fullest bloom; above them all, the royal June roses, queens of the garden, fill the air with their fragrance, and droop their heavy splendid heads with the weight of

their own beauty. A lark is singing high up in the cloudless blue; nearer at hand the shrill thrush pipes and the linnet twitters from the trees; bright-winged insects whirring by; there is no silence in the serene summer air; it is a day of warm, live, wide-awake beauty.

Athelyn's laughter is fresh and pure as the bird's trill; her face is radiant as the sun-bathed rose, her life this day as cloudless as the sky. She does not know how happy she is; she is all unconscious of the influence that is silently, subtly coiling round her life, winding her in meshes that may now be frail as the cobweb, but which may, in the coming days, lash her life fast to its as yet unknown destiny with bonds no struggle of her own can break.

She does not know that never again shall she look on tree and flower with the same careless eyes—that hereafter every stick

and stone of the old familiar garden shall whisper a story to her. This mulberry-tree, under which they sit in the shade while he tells her about his next picture and shows her his sketch-book—this Gloire de Dijon rose-bush, from which he chooses the finest rose and pins it in her hair—this strawberry border, among whose dark, shady leaves they hunt for the red-ripe early strawberries—this clematis-screened summer-house, with its queer stained glass windows, where Jim comes limping up to them with a thorn in his paw, and Mr. Parkhurst takes Jim up in his arms and extracts the thorn, and Jim covers him with grateful demonstrations—each and all of these shall speak to her henceforward of him.

Never more shall they be as lifeless parts of the landscape to her; Memory will sit among the branches and whisper in the wind henceforth. But this she does not

know ; she only knows that she is happy this bright morning, and she does not spoil her happiness by counting its minutes as they pass.

“So you are going to Lakeside for this Tuesday’s ball?” he observes, presently.

“Yes ; I am going on Monday.”

“On Monday !” he repeats, “I am invited for Monday too. I was making my way there leisurely, but if I were to hang about here till then—there’s an inn, I suppose ? If I stayed about here, might I escort you on Monday ?”

“But I thought you were on a walking tour—sketching, and taking a different place every day?” she says, looking up, inquiringly.

“So I am ; but if you say ‘Stay here till Monday,’ I’ll throw up my walking tour. What do you say ?”

Athelyn is half frightened at the respon-

sibility this question lays upon her. Beneath her sweet society smile and demure drawing-room coquetry, she is wild and shy as an uncaught antelope. She does not understand the new fluttering shyness that possesses her; it is not unpleasant, there is nothing of discomfort in it, it is only a new sensation, and those bold, black eyes that are so intently fixed upon her face half fascinate and yet half scare her.

He reads in her look a shy, startled hesitation.

“Well? Issue your orders,” he says.

She makes a struggle for her usual lightness of tone and attains it.

“I shall not be in any need of escort, thank you; it is nothing of a journey, and the inn here is very poor. You had better make your way there on your pedestrian tour according to your original plan.”

Mr. Parkhurst does not press the sugges-

tion further. He might have been annoyed, his vanity might have sustained a rude shock, had the girl been any other than Athelyn, had the voice been less sweet in its half embarrassed lightness, the eyes less lovely in their timid gazelle-like appeal. As it was, if his vanity suffered a slight twinge, something in his æsthetic taste was gratified. This startled, shrinking reserve was quite in keeping with his ideal of Athelyn. There was a purity as of flawless crystal about her; he could look through and through the transparent soul; and just a touch of shy recoil, in this early stage, from his advances, was sufficiently pleasing to his fastidious and practised taste, and harmonious with his poetic ideal of her nature, to heal the wound to his self-love.

“Well, no matter,” he said, smiling, and no man had a sweeter, more thoroughly sympathetic smile than Harold Parkhurst.

“Monday is not far off. I’ll see you then.”

She smiled too, relieved that he showed no sign of offence or hurt feeling; yet possibly, down in the depths of her heart, there was a little—just a shade—of something not unlike disappointment.

“I’m glad I have seen your home,” he said. “Now I can picture you here. When I think of you, I shall see you in this garden—with the dogs.”

“In the yard with a plate of bones would be a less romantic picture,” she said, gaily.

“I don’t know. I didn’t think there was much wanting in the picture when I looked over the gate. It was you at home—and it is you in your home that I shall remember. It’s a nice thing to have a home, I suppose,” he added, with the faintest tinge of bitterness.

“Have you not got one?”

“I? Do I look as if I had a home? A

wandering Bohemian—a vagabond artist—living from hand to mouth ! ”

She did not utter her thought aloud—which was that his general appearance did not impress her as being at all in accordance with his last phrase. There was a certain intentional and picturesque *négligé* about his felt hat, his loose collar and careless tie ; Athelyn’s acquaintance with “ wandering Bohemians ” was small, and she wondered, did “ vagabonds living from hand to mouth ” as a rule wear sapphire studs, and the finest of linen, and most faultless of coats and boots, to say nothing of a ring set with one great brilliant ?

She learned afterwards to know that there was in Harold Parkhurst a touch of that pleasure in personal luxury and ornament which survives from the barbarian with his red glass beads. His was the form of civilised Bohemianism that is pass-

ably indifferent to genuine comfort, but must have an outward show of luxury.

“Once I had a home,” he resumed. “A little cottage on the banks of the Thames. But when my mother died, I had looked my last on such a thing as a home.”

“You have not any father? or sisters and brothers, then?”

“No such appendages. I’m free from all domestic ties. Is it a good thing or a bad thing, I wonder, to be so free?”

“How can it be a good thing to be free from ties that mean—” she hesitated a moment, then added, frankly, “that mean love and home?”

“Some natures can’t bear bonds. Even the domestic chain may gall sometimes. At least, so I should fancy. I don’t know. I never experienced what it was to be fettered.”

Athelyn looked startled, puzzled. These sentiments were new to her. She did not approve of them ; she felt they *ought* to have repelled her ; yet somehow they did not.

“I’ve a snug studio in town just now,” he continued, reverting from the metaphorical to the actual. “That’s my nearest approach to a home. The same old rugs and tapestries have been with me in Rome—in Paris—in Stuttgart—London. I never settle long in one place. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Next week I hand over my quarters to another fellow and cut England for a year. Here in your garden to-day—on the sea on my way to India next week.”

“India !” she echoed, looking up. “Are you going to India ?”

He noticed a faint colour flush and fade on her cheek, and triumphed.

“Yes, I’m off directly I leave Lakeside.

In fact, I should probably have gone this week, but—I wanted to have another day or two there, like the last. I'm going to sketch Hindoo temples—ruins; get a portfolio full of scenes; and then India is a quarter of the globe I've not been in yet. In a year I shall be back."

"Have you travelled much?" she asked, her tone unconsciously lightening as he spoke of coming back.

"Not half so much as I could wish. I was born in Cuba; I went back there a few years ago for a trip—ran through the United States and over to the South Sea Isles. Sometimes I wish I'd stayed there! One learns there what colouring is. These skies of ours are tame," glancing ungratefully up at the blue June heavens. "Then I have wintered in Egypt and Palestine—and I have dipped down into Algiers. But somehow London has always drawn me back.

That giant among cities is a world in itself. There you need not seek ; you stand on the shore, and every wave of the world comes to you ; every relic from the Antipodes is washed up at your feet in time."

"You love London?" she said, with brightening eyes. "So do I. It is my other home, you know. We live there with my grandfather a great part of the year."

"You do? Then there, when I come back, we shall meet. But it is not in London that I shall think of you when I'm in India. This is the frame in which I shall set the picture!"

He glanced briefly round the blooming garden, and looked long upon her face ; the picture seemed to attract him more than the frame.

"A sweet, peaceful home," he said. "And your mother—she is like you." His

tone made the word a flattery. "She is as beautiful as I could have imagined. I shall often and often look back from India to this day."

"I am glad," she said, softly.

"And *you*—will you remember me for a whole year?"

"I think I can—even for a whole long year."

She spoke lightly and smiling, with no forced smile. The thought of his going away did not touch her with any regret at this time. Between that *then* and this *now* stood the delightful prospect of Lakeside. His absence lay on the other side of that, and looked far away; and the present hour was sweet—although she did not realise *how* sweet.

They were a pleasant trio round the luncheon-table. Mrs. Hastings was a charming hostess. She was more talkative

than Athelyn, who on the whole was always rather silent than conversational, unless the subject under discussion interested her especially. But her eyes were eloquent and her silence sympathetic enough for her to well afford to be monosyllabic.

Mr. Parkhurst talked about art, of which the ladies knew enough to be good listeners, if not to start original sentiments, and about his travels, which they found, in their hearts, a more interesting topic. He by no means banished the auto-biographical from his conversation; he had the appearance of being rather communicative about himself than the reverse, and yet, on looking back when he had gone, they found they did not know much about him.

After luncheon the three walked round the gardens for another hour, and then Mr. Parkhurst took his leave; he said (to the mother, not to the daughter) that it was a

day he should never forget, and it proved no idle compliment. He never did forget that June day.

“How do you like him, mamma?” asked Athelyn, questioning her as well with her candid eyes as with her words.

“Very much,” replied Mrs. Hastings, promptly. “I was undecided for the first five minutes; I did not know whether I liked either his face or his manner. But it is a face that grows upon you. Is he an intimate friend of Sir John’s?”

“They seemed on very friendly terms, but I do not fancy they have known each other long.”

“He is going to India,” Mrs. Hastings said, thoughtfully.

“Yes,” her daughter assented, cheerfully, but she did not add, “He is coming back in a year.” And she did not tell her mother a word of any part of their conversation.

Harold Parkhurst might well be satisfied; he was the first man in regard to whom Athelyn Hastings had ever observed this reserve—the first whose face had ever looked into her dreams, or entered into the airy castles of her reveries, as his did from this day.

For his part, many a face as fair as hers had filled the scope of his mental vision, for a time, and then passed out of sight and out of mind. But this girl not only pleased his artist's eye, not only satisfied his somewhat fastidious taste, but something in her soul seemed to reach into his soul and touch those finer chords that seldom a woman's influence had stirred before. Subtly and unconsciously she glided into his life that day and took up her place—a place whence no rival should oust her for evermore.

CHAPTER III.

A RED ROSE.

And all night long his face before her lived,
 Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
 Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.

.
 He had not dreamed she was so beautiful;
 Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
 For silent, though he greeted her, she stood
 Rapt on his face.

TENNYSON.

IT is the night before Lady Manville's
 birthday ball. Lakeside is full of
 guests who have arrived that day.

High up in the heavens a midsummer
 moon hangs like a sphere of glowing amber;
 round their queen a court of pale stars

crowd the sky with their fitful twinkling lights. Not an enemy in the shape of a cloud intrudes a shadow among them; the lady-moon and her handmaidens hold supreme sway over all the sky. The mellow golden rays pour down upon the ivy-clad tower of the old wing of Lakeside, on the bare white walls of the new wing, on the light slopes of turf and the dark clumps of plantation, on the sleeping pools that lie still and shining as glass; the boats asleep on their waveless surface, the willow scarcely stirring its dipping boughs.

Most of the Lakeside party are out in the grounds, wandering about in pairs. The drawing-room is deserted; the piano, which usually at that hour is eloquent, silent. In the billiard-room Sir John Manville is having a game of pool with a couple of kindred souls; the stronger sex are in great force amongst the party this time, so that

there will be no danger of early wall-flowers and partnerless damsels to-morrow. Besides these three, there is not one of the select circle left within the walls of Lakeside; all the rest have strayed out one after another into the bright June night; one pair promenading straight up and down the avenue, one pair lost among the lights and shadows of the shrubberies, others flitting like black and white ghosts—always a black ghost and a white ghost together—about the paths that skirt the lawn. Amongst these pairs are Mr. Parkhurst and Miss Hastings.

They have been talking art—Mr. Parkhurst is not above talking “shop” to a sympathetic spirit, and Athelyn is quite well up by this time in the intended treatment of the picture to which a Hindoo temple is to form the background; they have been quoting poetry, and discussing their favourite poets,

ancient and modern ; now they have fallen into silence. Somehow, quietly and undemonstratively, he has taken her hand, and she leaves it passively in his without a word or a gesture of remonstrance.

She half wonders at herself for this ; it is the first time she has yielded even a tacit encouragement to any demonstration beyond verbal flattery. Of that she is tolerably well accustomed to stand strong doses. But hitherto she has always held herself aloof, with an innate reserve that is not in the least degree either shy or haughty, from any further advance. There is a kind of gentle frost icing her round, which now seems suddenly and strangely thawing. She is conscious of this with a faint surprise ; but she is so calmly happy walking there with him in the fair June moonlight that no wonder nor doubt nor thought of any kind can touch her to trouble her.

“How still and peaceful and lovely it is here,” she says, looking up at the sky alight with its myriad lamps.

“Peaceful,” he repeats. “And you are as peaceful as the night, are you not?”

“Yes,” she answers, simply. “I always am in the moonlight. It sheds such a beautiful hush and calm over everything.”

“To-morrow night won’t be like this. It will be all stir and bustle, brass bands and gas-light. You will like that too?”

“Yes,” she responds, animatedly. “I am catholic in my tastes. I can appreciate all forms of enjoyment. Will it not be pretty in there” (nodding towards the conservatory, the open door of which they are just passing) “when all the Chinese lanterns are hung up? And there are to be globes of all-coloured lights round the archway too, you know, and lamps outlining this path.”

“I like it better to-night than I shall in to-morrow’s glare of red and green light,” he says.

Athelyn pauses on the threshold of the conservatory, which to-night is only lit by two swinging lamps. They are standing in a broad cross-stream of the mingled lights of lamp and moon, and her hand which has rested so still begins to twist itself uneasily in his. He releases it directly.

“Are you cold?” he asks, looking down at her thin white dress, over which she has neither shawl nor scarf.

“No—but—it is a little cool, isn’t it?” she replies, inconsistently.

“Come in here, it’s a pretty nook,” he suggests, and they go up the two broad steps into the conservatory accordingly.

There is a great glass tank, cool and refreshing to look at, surrounded with rock-work, wherein gold fish show their shining

sides as they glide and turn; there are flowers of every kind and clime, from the temperate to the tropic zone; there are rare ferns growing as big as trees; the air is warm with colour and heavy with perfume. In cosy corners in the shade of the flowering shrubs there are low, lounging chairs, in two of which Mr. Parkhurst and Athelyn Hastings instal themselves.

He is silent, looking at her, and she finds nothing more original to say than,

“Are not the flowers lovely?” reaching out her hand to bend a branch of azalea towards her.

“Yes,” he assents, indifferently, and adds with abrupt earnestness, “But *that’s* the flower I want. Will you give me that rose?”

He indicates a deep red rose, which she wears fastened on the lace fichu of her dress by a gold arrow brooch.

“To keep in your pocket between a tobacco-pouch and a cigar-case?” she asks.

“Perhaps,” he answers, with a sort of obstinacy in his tone. “But will you give it me?”

“It is off our favourite tree,” she says, answering neither yea nor nay to his request; “mamma cut it this morning, and I brought it here with damp moss round the stalk to keep it fresh.”

“And I am to have it now, am I not?”

She looks up half hesitatingly. His pale picturesque face, with the dark brows and hollowed cheeks, although there is little real beauty about its thin, clear-cut features, has a strange fascination for her now; and under the demand of the deep-set piercing eyes she cannot say him nay. She raises her hand and slowly unclasps the golden arrow that holds the rose in its place.

He takes the flower from her with his

left hand, and with the right clasps both of hers together. Her hands are very slight and delicate—useless-looking white rose-leaves of hands, whose satin-softness no work has ever marred. His are not large, but bronzed and sinewy, and strong as fine steel. He clasps those fragile fingers of hers together with a sort of masterful energy.

“I will keep this rose,” he says, “till I die, or till I forget you. I wonder which will come first?”

“The last I should certainly say,” she answers, lightly, but with a fluttering in her breath that shakes her voice a little.

“Maybe,” he agrees; “but meanwhile I have got the rose! And——”

He pauses and draws a little nearer to her. Out-of-doors in the shadows and half lights she had left her hand peacefully in his. Here, with the lamp rays shining on her face, she is not at peace; her heart flutters,

her hand trembles, and a deep blush slowly suffuses her cheek; she shrinks back just a little, and tries to release her fingers from his clasp. Still her eyes do not droop or flee from his gaze, but meet it with their lovely shy, startled look that none but he has ever seen in them.

He thinks as he looks into those eyes that they have a stranger, rarer beauty than any woman's eyes he ever met before. They have the shining and the depth of moonlit seas—all the tints of the summer night seem to blend and melt in their mysterious liquid lights. Her head is set on the rounded white throat like that of a Greek goddess; her face seems to him pure and perfect as a pearl; a subtle fragrance floats up to him from the great rich coils of her midnight hair.

They are alone in the deserted conservatory, and this girl whose only half-reluctant

hand he holds is lovely as a dream. And a kiss is but a trifle to him; only a common cheap wild-flower, to be idly plucked and tossed away and forgotten, as so many such blossoms have been by him, the motto of whose light loves might be

“The best and the worst of this is
That neither is most to blame,
If you’ve forgotten my kisses
And I’ve forgotten your name!”

Yet for once Harold Parkhurst resists temptation—because for once he is moved by more than romance or passion, fancy or flirtation; he is really in love with Athelyn Hastings.

He lets go of the shy tremulous little hands; and a half smile stirs under the heavy black moustache—an inscrutable smile that is as sad as it is tender.

“You want a bit of bright colour there,” he says, suddenly dropping the lover and

becoming the artist. "One of those red camellias will do to replace the rose."

Then he goes off into abstract questions of colour, and leaves sentiment alone for the rest of the evening.

Flirtation is a common thing at Lakeside; it seems to be catching; it pervades the atmosphere. Flirtations begun here have ended in matches ere now; happy pairs have been brought together under that hospitable roof where a hostess young and gay and sympathetic presides, and in those romantic grounds where the chaperon has not been known to follow. There is some harmless chaff, but no tea-table scandal, there; and any young couple who may be either flirting or making love need not feel themselves embarrassingly conspicuous. Nevertheless Lady Manville's wandering attention is attracted by the mutual absorption of two of her guests.

Harold Parkhurst has come there leaving his history behind him. No evil stories have followed him to Lakeside; no one there knows any bad or any good about him. Still he is a man who somehow can nowhere pass unnoticed. As he moves amongst a crowd, there is always more than one individual's fair share of observation following his tall, spare, lissome figure, with a certain indescribable unconventionalism about its every movement, his dark Rembrandt-like head, with the vigorous hair curling low on the level brows.

He has that fatal gift of fascination which whether in man or woman oftener leads its owner in the end to woe than weal, which works the mischief that not seldom recoils on the worker, yet which all who lack it covet, and all who possess it wield as a weapon it would be shame to sheathe. For the gift means triumph of conquest and

vain-glory of power, although it rarely fails sooner or later to draw down the thunders on the head it crowns.

Lady Manville ignores Captain Jarvis's admiration of the meek-eyed Madonna-like Dorcas Bartlett, and passes by unobserved the flirtation between the Reverend Alfred and the too-captivating Mrs. Sinclair; but she notices Mr. Parkhurst's attention to Athelyn Hastings.

"I provided Mr. Parkhurst especially for you, my dear," she says gaily to Athelyn, into whose room she has come fluttering in her light butterfly way for a few minutes good night chat. "And upon my word I think it has been a most successful provision."

"I am sure I am satisfied if you are," laughs Athelyn.

"It's a regular case," pursues Sophy Manville, with a satisfied smile; she likes

the shelter of her roof to be propitious to the little god of Love who has done so well for her. Has she not got the best husband, and the loveliest baby, and the finest house for miles around? "I know the symptoms of the fever well, and he's got it—rather a bad case too, I think; and upon my word," she adds, scrutinising Athelyn's crimsoned face, "I believe *you* have got a touch of it!"

"Is it so easily taken?" the girl asks, smiling, but secretly invoking malisons on her own guiltily blushing cheeks.

"It's catching, my child—catching, but you shouldn't catch it from—or for—a 'detrimental,' if you can help it, and I'm afraid Parkhurst is a most decided detrimental; but then, you perverse girl! I never knew you flirt with an eligible man, if there was a penniless student or a crack-brained poet at hand! And, by-the-by,

Athelyn, what would Paul Severne say to your latest, if he were here?"

"What he generally says if I waltz three times or sit out a dance with anyone, and that is—nothing! He only looks down on me from an immeasurable height, as if I were a child at play, and probably pulls a pamphlet on the Progressive Development of Humanity out of his pocket and recommends it to me as a sobering study."

"I know you play at Platonics with him," responds Lady Manville, "but I never yet knew platonic friendships last—as friendships. Some day he'll fling himself at your feet, and ask you to go shares in his attic in London and all his flourishing estates in the air."

"Sophy, what an absurd idea!" exclaims Athelyn, with a genuine burst of merriment. "Fancy dear old Paul at *anybody's* feet! he is safely wedded to his theories and to humanity in general."

“There never was a man, my dear,” strikes in her friend, briskly—“even a philanthropist, who wouldn’t divorce humanity in general when he fell in love with one woman in particular !”

“Which Paul is not in the least likely to do ; he is seeking his ideal woman, I fancy—I wish him joy, if ever he finds her ; and you may rest assured, Sophy, that *our* friendship will last safely enough *as* friendship, if never a friendship did before !”

CHAPTER IV.

“DO YOU LOVE ME?”

O tree-girt ways

Wherein we wandered? Oh, the happy place

Where first I burst on Love and Love on me!

P. B. MARSTON.

MR. PARKHURST is one of those black swans occasionally found among the stronger sex, and once in a cycle it is to be hoped even among the daughters of Eve, in whose nature the element of gossip has neither part nor lot. It may be from want of sympathy or from self-concentration that he is so lacking in that important quality of humanity; but the fact remains, in his con-

versation as in his thoughts, the elf of gossip in no guise ever shows its impish or angelic face. He never talks about other people; but, by way of balance, other people talk a great deal about him. In the evening Lady Manville has honoured him by observing with interest his attention to Athelyn Hastings. The next morning after breakfast he comes under discussion again amongst the ladies of the party.

The men have one and all shunned the precincts of the drawing-room and left it sacred to their wives, sisters, and sweet-hearts—daughters there do not happen to be any at this time at Lakeside. A fragrance dear to masculine noses creeping through the keyhole of the smoking-room is the only sign of manly presences in the house. In their respected shrine, for whose sacredness they are not so grateful as they might have been, the maids and matrons are

whiling away the time in languid chit-chat and fancy work.

Miss De Vere, whom female society avowedly "bores!" is lounging on an ottoman near the piano, stifling a yawn behind a piece of music; Athelyn Hastings is picking out a tune with one hand and carrying on a feeble accompaniment of small talk with Miss Bartlett, none of them seeming to have energy to achieve a song or a fantasia to so limited an audience.

The hostess and two or three other ladies form another group, mostly occupied with embroidery, and flitting lightly from flower to flower in the sweet garden of gossip.

"By-the-by, dear Lady Manville, who is this Mr. Parkhurst?" inquires pretty Mrs. Sinclair, with mild interest—only mild, because hitherto the gentleman in question has not paid her much attention.

“An artist,” is the prompt if not very comprehensive reply.

“A wolf, who goes about seeking whom he may devour,” briskly interposes Mrs. Archer, a piquant widow who arrived the day before, who knows everybody’s biography and never gives her authorities, but whose statements are somehow always accepted as authentic.

Athelyn ceases running over the keys, and edges nearer to the embroidering group.

“I always trust wolves who wear their natural skin,” observes Lady Manville, “and Mr. Parkhurst makes no pretence to a sheep’s clothing, so I put my faith in him.”

“A wolf and an artist; not the first time the terms have been coupled!—but what more?” asks Mrs. Sinclair, gently persistent; she likes to know the “who and what” of everyone.

“I did hear once that he was the son of an old Jew who made money of some new oil and changed his name from Isaacs to Parkhurst, and married a Portuguese lady of rank. But I don't believe a word of it,” says Lady Manville.

“No, there's not a word of truth in it,” says Mrs. Archer, scornfully, with her air of unquestionable authority. “And his wolf-like qualities I imagine to be hereditary—that is, if he's the man I take him for. I recognised the name at once.”

“Well, who is he, then?” inquire the others, eagerly, in a breath, his hostess adding stoutly, “A very nice fellow, whether he's English, Portuguese, or Hebrew, wolf or sheep.” Athelyn does not enter into the conversation, but in a casual way occupies herself looking over some books on a table in the nearer neighbourhood of the matrons, who are absorbed in their congenial topic.

“Parkhurst, you know, is a name in the Brantyre family, a grandmother’s, great-aunt’s, or something’s name,” observes Mrs. Archer, with a sort of mild importance.

“And is he connected with the Brantyre family, then?”

“Not on the right hand,” the authority replies, significantly. “I know the whole story.” She lowers her voice, and the others lay down their embroidery. “Old Lord Brantyre was rather wild in his youth, you know.” They had not known, but they look as if the fact was matter of history. “He went out to Cuba and picked up some Spanish girl, a girl of good family, I believe—a planter’s daughter.

“There was a row out there, I heard, with an indignant brother, but it was hushed up somehow, and when he came back to England he brought her with him. She used to be Mrs. Parkhurst, and there was supposed to be

an absent Parkhurst, but he was never seen nor heard of. There was a son—a little boy with a taste for art—who used to draw with a bit of charcoal on the walls and be shown off to visitors, for she managed to get into a certain circle. Well, after Lord Brantyre came into the peerage and married Miss Chetwynd; there was never anything more heard of the *soi-disant* Mrs. Parkhurst and her son. She died some years ago, I believe. You see, the links of the chain are pretty clear.”

Everyone as usual accepts Mrs. Archer’s facts and deductions.

“How very interesting!”

“That accounts for his seeming to have no family—not such a thing as a relation in the world.”

“The story is not very generally known,” Mrs. Archer says, with the modesty befitting her superiority of information. “I daresay

Lord Brantyre would rather this young fellow didn't make the name conspicuous, but he is quite a genius, I hear, and will make people talk one day.”

They drift off from Harold Parkhurst in particular to art and artists in general, and Athelyn's interest in the discussion flags. Still she lingers by and listens, wondering if they will not speak of him again. By the time that it becomes evident that they have wandered far away from him, and for the hour forgotten him, she is weary of the drawing-room gossip; life indoors seems to have lost its savour for her, and she strolls out into the garden.

It is sunny and beautiful there, and she saunters away along, thinking on the only subject that this day interests her much. Lady Manville's piece of hearsay gossip she scouts and snubs as utterly as Mrs. Archer had done. Son of a Jew named Isaacs, the

inventor of an *oil*, indeed ! Simply absurd ! But son of a Spanish lady and an English peer, alone in life and worse than orphaned, that was probable enough. And had he not spoken of Cuba as his birthplace ?

What eyes he has !—sad, strange, and unfathomable ; not English eyes. She recollects that, in the first hour she saw him, her *signalement* of him began with “Spanish eyes.” She is thinking far more of *what* he is than *who* he is. He is utterly unlike her blond and athletic ideal with the Herculean frame and the fair open Saxon face, and yet she cannot help acknowledging to herself that there is a curious charm about him. He is not in the least like any other man she has ever seen, she reflects, and in this she hits the secret of his attraction. Presently she hears firm, leisurely footsteps crunch the gravel, and looking up, as she nears a turning in the path, finds herself

confronted by the object of her thoughts. He, too, is alone, and there is no room for doubt as to the genuineness of the quick, glad smile that lights up his face as they meet.

Half an hour later the early noonday sun is blazing down full upon the broad lazy pools that gave Lakeside its name. A former proprietor had called it “The Ponds,” but as the estate grew and flourished, and embraced field after field, and spread from fence to fence, and on the house added stories arose and fresh rooms were thrown out, a more ambitious and euphonious title was bestowed upon it.

If the two pools are not strictly speaking large enough to be called lakes, they are big enough to boast of a bridge, a boat, a punt, swans, water-lilies, weeping-willows, and the larger one even of an island.

The island is like the Prisoner of Chillon's
"small green isle," inasmuch as

"On it there are three tall trees,
And on it there are young flowers growing
Of gentle breath and hue!"

But it is larger than that Byronic spot which the British tourist rows around, and fain would land upon, did not the steep and railed-in sides forbid (though the adventurous American has been known to scale the barriers and whittle a souvenir from the tallest of the three tall trees). On the Lakeside island there are three great elm-trees, to say nothing of the modestly drooping willow and straggling nut-bushes and slim saplings that will shoot up to the height of the tall trees in time. The banks are covered with wild-flowers; the pale blue eye of the forget-me-not peeping shyly among the brighter blossoms and deep green glossy leaves of the periwinkle; the fragile

convolvulus droops from the trunks of the trees; here and there the wild peppermint perfumes the air with its keen spicy odour, and the tall willow-herb bends its rosy head. On the grassy slope that forms the landing-place of the island, Mr. Parkhurst and Miss Hastings—truants still from the general body of the party—are standing, with the boat from which they have just landed at their feet, its oars lying idly in the thwarts, as still as the leaves of the weeping-willows that dip into the sleepy shallow water in which there is scarcely a ripple to blur the outline of each little pebble shining beneath.

A swan comes sailing towards them, curving its long white snake of a neck and glancing at them with keen mild eyes.

“He thinks we have some bread. Why did you not think of putting a biscuit in your pocket?” says Athelyn, reproachfully.

“That’s like a woman!” he replies. “*She* never forgets! No, my friend!” addressing the swan who is coasting along with inquiring looks. “No biscuit here. It was *I* who forgot it, of course. The truth is, I was only thinking of myself—and of this young lady at my side.” He looks at Athelyn, half smilingly, half intently. “An island isn’t half a bad institution,” he adds. “We might be two Crusoes here, if it were not for the boat that is to take us back to the world. I feel a grudge against that boat—it looks as if it was waiting for us!”

He sets his foot on the boat and stoops to pick up one of the oars, and so doing glances up at her again. She is standing half in the sunshine, half in the shade of one of the tall trees, the wavering flecks of light playing about her like showers of bright petals shaken from some sun-gold

rose; the warmth of summer is glowing on her cheek; a dreamy smile just parts her lips. She is as thoughtlessly happy as a child—happier than if her penniless Bohemian companion had been a millionaire with broad acres and ancestral walls in his gift.

Half on an impulse and half by an accident—he could scarcely himself have told you the next moment which it was—he pushes the boat off the sloping shore, and it drifts away among the water-lilies, scaring back the swan. Then he turns to Athelyn and laughs. He has for a man a singularly soft and sweet-toned laugh, though a suspicious woman might have detected an undertone in it which would possibly have displeased and would certainly have set her on her guard.

Athelyn only utters a gentle exclamation of half-amused dismay.

“What are we to do now?” she says,

looking at him in a laughing, child-like appeal.

“What, indeed? Here we are, and there’s the boat.”

“We might be Robinson Crusoes in earnest now—which of us should be Man Friday?—and oh, what a pity we haven’t got a gipsy kettle and sticks; we might picnic out here! But, seriously,” she adds, after a moment’s pause, glancing from him to the drifting boat, round which the swan is suspiciously sailing on a voyage of inspection, “how are we to get back?”

“Are you in such a hurry, Athelyn?” he asks; he has never called her by her name before.

“Well, not in a great hurry, but I don’t see how we are to get that boat,” with her eyes fixed upon it.

“Forget the boat,” he says, half impatiently, half tenderly, taking her hand in his.

“Look up at me. Why hurry? is it not lovely here?”

“Yes, it is lovely,” she answers, looking up at him obediently; “but—I wish——”

There is a sort of timid, trustful appeal in her tone.

He looks down into the very depths of the sea-grey eyes, and reads there not one glimmer of doubt, or fear, or anger, or reproach; coquetry there is none, then nor ever, in her gaze. Athelyn’s *eyes* can never coquette; all such spells may play in her voice, her smile; but those eyes, ever pure and clear as deep, still waters, know no look save that of the truth and purity of her stainless soul.

He meets her look steadily, intently for a few moments, then he says very softly and tenderly, yet with a touch of distance in his voice,

“I am sorry I set it adrift; it was

thoughtless of me. I will get it back. Must I try for it immediately? Mayn't we stay a little?"

"If you wish—a few minutes," she answers, half hesitatingly.

"Not one minute against your will," he rejoins, promptly. "There, go you and sit down under that tree, and I'll get the boat back in a trice."

Athelyn obeys, and Mr. Parkhurst, not wishing for an unnecessary wetting, hunts about in the grotto near the landing-place for some assistance, and is lucky enough to find a punting-pole and a coil of rope, by the aid of which, after a good deal of exertion, and at the cost of some havoc among the water-lilies and panic among the swans, he manages to recapture the fugitive boat.

Then he rejoins Athelyn, whom he finds sitting placidly on the bank in the shadiest nook between the elm-trees; she has taken

her hat off, and is amusing herself by twining round it a wreath of wild flowers, with a bunch of which she has already adorned her sash.

“Well, the boat’s ready at the landing-place,” he says, taking up his place at her side, “so now, I suppose, we needn’t hurry? You look pretty comfortable here; you’ve been occupying your time, I see—better trimming than a brass buckle and a murdered bullfinch, isn’t it?” he observes, picking up the flower-wreathed straw hat.

He fancies—it is only fancy—that she returns his smile a shade more pensively and coldly than usual.

“You are not angry?” he says, gently.

“I angry—no! why should I be?” she answers, in soft surprise.

“Don’t be angry with me on our last day together,” he continues, almost pleadingly; “we have only got to-day; to-morrow

morning early I am off to London, then to India. I ought to sing 'Kathleen Mavourneen' under your window, oughtn't I?" he adds, with one of his sudden changes of tone. " 'It may be for years, and it may be for ever!'"

"*That* line would be appropriate, anyhow," she answers. Her smile is not so frankly gay as usual; the lightness of her tone is forced. Neither of these signs is lost upon Harold Parkhurst.

"It might be for ever, certainly," he agrees. "India's a long way off. I wonder, if I never came back, would you be the least bit sorry?" He waits a moment or two, then persists—

"Why don't you answer? Your silence is uncomplimentary! Would you be sorry?"

He wonders whether she will tell the truth, or take refuge in some falsehood or

frivolity. Yesterday she might have done the latter; but to-day she answers steadily and gently, though a blush is deepening slowly in her cheek,

“Yes—I should be sorry.”

“Never fear!” he says, recklessly, with a smile audaciously defiant of the fates. “I shall come back! Did a bad shilling ever fail to turn up again?”

There is a silence; his keen falcon eyes pierce into hers, seem to search her very heart. Before his gaze she quivers and turns her head away. He still looks at her in silence, bends forward to watch the averted face, notes the changing colour fade and leave it very pale, sees the sensitive, child-like lips tremble; and his own eyes soften strangely; no trace of the audacious searching, the half-scoffing defiance they sometimes express is left in their tender and yet reverent gaze.

“Will you ever think of me when I am far away?” he asks.

“Yes,” she replies, faintly, her heart fluttering like a wounded bird. He bends his head nearer to her, and his arm steals round her waist.

“Look up, Athelyn,” he whispers, “don’t turn away! To-day—our last day—you will let me take the memory of one kiss away with me?—Athelyn—darling—just one!”

She cannot speak; but slowly she turns her face to him, in obedience to a spell she has neither power nor will to resist; and he takes from those beautiful lips the first kiss they have ever yielded to mortal man.

“When I come back,” he says, “a year hence—perhaps more than a year—do you think you will have forgotten me?”

“I shall not forget you,” she murmurs.

“I have wandered half over the world, but I have seen no woman like you. You have come into my life like an angel, bringing a blessing, my white pure Athelyn! And *you*—you are not sorry to have met me?”

“No.”

“Then some day,” he goes on, clasping her closer to his heart, “if I say to you, Athelyn, my love, my only love! I have come back to my one good angel from the other side of the world, will you let the wanderer stay and rest, and find a home at last—a home and a haven *here*?”

She is silent. A promise to her is sacred. If she gives him this promise, she is pledged for ever. It is so solemn a thing, she pauses, with heaving breast and white cheeks and startled eyes, and makes a faint attempt to release herself from his arms.

“Will you?” he urges. “Or will you

have forgotten me? and shall I find you some other man's wife?"

"I told you I should never forget you," she answers, letting her hand droop back into his softly as a falling blossom. "And I never shall! And you will not find me anyone else's wife. I—I have not thought of marrying anyone at all."

"Then *don't* think of it!" he rejoins, "not until I come back to you! There will be plenty of time then."

"Yes," she assents, with a faint smile shyly playing about her lips, somewhat relieved.

The first idea of an irrevocable bond, of a plunge into the deep untried sea of marriage, comes as a shock to a girl whose wild shy heart has only freshly been tangled in the spell of love, who does not comprehend her captivity yet.

He is satisfied too; let him only find her

free on his return; that is enough. He lifts her fair face to his and kisses her again, softly as if those lips of hers were rose-leaves that he half feared to touch. Is it hours or minutes that they linger there together, looking through the screen of drooping boughs upon the sparkling water? Neither of them could ever tell.

A rapt calm happiness is on Athelyn's face, the wonder of a beautiful dream in her eyes. The consideration whether this man is in the regard of the world a good match or a bad match never occurs to her; she does not even think “ what manner of man is this ” in himself; nay, in this mirage-land wherein she is wandering she has not even put to herself the question which he presently puts to her,

“ Do you love me, Athelyn ?”

“ Do I ?” she murmured, dreamily. “ Is this Love ?”

She did not know. She had thought that Love was passion and pain. This was joy and peace. All around was the warm still smile of the fair mellow June day, and her heart seemed as tranquil now as the sunny water where the languid lilies slept. She was rapt in a sort of blissful trance, as if the world stood still, and all her future and all her past were melted into this one morning hour.

“Is this Love?” she wondered, and her eyes appealed to his.

“If you do not love me, Athelyn,” he said, “you *shall!* For *I* love *you!*”

CHAPTER V.

“THE DAWN OF THE DAY THAT PARTS US.”

Love is a day, Sweetheart, shining and bright,
 It hath its rose-dawn ere the morning light—
 Its glow and glory of the sudden sun—
 Its noontide heat as the swift hours wear on—
 Its fall of dew, and silver-lighted night—
 Love is a day, Sweetheart, shining and bright!

LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON.

ALL the rest of that day passed like a dream to Athelyn. The happy morning hours fled away; the afternoon sun flamed to its zenith and burned its bright track slowly down the western skies. The day ripened to the splendid dusk of a summer night; and all earth seemed fair and

peaceful as heaven, and Life a garden of delight, in Athelyn's eyes.

Again and again she asked of her own heart if this was Love, and wondered could it be Love that shed this brightness over all the world? For if so, this maligned Love was unjustly counted as a pitfall and a snare, a passion and a pain; it was a rose without a thorn. Life had never seemed so peaceful, so beautiful to her as now. She walked on the earth as one wandering in the fairest ways of dreamland, and it seemed as air beneath her feet.

Athelyn was ordinarily of an excitable and nervous temperament; but she felt now neither excited nor agitated in the least degree. The truth was that her nerves were too highly strung for her to be conscious that they were strained at all. The very tensivity of the strain prevented her from feeling it. She was calm as one in a dream,

and had no idea that this was like the sultry calm of air surcharged with the electricity that must, some coming hour, burst into storm. For she had been right in deeming that all the elements of storm are commingled in love; only she did not dream of the rain of tears bitter as barren seas and the darkness as of great eclipse, folded in the breast of the radiant cloud that floated so peacefully across her sky and made all its loveliness.

Lady Manville was too busy in superintending the preparations for the night's festivity, and the other guests too much interested in their own proceedings, for Mr. Parkhurst's and Miss Hastings's morning wanderings to attract any attention; and Athelyn's sensitive varying colour was too given to fitful flickerings and deepenings for her vivid blush when Harold Parkhurst bent to her ear to be anything noteworthy.

It seemed odd to her to observe how utterly unchanged all external things were, how like herself she looked and spoke, how exactly to-day was like to yesterday—while all her world was transformed.

In the evening she dressed with a fluttering pleasure, an anxious care she seldom gave to her toilette. It seemed a new face that looked back at her from the mirror, a new light that shone in the deep sea-tinted eyes.

She wore a dress of a rare and delicate amber satin; garlands of white lilies looped around the skirt; white lilies with gold leaves in her dark hair; no jewels save a thick gold chain coiled round her neck and broad gold bracelets on her slender pearl-white arms. It was a costume that would have killed a sallow and ruined a ruddy complexion, but from which Athelyn's lilies and roses—the purest of lilies and

the palest of roses—came out triumphantly.

The night was as much a dream to her as the day. She knew she was looking her best ; if her mirror had not told her so already, Harold Parkhurst’s eyes would have informed her of the fact the moment she entered the room ; and although he made no attempt to monopolise her—although, with a magnanimity not generally expected and only occasionally to be found in a lover, he even said to her that “ as he did not waltz himself, he would introduce her to a fellow who waltzed splendidly,” yet always, wherever she went, she felt his eyes following her. Through all that brilliant evening, while the music clashed out its gayest, gladdest strains, while the rooms were like huge flower-beds touched by a magic wand into life and every blossom whirling in a mad Malstrom—light, colour, melody and perfume all around—Athelyn abandoned

herself to a keen enjoyment of the hour, with a new sense thrilling under the surface pleasure that made her feel as if she were living two lives—one on earth and one a dream, and both all joy. Hitherto she had plunged into such pleasures as these and enjoyed her small society-triumphs with the simple zest of a child. Now, if one pair of dark eyes had not followed her, the scent would have gone out of the roses, the colour out of the shifting scene, the melody out of the music, for her. But she did not know this yet; the rose was without a thorn so far.

Late in the night, when supper was over, when the tired musicians, having availed themselves of a pause to refresh exhausted nature with champagne and chicken, had returned to their labours—when the waltz was whirling fast and furious, and a few early dowagers had departed, and a few

energetic young people were asserting that “*now* they were going to begin to enjoy themselves,” Mr. Parkhurst and Athelyn wandered out into the garden. The same move had been made by others before them. The night was still, and warm, and fair, even at this coolest and darkest hour that precedes the dawn; the trees were silent as sleep, a sprinkling of great bright stars were shining still; the lights from the house streamed out of the open windows and flickered on lawn and path, where several couples were strolling about, or resting from the dance in the cosy nooks in which the grounds of Lakeside abounded, on rustic benches under spreading trees, in rose-wreathed arbours lurking round unexpected corners of the shrubbery.

On one of the garden-seats, under a great chestnut-tree, Harold Parkhurst and Athelyn sat down; he had made her bring a scarf

with her, and insisted on wrapping it closely round her with a sort of fond proprietorship that thrilled her with a new sweet sense of dependence. Athelyn was just the type of woman who loves to be commanded in trifles, and whom, from that quality, some men misinterpret, and, taking that as the key-note of the nature, think they have to deal with a spirit they can model like wax to their will. Sometimes they find out their mistake too late; sometimes, if the fair waxen saint remains on her pedestal, they never find it out at all.

Although there was not a breath of wind, the air at that hour is always fresh, and the grass was cool with dew.

“You must not catch cold,” Harold Parkhurst said, drawing the shawl carefully round her. “I must leave you well tomorrow, else I shall be anxious, leaving

you. You look so frail and ethereal, Athelyn; are you well and strong?”

“Yes, strong enough. You must not misjudge me by my looks; I am one of those people who are sent into the world natural impostors; we look much more delicate than we are, and get a good deal of sympathy we have no right to.”

“You may be an impostor in that,” replied Harold; “I hope you are, for you look but a fragile little vessel to stand stormy seas—almost too slight a skiff for a man to trust the cargo of all his hopes and his future in. Be stronger than you look, if you will—if you can! It’s the only thing you will ever be an impostor in, I know. From the moment I looked into your eyes, I knew you were as true as you are pure.”

“I think I am true,” she said, simply and

thoughtfully, "but—I have never been tried."

"Yes, you are true," he said. "I wonder, will you be true to me?—You have not promised me, you remember. You were too cautious to pledge yourself; you have promised me nothing."

"Did I not? If I did not, I—I," her voice sank shyly—"I will promise you now——"

"That you will marry me when I come to claim you?"

"That I will marry no one else."

"You promise that? Your word on that!" he urged, almost vehemently, drawing her close to his heart with a sort of masterful tenderness, as if he claimed her then and there as his right.

Athelyn was silent a moment; then, "I promise!" she said, with a fluttering of the breath that was almost a sob—hesitat-

ing not from any regret or reluctance, but because it seemed to her that she was crossing a Rubicon then.

“That is selfish of me to ask,” Harold Parkhurst said, suddenly, after a pause. “Selfish—unfair. I am going away to the other side of the world. I ask you to promise to keep true to me—when you do not even know whether you love me or not. And I ask you to say Nay to any other man—who may be ten times more worthy of you than I—for my vagabond sake. No, it’s not fair! Look here, Athelyn, take back your promise! Just because you are so true, and I believe you would hold your word so sacred, I won’t accept it from you. Keep your life in your own hands. Marry, if you will! From the moment you wish to be free, you are free for ever from all claim from me!”

She made no answer in words, but with

a gesture infinitely graceful in its shy half-shrinking tenderness she drew nearer to his side and laid her hand in his.

He smoothed the silky coils of her dark soft hair, and lifted her face gently to his, and kissed her, as fondly as if in meeting, as tenderly as if it were a farewell.

“My darling!” he whispered, “if you will learn to love me, my love shall make you happy—shall shield you round and keep trouble off you all your life! No man on earth could love you better than I will do!” He paused. Perhaps his memory brought back to him untimely echoes of protestations whispered into other ears—of kisses pressed upon other lips. Perhaps a ghost rose up out of the past and looked at him with reproachful eyes. Perhaps it was in answer to some silent presence that breathed in the chill of the morning, “Remember me!” that he spoke to Athelyn, as

if arguing against a doubt that she had neither felt nor uttered. “I may have fancied I loved before—but this *is* love at last! You are all that my ideal ever was. Why should I wander from you when in you I find all goodly things?”

“No, no,” she murmured, protestingly; “they are not in me—they are in your eyes that see me. I wonder, will you like me when you know me better?”

“I wonder!” he said, fondly, with a half laugh, still caressing her hair. “So you have faults, Athelyn, have you? Where are they? How long must I know you before I find them?”

“Not long; I wonder you have not found some of them already, they are tolerably near the surface.”

“I haven’t seen them. I don’t want to see them. I want to take my ideal away with me to India—to dream of my spotless

white flower blooming here, without a speck or flaw. But I don't want to be left to have nothing but *dreams*. I want tangible and visible signs of you. I want letters. I may write to you, may I not? And you will write to me?"

"Yes—sometimes."

"Sometimes!" he echoed, half smiling, half discontentedly. "No concession without a condition—a limitation! Are you suspicious of me? do you mistrust me?"

"Suspicious?" she said, lifting her head in simple amazement. "Suspicious of *you!* mistrust *you!*"

Her tone of puzzled astonishment was a more eloquent refutation of the idea than if she had protested ever so warmly.

"Ah, you do not! That is well," he said, softly, looking at her with something yearningly tender and reverent in his gaze.

Assuredly in avowing he loved her he had taken no false vow.

The bench where they sat was facing the east. Across the meadows a faint, faint streak of opaline light was just perceptible on the horizon; the sky was beginning to brighten; the stars had paled.

“There is the dawn!” he said, “the dawn of the day that parts us two!”

“Have we been here so long?”

“Long? Not ten minutes! No need for us to move yet. Hark to the Blue Danube waltz! they are spinning away in there—will be spinning for the next hour and more! And look—do you see that white dress behind those laurels? There are other people out besides ourselves. Stay here awhile, Athelyn; it will be many a day before we two shall see daybreak together again.”

She had no wish to move. She was

happy, and as yet she did not realise the pain of parting, nor even the fact that this was a parting hour. She only felt the hour was sweet.

They sat and watched the ice-blue light of dawn deepen—the feathery tree-tops stand out in darker and sharper silhouettes against the lightening sky.

“Do you know, Athelyn,” he said, abruptly breaking into a silence, “I am not worthy of you—I have not led a good life.”

“Have you not?” she replied, looking at him with grave, tender, innocent eyes. “I am sorry for that. But perhaps——”

“Perhaps what?” He wondered what conjecture about his past or future this child could be going to utter.

“We are none of us,” she said, hesitatingly, “so good as we might be—as we ought to be. And perhaps you—may over-rate any faults of yours. We all have

faults—so you are only like the rest. Nobody is perfect in the world, they say—though some people have seemed to me good enough for Heaven. And—I think you must be good.”

She added these last words very softly; and her look said “I care for you—and how could I care for you if you were not good?”

There was something in her look, in her tone, in the utter trust and innocence of her child-like words, that just touched a chord in Harold Parkhurst’s breast that was rarely, if ever, stirred. A storm of sobs, a passion of reproaches, the sigh of a last farewell, would probably have moved him less than this girl’s quiet simple words.

He did not answer her; he could not trust his voice; something had risen in his throat that stopped his utterance, and as he stared across the meadows, the horizon-line

—so clear but now—seemed vague and blurred.

Athelyn leant forward and looked up in his face; he turned his head away, but not before she had seen that the dark, daring eyes which had mastered and subjugated her were strangely dim. A sort of electric thrill ran through her; she knew not whether it was most of joy or pain. Only her heart leapt, and stood still; the blood fled from her cheeks and lips and left her white as marble, and if he had been striving to make her love him, in that moment the battle was won! the hour in which he most utterly yielded he was conqueror.

On an impulse that swept away all hesitant tremors of shyness, and thawed the last thin ice that had shielded and saved her heart from Love, she slid her gentle arms round his neck and drew his head down on her shoulder, and there was silence, broken

only by a few wild whispered words at last— words spoken from soul to soul as only in a few such supreme hours of life can man and woman speak.

The veil of Night had melted all away and left the sky one vault of purest sapphire. A pale primrose ripple of light was surging up in the East and breaking over the long sweeping line of meadow land.

Side by side, and hand in hand, Harold and Athelyn looked away to the shining horizon which, in that hour, was glorified to them by—

“The light that never was on land or sea.”

An hour afterwards the broad daylight was streaming into the deserted ball-room, whence—

“Half to the setting moon had gone,
And half to the rising day;
Low on the sand and loud on the stone
The last wheel echoed away.”

The candles were burnt down in their sockets, the flowers looked drooping; day dispelled all the glamour of the night, and threw a cold and disenchanting light over the scene a little while ago so brilliant.

The Lakeside party, all other guests having gone, stood together, looking a forlorn group stranded in one corner of the great ball-room. The girls, pale or flushed, tired or untired, looked one and all somehow faded and "put out" in the pink light of the sunrise that had set all the East ablaze.

"Is there anything in the world more dreary than the 'last look round' after a ball?" observed Mr. Parkhurst, who was amongst the group by Athelyn's side. "Well, the night is over now," he added, more especially for her ear. "Shall I see you to-morrow?—*this* morning, that is. Captain Jarvis and I leave directly after early breakfast. Shall we see you then?"

“Oh, I think so; I suppose I shall get up as usual.”

“That’s more than *I* shall!” struck in little Lady Manville, vivaciously, who had just nipped her twentieth yawn in the bud. “If you are bent on leaving us at that unholy hour, you had better take a tender farewell of me now! Mortal eyes will not see me till noon. If either of you girls,” addressing three or four young ladies impartially, “are early birds, you are welcome to my share of the worm—and perhaps you’ll kindly undertake to pour out coffee for these gentlemen?”

“Perhaps you will kindly specify which or what is the worm, as it was left rather vague!”

“Whichever or whatever it is, I promise not to claim any share of it, unless I happen to be an early bird!” observed Athelyn, as if there was the smallest doubt of

her early rising on that day of all days!

If the long calm day and the long bright night had been like a dream to her, the first stir of the waking was beginning to touch her now. All through the cool early morning hours she lay sleepless, open-eyed, swaying between pain and pleasure—the joy of yesterday and the severance of to-day. Yet over her young and ardent and only newly roused nature, Joy, her patron goddess hitherto, still held the stronger power; and Yesterday triumphed over To-day.

She was to see him again; they were to meet and part; and that coming morning hour stood between her and all her future; she saw nothing beyond it.

That hour came; but like most of such eagerly anticipated hours it was unsatisfactory. It fled too fast; every minute of it was gone before she could feel she grasped

it; it was taken up with common-places, and crowded with a press of those scraps of business that always obstinately will intrude themselves on the most romantic parting,—being rather important details to the traveller whose comfort they concern, but harmonising ill with the sentiment of “the girl he leaves behind him,” who, as a rule, would like to have ample room to indulge in the tender reminiscences and reassurances which are so cruelly curtailed and interrupted by such considerations as a demand for a portmanteau-strap or a luggage-label.

People must eat; orders must be given; and in this case Captain Jarvis *would* look at the clock and make cheerful allusions to their chances of catching the train, *would* hurry the servants, and discursively discuss the P. and O. route to India with Mr. Parkhurst—making Athelyn feel as if the im-

pending parting was already an accomplished fact, and she was already shut apart from him. Unfeeling people would laugh and talk, and eat game-pie with a robust appetite ; and she forced herself to laugh and talk too, and saw the golden minutes slip away, and had not half a dozen words with Harold Parkhurst. Just at the last he seized a moment to whisper a good-bye to her, a promise to write, an entreaty that she would answer his letters. Then the dogcart rattled up to the door ; there was a bustling warning of " No time to lose ! " and they clasped hands and parted.

The hour had passed, and Athelyn went back to her room ; she felt cold, and sick at heart, and looking accidentally in the glass she was surprised at her own paleness, at the fixed sadness of her own great mournful eyes. Was it all since yesterday, she wondered?—only yesterday they had rowed

over to the island—less than twenty-four hours ago! There seemed a year between that morning and this. Yesterday he was with her—an hour ago he was with her, and now—

“He is gone!” she said aloud, unconsciously.

And those words unsealed the fountain of such tears as she had never shed till now—tears of yearning for but one more word, but one more look, in which she seemed to weep her heart away.

CHAPTER VI.

A PAIR OF FRIENDS.

I dwell amid the city ever.
 The great humanity which beats
 Its life along the stony streets,
 Like a strong and unsunned river
 In a self-made course ;
 I sit and hearken while it rolls.
 Very sad and very hoarse
 Certes is the flow of souls,
 Infinitest tendencies
 By the finite prest and pent,
 In the finite turbulent.

E. B. BROWNING.

WHY people fall in love is frequently a puzzle to their friends, but it is often quite as great a wonder why they do *not*. A woman's unaccountable infatuation

for one man with an ugly face and an obliquity in his moral vision, is not a whit more astonishing than her utter indifference to another who can boast of all the cardinal virtues and a Grecian profile.

Nor are men a degree more reasonable than women in this the important decision that casts the die for their future lives. It is to the full as surprising to observe what perfect beauty, innocence, virtue, and grace a man will pass by indifferently in the search for his ideal, as to take note of the piece of clay out of which he often fashions his idol at last. When our choice surprises the world, we can often—nay, always, point out one shining light among the shadows of the nature we choose to idealise, exhibit some one precious ingot found in the rocky earth that seems to us rich ore, and attest triumphantly that we can show good cause for our love. But seldom or never can we

account for our indifference, or satisfactorily explain why we do *not* love what seems most lovable.

Athelyn Hastings was charming as well as beautiful, and the very incarnation of girlish grace, and truth, and purity. Yet Paul Severne, who had known her from her childhood, never fell in love with her. Paul Severne was tender and true of heart and strong of brain, well worthy of any woman's love or man's friendship, yet Athelyn never cared for him otherwise than as a friend and brother.

Her fond mother and grandfather had once been haunted by a secret and mutual fear lest their darling should become entangled in any attachment to so ineligible a *parti* as Paul Severne. They had, however, not thrown any evident obstacles or built up any perceptible barriers between the two young people, which perhaps was fortunate

for their anxious though unspoken wishes, as there are few things more likely to ferment friendship into love than pointing out to the pair of friends that such a transformation is possible and is forbidden! Old Mr. Hastings, like his daughter-in-law, was tender-hearted, slightly inclined to romance and superstition, and nervous of attempting to cut a channel for Fate or check its apparent course. He distrusted violent measures, deeming that they were likely to over-reach themselves. In this he was perfectly right, for there is nothing easier than to drive a woman's heart fluttering into the very interest from which you are doing all in your power to frighten it away.

Paul Severne was a great favourite of the Hastings, who generally spoke of him as a "dear good fellow," and about whose house he had been running in and out on familiar terms since he was a boy. He was one of

the Severnes of Severne Abbey; that had at first been in a measure a passport to their favour, although it was probable that his ancestors looking down upon him regarded him as degenerate, and it was certain that his surviving relatives—none of them however very close kin—took little or no notice of this solitary, fatherless, motherless, brotherless scion of the youngest branch.

His mother had been a tradesman's daughter, and the Severnes looked with horror on the *mésalliance* contracted by one of their house, especially as the bride had not the redeeming quality of wealth; she brought no fortune but her beauty—and that unluckily her only child did not inherit. His father, thoughtless and extravagant from the day of his first school-debt to that of his hasty love-match, and thenceforward more reckless and inconsiderate still, had run speedily through his small property,

mortgaged his expectations, and still counted sanguinely upon the family influence and interest for his son. However, although at Mrs. Severne's death some formal signs of sympathy and kinship were exchanged, and some trifling notice taken of the boy Paul, Paul's father was not long in exhausting the limited patience of the family, and finally died hopelessly involved in debt.

Paul might have received more assistance from the House of Severne if he had been an easier *protegé* to assist, and could have been more comfortably patronised. But his education had been conducted in too desultory a fashion to render it probable that he should satisfactorily pass any examination for an official appointment; then he had unluckily and rashly expressed in a great kinsman's hearing a boyish aversion to regular hours and routine; and last, perhaps not least, he started in life weighted

with all the disapprobation attached to his parents. So no obliging relative put him to college or bought him a commission or offered him a post. Paul fought his own way, his pen being his chief weapon; and now as amanuensis, then as secretary, now journalist, then agent for a firm that failed, and now sub-editor of a paper that died young, he managed to live a life that appeared to afford him tolerable contentment.

Old Mr. Hastings liked him, and had been a good friend to him in many ways; Athelyn's father had "tipped" him as a schoolboy; her mother was graciously kind to him in a semi-maternal, semi-elder-sisterly sort of way. Young Severne was grateful and affectionate, returned their liking cordially, and rewarded it by not running off with the heart of their Athelyn. It is probable, however, that if the dreaded con-

tingency had really taken place, and Paul and Athelyn fallen mutually in love, Mrs. Hastings would have wept and have given them her blessing, and even the grandfather have reconciled himself to the match with a speed only a trifle less astonishing and satisfactory than that of the stage-parent just ere the curtain falls. As it was, however, and well or ill for these two as the Fates should ordain, they were only friends, and Athelyn's heart was free, when Harold Parkhurst saw her, for him to woo and win.

It was a cold late autumn evening in London. Mr. Severne and Athelyn were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* in the front drawing-room of Mr. Hastings's abode, her London home. In the back drawing-room the old gentleman was avowedly taking a siesta, and in all probability Mrs. Hastings, who professed to be reading a novel, was sinking

into slumber in her arm-chair too. The rooms were handsome and lofty; it was evident at one glance that not only had money been lavishly laid out upon them, but good taste had guided its outlay. More than this, there were all the slight and subtle finishing touches about the place that indicate a woman's influence. You could always tell by the aspect of the rooms when Mrs. Hastings and Athelyn were in town; their presence seemed to carry with it a certain charm; something graceful and refined always pervaded the atmosphere of the home when they were there.

Athelyn sat leaning back in a low chair. To some tastes she seemed even more lovely now than in the happy days of the past summer; her beauty had in some undefinable way ripened and matured; there was at times a dreamier depth, and then a more restless far-seeking gleam, in the eyes

of lucid grey. She was not only a picture, but a picture exquisitely framed and mounted; there were all those subtle prettinesses about her without which it was difficult to imagine Athelyn Hastings; every touch about her toilette was perfect, from the gold arrow in her hair, the lace ruffle round her neck, down to the hem of her dress, under which the shining buckle on a little silk-shod foot peeped out.

On the rug at her feet lay her two pets, the pair of white terriers from Fern Cottage. Tim was curled up like a large white cushion, his tail wrapped round his sharp foxy nose. Jim was blinking solemnly at the fire with half-shut eyes and his paws spread out to warm on the fender.

Paul Severne—who generally stood up while talking, and seldom talked except upon some theory relating to the life, social and personal, of Man in his past, present,

and future developments—was standing by the mantelpiece, a tall, fair, well-looking Englishman, who yet fell most decidedly short of meriting the adjective “handsome,” brown-haired, brown-bearded, entirely lacking in any vividness of colouring or picturesque-ness of aspect, with quiet eyes that seldom lightened, and a broad benevolent brow that would have delighted the heart of physiognomist and philanthropist.

His coat was somewhat the worse for wear, and it is probable that even in its palmiest days it would only have barely passed muster in the west-end world. No appreciative intimate friend would ever have inquired “Who is your tailor?” the remark would have savoured of satire; and, good-natured as he was, people did not venture on impertinences to Paul Severne. He was unmistakably a gentleman, and yet with a curious air of unworldliness

about him, a man whom the friends who knew him well, loved, and whom the relatives who knew little of him "gave up" as incorrigibly impracticable.

He had been for the last half hour holding forth on a favourite topic, the hideous mass of poverty and vice that reeks unseen of half the world in the core of London, the ulcer eating at the heart of the giant city that is supreme in everything, vast in its misery and crime as in its luxury and art.

"Is this a true picture, Paul?" Athelyn asked at last, with troubled eyes. "Are you not painting it too black?"

"Not one shade too deep," he answered. "I wish you would come and see it and judge for yourself, Athelyn. If you would come with me one evening, I would take you round a few of the bye-streets where you would see, not the worst, but enough

for you to realise the depths of misery and degradation, sunk even below shame, in which hundreds, nay, thousands, of your fellow-creatures are living almost within a stone's throw of you. Only come and see for yourself, I would take good care of you. You would be quite safe with me. I suppose," he added, doubtfully, regarding Athelyn's dress, which, simple as it was, even his uncomprehending masculine eyes recognised as being elegant and costly, "you could get some old bonnet and shawl—something not like what you usually wear—and a veil?"

"The bonnet and veil difficulty *might* be got over," she rejoined. "But—I should feel like Virgil being ferried across the Styx!"

"Yes, I don't think the Styx could be much blacker," assented Paul, gravely. "Well, would you like to come, Athelyn?"

She paused a moment. The vision of intoxicated men and unsexed women, unlovely sights and evil smells, which Paul's description had brought before her, was not attractive; it did not even pique her curiosity.

"Honestly," she said at last, "I don't think I should."

He looked a little disappointed.

"No?" he responded; "well, it's not your line, to be sure. Quite out of your way; I might have remembered that. Only—I should have liked you to see——"

"But, Paul, what good could I do by seeing?" she answered, earnestly, "except convince myself of the truth of your word, which I do not doubt."

"You don't doubt it; but you don't realise it. You can't realise except by sight."

"And if I did thoroughly realise it, I

should be miserable! How could one know an hour's peace in one's comfortable home if all these scenes of sin and suffering you describe were realistically present to one all the time? It would be worse than the skeleton at the feast, for the skeleton is the emblem of only Death!"

"There, Athelyn, you have hit the blot—the failing of this world of yours! That is the cry, 'How could we know Peace if we saw? Therefore let us shut our eyes from seeing. Leave us our delicate sensibilities unhurt. Hustle the skeleton anywhere, anywhere, out of sight of our table of feasting!' And then again there is the other cuckoo cry, 'What can I do? I can only light my rushlight.' Yes, but if every little lamp was lit, we should soon have an illumination that would frighten these foul things from their lair."

"You make me feel guilty, Paul," she

said, looking up at him frankly, "that I have never lit my rushlight! It would be little, so little, I could do; and that little I admit I have never done; the chance has never come near me, and I have never gone to seek it. I own I do like to see the beautiful side of life. It's selfish, I suppose, but I love to look on the white shining side of the shield; and if there's a black and stained side that I am powerless to whiten, I had rather it should be turned away from me!"

"Natural enough," he answered, almost tenderly, yet sadly too; "it is the choice of a fair and pure, soft and sensitive nature, and it's no wonder, looking round the pretty, peaceful home-scenes that always frame you, Athelyn. We want the beautiful in life; and you, and such as you, and all your surroundings, supply it."

"A compliment, Paul—well, it is time,

for you have been very uncomplimentary hitherto, and this is a very dubious compliment, after all! I know you like parcelling people out in types and ticketing them as specimens of this and that class. I suppose you have got *me* labelled as an excellent specimen of the human butterfly?"

"Not quite that," he answered, smiling kindly, and making no apology for his previous unflattering generalities. Paul and Athelyn habitually spoke freely and plainly to each other, as only the best of friends dare do. "Only, like most highly-organised and delicately-strung natures, your feeling of recoil from all things coarse and ugly and debased is very strong—stronger than your desire to amend them. That is well for you in some ways; it keeps you safe and shielded. You will keep your garments white; you will not plunge your hand into pitch——"

“As your ideal woman would?” interposed Athelyn, as he paused. She and Paul had always teased each other about their mutual ideals; of late she had dropped all allusions to hers, but she still adhered to regarding Paul as in search of his.

“Yes, as my ideal woman would—if I found her; but I shan’t find her—no fear or no hope of that; she will remain ideal to me.”

“Courage is the quality you worship; she will be very brave, your ideal?”

“Yes, as brave as pure, and tender too! There will be no depths of mortal misery which she will shrink from contemplating—no mortal hand which she will fear to touch; she will recoil from no criminal, however lost, although she hates his crime; she will have a great love for all humanity—a limitless pity for all its frailties; she will not walk above earth, but on the earth, through

its muddiest, darkest ways, stainless and fearless. While other women, as fair and pure as she, gather their skirts and walk on the other side of the way, she will be kneeling by the sinner's side. Yes, I have my ideal, Athelyn, and that is she."

"And a nobler ideal man never had!" said Athelyn, with one of her rare flashes of grave enthusiasm. "Paul, I think you will find her; you must! You seem to see her so clearly; somewhere in the world she must exist, waiting for you."

"I'm afraid not. If I find her strength, she will be lacking in the beauty and the sweetness which make her the ideal of *womanliness*. Without them she would be only a man in petticoats; there are plenty of *them* about now-a-days," said Paul, coming down from the clouds.

"If ever you find her," Athelyn rejoined, refusing to allow her sanguine faith to be

dashed, "you will take me to her, won't you? Promise to take me to her and ask her to be my friend."

"I will," he answered, smiling, "in the event of that great *if!* But will she not be too strong a tonic for your nerves?"

"You think I am a crystallised sugar image that a ray of honest sunshine or a drop of rain would melt!" she said, with a little petulant *moue*.

Presently Mrs. Hastings trailed her silken waves of sea-blue drapery languidly into the room, and her sweet sleepy eyes smiled kindly on the pair.

"Well, young people, how have you been amusing yourselves?"

"We had rather a stormy discussion at first; then we made peace over our mutual admiration of Paul's ideal. Didn't you hear us when we waxed enthusiastic?"

"I heard a sort of buzzing," Mrs. Hast-

ings said, placidly, arranging herself in her own especial easy-chair. "What windmills have you been attacking lately, Don Quixote?" she added, with a smile.

The Hastings always chaffed and teased Paul Severne in an affectionately familiar way; and he submitted to the chaffing as amiably as a big good-natured dog submits to the children's rough caresses.

"He has not been attacking windmills; he has been fighting *me*," laughed Athelyn.

"And no windmill ever veered round more than you did," replied Paul, gaily.

"Eh, my dears, what's the joke?" inquired old Mr. Hastings, following in the track of his daughter-in-law.

He was just the picture of an old patriarch; many artists had asked him to favour them with a sitting since Time's frosts had snowed his hair and beard. He had one of those faces that look as if they

could never have been young, but were born for beautiful old age; his hair, silver-white, was like a pale aureole round his high bald forehead; his eyes, from which all the fire of youth was quenched, beamed still with a light of steady goodness.

“They were likening me to Don Quixote,” said Paul, welcoming the old man with a sort of affectionate respect.

“Well, well, you might be paid a worse compliment! A favourite book of mine, an old favourite. When first I read it as a boy I did not see the pathos of it, but later I pleased myself with the fancy that the poor chivalrous old knight found all his illusions again in some other world, and the real Dulcinea waiting to welcome him.”

Athelyn smiled approvingly up in her grandfather's face and slipped her hand into his.

“ But I hope Paul will find his Dulcinea on earth !” she said, with one of her sweetest glances at Paul.

Mrs. Hastings too smiled kindly ; she classed most of Paul’s theories and sentiments briefly as “ crotchets ;” but for him personally she had a great affection, and in reality respected him far more than she thought she did ; and as she sat languidly furling and unfurling her big black fan, she observed that “ she wished him better luck than Don Quixote.”

Paul looked at the trio, and thought what a picture of happy home-life the three generations made ! The grandfather with his good grey head, in the peaceful twilight of his waning life—the beautiful mother in the mellow afternoon of hers, with just the pale shade of a past sorrow casting an added softness over her smile, a deeper thoughtfulness on her brow—the daughter

in all the loveliness of her cloudless morning.

So he left them—left Athelyn thinking of him and pondering over all he had said. His influence over her was greater than he thought; she sat abstractedly leaning her head on her hand, and wondering, asking herself—Could she ever grow like Paul's ideal? Was such nobility, strength, and beauty too high out of her reach for her ever to attain to it? Was she indeed so weak and poor and selfish a creature as his words had suggested to her?

It was true, she had thought but little of all the vice and misery that lie cankering the heart of the great city that was to her so bright a home. The witches' cauldron might be seething at her feet; but she had walked looking up to the stars and listening to the nightingale. It was true that she had always shrunk from contact with

anything that was not graceful and refined; her æsthetic taste demanded purity and harmony; and she had been always rather proud than ashamed of her delicacy and daintiness of taste and breeding.

There was a good deal of both pride and vanity about Athelyn, though the pride had nothing of haughtiness or arrogance in it; the vanity was not superficial conceit. She was proud of her gentle blood, proud of the long line of generations *sans peur et sans reproche* from which she drew her life—prouder far less of her beauty of face and form than of the white slim hands with their long fingers “lessening in perfect cadence,” and the small shell-like ears that belonged to all the family, and could be traced even in the old family portraits. Pride of race was strong in Athelyn; she believed implicitly in the supremacy of the thorough-bred; and she knew instinctively that that very undefin-

able stamp of *sang azur* about her, her patrician delicacy and cultivated daintiness, were among the things for which Harold Parkhurst had loved her. She suited his æsthetic taste; he liked a lily under a glass case.

Was it possible that, after all, Harold's estimate of her was true enough, but not the subtle compliment that she had deemed it? Could it be that the type *he* had seemed to love was but a poor and weak one? And if Paul were right, was she—soft, untried, untempted, unchastened, and unproven creature that she was—was she strong enough to be worthy of Harold Parkhurst's love?

For to that all her thoughts turned; and round that centre all her dreams, which hitherto had wandered meteor-like through space, fell now into their natural orbit and revolved. It seemed that in finding her heart she had found the purpose of life;

and on all life she looked through the lens of that one knowledge. No truer lines were ever written than those that bid us

“Know what Love is—that it draws
Into itself each feeling, hope, and thought,
The heart of life, to which all currents flow
Through every vein of being.”

CHAPTER VII.

A WAIF AND STRAY.

Alas for the rarity
 Of Christian charity
 Under the sun !

.
 Where the lamps quiver
 So far in the river,
 With many a light
 From window and casement
 From garret to basement,
 She stood with amazement
 Houseless by night !

Hood.

IF Paul Severne played his part in Athelyn's thoughts that night, he too was thinking of her as he walked through the gas-lit London streets—thinking of her

surrounded by her household gods, a pearl of fair maidenhood set as such pearls should be, in all the pure gold of home and love. He was very fond of Athelyn, although to him—a man accustomed to a rougher world, a tougher fight than she could comprehend—she seemed a creature just a little too fragile and flower-like for “human nature’s daily food.”

Tangled in with thoughts of her were floating fancies about that “not impossible she,” that lofty ideal of his, whom he wondered vaguely if he should ever find on earth.

Once he had deemed he found her; but the illusion had been dispelled, less cruelly, because more suddenly and completely, than such illusions sometimes are. He had seen what he had fancied a goddess shrink into a weak woman, whom, had he ever loved as a mere piece of fair womanhood

he might still have adored, but whose folly and falsehood disenchanted him for ever just because he had set her on so high a pedestal.

But Paul Severne's was a nature not easy to embitter or drive to desperation. He was a dreamer—though he could do and dare as well as dream; but life had given him always more chances of dreaming than of doing. From disappointment—that fell mercifully too early to be a crushing blow, though late enough to have poured the poison of universal mistrust into a less healthy nature—he had risen up with unbroken spirit and unembittered heart, and was seeking his ideal still.

He was, as he had always been, poor, very poor in the world's goods, of course. The coat he had on was the only one he possessed, save one reserved for the rare state occasions when full toilette was re-

quired. But as he observed philosophically, "a fellow doesn't want to wear two coats at once." And to his mind the aristocratic cigar had no recommendation beyond its expense to advance it before the plebeian pipe which he favoured. Cabs were amongst the luxuries in which he never indulged; the top of an omnibus he occasionally patronised, rather to save time than fatigue, for he was a capital pedestrian, and there was scarcely a street in London he did not know by heart. This night, when he left the Hastings's house, he did not go straight home to his little room over a greengrocer's shop in the heart of London. He had an invalid friend to inquire for, a message to leave, a telegram to send—which telegram took the last shilling but one out of his purse.

He liked a walk through London by night; it was a habit of his to pursue aimless

peregrinations at all hours of night or day, and "see life" under all possible aspects. On several occasions he had aroused the suspicions of policemen; once an irate guardian of the peace had imperatively demanded his descent from one of the lions in Trafalgar Square, on which he was sitting composedly watching the pale blue dawn break over the sky as the last star faded. On this night he turned a little out of his way to look at the old Abbey in the moonlight, and then sauntered on past the Houses of Parliament. A little way down one of the streets turning thence, there was a hot coffee-stall. The odour of the steaming beverage was appetising, and, as Paul passed, it suggested to him the fact that it was a long time since he had dined, also that there was only bread and biscuit in his cupboard at home, and that as it was late, his landlady might very probably have

retired to rest before he returned. He might as well have a cup of hot coffee, so he stopped accordingly.

This was one of the bits of London life which Paul Severne liked, and in which he frequently took his part; the cry of "Taters all 'ot!" and the red glowing brazier of chestnuts had often arrested his steps on a winter night.

The lamp flared and cast odd shadows on the face of the stall-keeper; he had a bald, grizzled head, a rainbow-coloured bandana wisped round his neck, all its colours blurred together in the flickering light; he looked like a bit out of an old Dutch picture. Behind the high houses the moon was sailing up through a shadowy sky, breaking out full-orbed from the dark clouds with their shining edges of silver that caught her light.

Paul stood sipping his coffee, exchanging

a word or two with the stall-keeper, half absently; he was thinking still of Athelyn, smiling to himself as he imagined her with him here, pictured her sharing this light and frugal refreshment, gathering her dress delicately round her, looking at the delf cups and thick stumpy spoons, with a smile half amused, a little dainty and wondering, yet always sweet.

“She only knows coffee-stalls by driving past them in a carriage, with flowers in her hair and a gold embroidered opera-cloak,” he said to himself, remembering how, on one occasion, he had seen Athelyn in that toilette going home from the opera, looking from the carriage-window on that outer world of passers-by of which he was one; he recollected her just as she had looked that night, set, as in a picture, by the window-frame.

Her pure and delicate face was thus

floating in his mind's eye when a real face, coming before him, chased the vision away and struck his attention, more by its contrast with his thought at the moment than by anything remarkable about itself. It was the face of a woman—nay, a girl, perhaps even younger than Athelyn, who had paused in passing the stall and turned her head to look at it.

She was poorly dressed ; her fair hair was pushed away untidily under a little piece of faded finery that had once been a bonnet ; it was not beauty that attracted his notice to her, for at that first glance he would have said she was not even pretty. It was the troubled look of the pale, haggard face, the half-abstracted stare of the restless, light blue eyes that chanced to meet his full—eyes so large and bright that no face to which they belonged could ever be wholly

destitute of beauty. The night was chilly, but she had no wrap save a shabby scarf of some gauzy summer stuff which she was clasping tight across her chest with gloveless, shivering hands. She had lingered by the coffee-stall as if involuntarily, and as the savoury steaming scent came to her she cast a half reluctant look at the cup the old man was filling.

“Nice hot coffee, my dear,” he observed, ready for a stroke of business.

She shook her head and hastily turned a step away, but her eyes went back to the coffee with a glance that made Paul Severne put his cup down; he felt as if another drop would have choked him.

There was the craving of hunger in her look, in her thin, pinched face, and beyond that he had caught a despairing misery in her eyes that was tragically incongruous with her youth.

“Have a cup, my girl; I’ll stand treat,” he said, kindly.

She shook her head again.

“No,” she said, and a moment after, added, to her curt negative, “thank you, I don’t want nothing.”

But her look belied her words, and Paul detained her, holding the cup towards her, and saying cheerily,

“Come, try it, this cold night!”

She half drew back, and looked as if she wished to refuse; but Nature was too strong for her. She took the cup—he noticed how her hand shook as she held it—and drank its contents with an eagerness she could not wholly disguise.

“Ah!” she said, with a little sigh, rather to herself than to them, “that warms one!”

“Best have a drop more, my dear, as the gennelman’s so kind as to stand treat.”

“No more, thanks.” She looked from

one to the other as she said this, but in a vacant absent way as if her eyes conveyed no image of their faces to her brain. The old man did not notice her face; but Paul Severne, accustomed to studying physiognomy, was interested and struck by her expression. Her mind was far away from them as she stood there beside them. There was a moment's irresolution, a tremulous relaxing of the fixed lines of her features; then the whole face changed and hardened strangely, brows frowning and lips set.

“Thanks—” she said again, but rather shortly than gratefully, and turning abruptly from them, went hastily on her way.

“A short-spoken young woman, that! Wonder if she's up to any good,” observed the old coffee-man, as she disappeared.

The words suggested an idea to Paul Severne. He remembered she had gone

straight down the street towards the river. An impulse, that five minutes before would have seemed even to him too wild and extravagant to be obeyed, possessed him ; and hurrying through his brief settlement at the coffee-stall, he followed in her track.

He had lost sight of her at first, but soon caught a glimpse of the slight shabbily clad figure. The moon fell full on her face as she looked round, and turned down the steps by Westminster Bridge. He soon came up to the spot, and he too descended a step or two, and then paused, pulled back by a sharp summons from Prudence, which insisted on his at least pausing to debate the question—To follow, or not to follow?

The girl reached the bottom of the steps and looked back. Whether she saw or recognised him he could not tell—he thought that, as he stood by the wall, it was impossible ; but she shrank back into

the corner close to the parapet. He could barely trace her figure in the shadow.

“Come away!” urged Prudence, plucking him strongly by the sleeve, “what is the girl cowering back in that shady corner to you? is it *your* affair to conjecture for what or for whom she is waiting?”

Paul, however, regarded all humanity as his affair; to him the world’s concern was every individual man’s, and every individual man’s affair concerned the world. He shook off the detaining hand of Prudence, drew a step nearer, still unseen, or at least unnoticed, by her whom he could but dimly see, and watched and waited. Yet he felt his position alike an undignified one, and one liable to be misinterpreted; and while he doubted and debated, the object of his conjecture moved out of the deepest shade with what seemed to him a half hasty, half timid step, and standing with a sort of uncertainty in

her attitude, cast a glance around her. He could not detect whether the glance was suspicious or seeking; nor whether she saw or did not see him; but with the same nervous and hurried gait she crossed the bottom of the steps and turned along the embankment.

Reason and impulse fought one brief battle over Paul Severne. Impulse won; and, keeping cautiously behind her out of her sight, he followed a poor girl of whom he knew most literally nothing along the riverside. It was almost deserted at that hour; Paul smiled to himself as he regarded his self-imposed mission of amateur detective from the probable view of the legitimate defender of the law whom he might encounter on his beat—but whom, as it happened, he was well-contented *not* to encounter.

Something in the manner of the girl

whom he kept in sight confirmed the suspicion that had first crossed his mind as he saw her turn towards the river. She shrank and started once or twice ; there was something alike furtive and nervous in her step—or so it appeared to his vigilant eyes. He had not far to follow her. At a spot where the parapet ceased, and a kind of landing-place with low railings reached out into the river, she stopped ; for one moment she threw another quick searching glance back, and around her ; then turned out from the path on to the landing-steps with a movement so stealthy and sudden that she was out of his sight in a second.

He hastened his pace. If he had not been suspicious of her intention before, he would have suspected it now. The feline furtiveness of her step and gesture as she looked round at that moment decided him, though he had scarcely caught a glimpse of

her face. It seemed to him long, though it was only a minute or two, before he also turned from the straight path on to the low and slightly railed-in landing-steps.

For a second he did not see her. Then as he looked round startled, thinking "Could he be too late?" his eye fell on the girlish figure crouched all in a heap in the furthest corner close to the black water that lapped the steps.

He took one stride forward, and laid his hand on her shoulder—gently enough, but she started so violently as to fling off his hand.

"What are you doing here?" He asked it kindly, but had to put his question twice before he received any answer.

"No harm," she said at last, sharply, with a sort of gasp.

"Not yet; but are you sure you were thinking no harm?"

“My thoughts are my business.” She was trembling still, but neither tearful nor agitated, answering curtly and sullenly.

“If they are harmless thoughts—harmless to yourself and others—that’s true. But I think you are not here on any business harmless to yourself.”

She did not attempt to deny the inference; she had risen and stood leaning against the railing looking at him. The clouds were driving past the moon so that they could scarcely read each other’s faces.

“You’re the gentleman who gave me the coffee,” she said, after a minute’s pause. “I thought at first you was a policeman. What call have you to be following and dodging me?”

“What are you lurking down here in the dark alone by the river for? Come away.” Half reluctantly, half obediently, she let

him draw her a step or two further away from the water.

“It’s no business of yours?” she muttered.

“Perhaps not—but I am glad I followed you.”

“Why?”

“Because I think there was some rash thought in your mind, and if I had not come up with you, you might have carried out that thought into a rash act.”

“And if I had?—I didn’t say I was going to, mind!—but if I had? There’d be one less in the world, that’s all.”

Paul was getting on his own ground now; he had led her to speak her thought, and had broken through the ice of her first antagonism.

“There is room in the world for all of us, and a place for each. There’s a right in the world for all of us. Come back to

your place and your right in life—don't try to run away from your post even if it's a hard one. We all have a place to hold——”

“A place !” she interrupted, bitterly, with a harsh laugh. “Yes, I know there's a place for me ! There's a place all ready for a girl as has got no home, no friends, not a penny of money, and not a soul to help her, and stands alone in London streets. It's away from that place I'm running,” she burst out passionately, and breaking down at last into a sob, “and there's the river near—and in five minutes more I'd have been at peace, if you'd only let me alone.”

Paul Severne listened with a terrible sense of helplessness that held him silent. There were hundreds like this girl—hundreds whom Life pushed harshly to the door, saying, “No place for you !”—hundreds whom he was powerless to save.

“And what good have you done?” she

went on, more collectedly, struggling with her agitation. "It was the best I could do for myself, and you stopped me. You had no right to stop me! you don't know what life's been to me—how can you judge? I wish you hadn't followed me; the impulse is past, and the courage I'd got up is gone; I couldn't do it now. But you've done no real good; it'll come to this some other night all the same."

"It must not—it shall not!—you are too young to talk like this, too young to despair. You have no parents, no friends, you say?"

"No; mother died three years ago. Some people have been kind to me, but there's no one I can go to for help; I'm all alone."

"Where do you live?"

"Nowhere; I couldn't pay my rent. I walked about all last night, and to-night I said I'd end it."

Paul thought of the few pence in his purse—only a few miserable coppers!—what good could they do? If ever in his life he longed for money, he longed for it now. What was he to do for this girl? He stood there in wretched perplexity, as if he were searching for a loop-hole in a dead wall. All blank—blank! He could see nothing to be done, yet something he must find to help her. He dared not leave her, alone as he found her, by the river—the cold, black river that splashed against the stones sullenly as if disappointed of its prey.

While he stood cogitating, she spoke again.

“Well,” she said, “that’s about all, ain’t it? I’m afraid I haven’t seemed over grateful to you. You meant it kind, I see, but it was hard to be pulled back just then; still I thank you, because it was kindly

meant, and there hasn't been too much kindness showed me lately. So now I'll wish you good night, sir—and you, don't trouble yourself no more about me; I can take care of myself."

"Care of yourself, child! why, you are but a child still!—yes, I see the care you can take. Where are you going?"

"Anywhere!"

Paul Severne made up his mind.

"That is nowhere," he said, "and 'nowhere' won't board you and lodge you to-night. Now you're not thankful to me just now, I know—you cannot be, but you will be one day; meanwhile, I see only one thing to be done. You are faint and tired, I know; do you think you can walk a mile or so?"

CHAPTER VIII.

HER STORY.

Poor flower, left torn since yesterday,
Until to-morrow leave you bare ;
Poor handful of bright spring-water,
Flung in the whirlpool's shrieking face !

ROSSETTI.

“ I AM glad you are still up, Mrs. Brown,”
said Paul Severne, with a mingling
of relief and anxiety as his landlady ap-
peared on the threshold, candlestick in
hand.

Mrs. Brown welcomed him, first with a
smile, for he was one of her favourites
among the lodgers, then—as the flickering

light of the unsteady candle; which was wilting in its socket, fell on the half-shrinking figure of the girl in the shadow at his side—with suspicion.

“Well, Mr. Severne!” she said, in a tone of severe virtue, “and who may this young woman be?”

“She wants a lodging—for to-night, at least; and, Mrs. Brown, I knew you were a kind-hearted woman, and your niece Jessie left you this morning——”

Mr. Severne felt he was floundering, but he struggled manfully on, endeavouring to attain as frank and ingratiating a manner as possible, while he would gladly have changed places with a soldier charging in the front rank of the battle. Shot and shell appeared less alarming than Mrs. Brown’s glare of inquiry.

“So I thought, perhaps,” he continued, “that, as Jessie’s room was empty, you

might be kind enough to let her occupy it—just for to-night.”

“Jess hadn’t no room. Jess had a shakedown in the back kitchen,” answered Mrs. Brown, with a steely glance that scrutinised the stranger from top to toe. The girl spoke for herself now.

“A shakedown’ll do for me—anything’ll do, if you’ll let me have it. I’d go on further to look for a place if I could—but I’m dead tired and done up.”

She finished with a sort of tremble in her voice, and involuntarily leant against the wall for support; her tired hands hung down heavily by her side; her misty blue eyes glanced from the woman to the man beside her with something of the look of a lost dog as he scans the faces of the people hurrying to and fro past the spot where he missed his master. All the angry and sullen spirit which had animated her when

Mr. Severne arrested her intent by the river-side had died out ; she looked a forlorn and weary, frail and drooping creature, with even a certain pathetic childishness and simplicity of aspect ; and Mrs. Brown, whose heart was soft if her tongue was occasionally shrewish, relented from her original attitude of suspicion.

Well, the young woman could have Jessie's bed, she admitted. And supper? well, she didn't know about supper—in answer to Mr. Severne's suggestion. There was a bone of cold beef, and if there was fire enough to boil the kettle, she could make a cup of tea. She supposed Mr. Severne knew what he was about, for he had always been quite the gentleman, but she should like to know who and what the young woman was? This in a stage aside.

Mr. Severne succeeded, with some difficulty and diplomacy and avoidance of com-

mitting himself to any statements, in postponing all explanations till the morrow, also in eliciting a kind of half and half and conditional promise of friendly attention, and due administration of such refreshments as the house afforded, to his *protégée*. He even went the length of descending to the front kitchen—which also served as Mrs. Brown's dining-room, where a large cat slumbered before a dead or dying fire, and unwashed plates and dishes ornamented the table—to see that his instructions were attended to. With an awkward sense of intruding on Mrs. Brown's privacy, and being possibly regarded as an interferer and a busybody by the object of his solicitude, he endeavoured in his clumsy masculine way to commend the two to each other and to cheer up the young girl, who seemed now almost too exhausted to respond; she sank limply and listlessly into a chair and

turned very white, while Mrs. Brown, briskly bestirring herself, suggested,

“Come, don’t go and faint now; keep up your sperrits! I haven’t got no salts, but you take a sniff of this vinegar,” vigorously uncorking a big bottle she took from off a shelf and shoving it under the girl’s nose. “Mr. Severne, you’d best just go and leave her to me.”

Paul Severne thought so too, and retired, leaving his charge to faint away in peace—a proceeding which would have alarmed his inexperienced heart—and to be shaken and splashed with vinegar and cold water back to consciousness.

He climbed up four flights of stairs to his bachelor quarters near the roof—an elevated and airy situation with which he was very well contented—to flavour with the sweet consciousness of a deed well-done his nocturnal pipe and brandy and water.

The morrow came ; and he awoke to consider with the sober views of daylight his last night's adventure. First and foremost, he was glad to think how Fate or Chance had led him to the river-side in time to prevent the old story of " One more unfortunate " being enacted again to its dreary end. That he, under Providence, had prevented such a climax he had no doubt. The girl's intent she had not even denied ; and in the face of the recollection of the despair of her look, the stealthy swiftness of her movement, the passion in which she had turned upon him at last, he could not disbelieve that she would have carried out her intention. He was very sorry for this fragile creature, so young, so lonely—this waif and stray that the great dark sea of London had cast like a poor weed at his feet.

Still he could not shut his eyes to the fact that he had taken upon himself a great

responsibility; and he could not see what on earth to do with it. It was a good deed; he was not troubled by any wavering in that conviction; but this good deed came home to him very much in the manner of a white elephant; he did not know how to undertake it. He was quite willing, more than willing, anxious to pay the cost and carry on the work he had begun; only—how was he to do it?

Two ideas only occurred to him—domestic service and dressmaking. He wondered whether the Hastings' had a vacant place in their establishment, whether he could induce Athelyn to light her rushlight to the extent of taking this girl into service? then an uneasy doubt occurred to him, whether—supposing he were to persuade Athelyn to take her on trial—the girl would be eager to accept the chance? He had a vague idea that for getting any place

a certificate of character was necessary ; he supposed his new *protégée* could easily obtain that. Yet if she could show a fair character page, and was willing to work, how did she come to be alone by the river that bleak November night,

“ Mad from Life’s history,
Glad to Death’s mystery,
Swift to be hurled
Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world !”

Then he reflected how little he could tell of her, how little he knew. It was enough to interest him strongly—far too little to represent to others. Actually he did not even know her name !

Mr. Severne’s bell rang unusually early ; and he, habitually the meekest and most long-suffering of lodgers, waited with unusual impatience for his breakfast. He had a half idea floating brokenly in his mind that his last night’s adventure might turn

out to be but a dream—that the girl might vanish, like an Arabian night's vision, away into the darkness from which she had come—that on inquiring for her he would find that she had fled.

He hoped that Mrs. Brown herself would bring him up his tray; she did occasionally honour him so far when her time could be spared from the shop, more especially when she had any grievance to unfold for his sympathy. However, it was not Mrs. Brown who entered; it was the charwoman who “helped” in the house-work, that is to say, who did it all, and on whom the lodgers depended for most of their comforts. Luxuries there were none in Mrs. Brown's establishment; it was a hive of working-bees, a kind of Republic on a small scale; drones and aristocrats had no abiding-place there.

If the omission of anything which Mrs.

Brown deemed a luxury was complained of, she would suggest that the dissatisfied party had better resort to "one of them big hotels, and be Number 219." She always appeared to regard this specification of their possible number as a cutting retort; hotels in general were a pet aversion of hers; and the custom of "numbering" was to her as the red flag to a bull. Being Number 219 seemed to over-balance in her mind the advantages of electric bells, *tables d'hôte*, billiard-rooms and lifts—some of which occasionally one or other of her lodgers would venture to suggest were among the good things of life. Electric bells would certainly have been an improvement in the house where two or three of the wires were broken, and the bell-ropes had a pleasing habit of divorcing themselves from the crank if anyone gave more than a modest and insinuating pull, as if rather to

suggest than to demand attention. A lift, too, would have been an advantage to the inhabitants of the third floor and attics.

The house on the whole was kept very clean, but it would be difficult to say whether the outside or the inside *looked* the dingier. The appearance of the outside was that of having for generations steadily undergone the process of soaking in the yellowest of London fog and blackening with the thickest of London smoke. The inside must have almost forgotten its first acquaintance with paint and varnish, and was relapsing fast into its primitive and natural colouring. You might by a little study guess at the pattern, and even lay a rash wager on the original colouring of the carpet that covered the drawing-room stairs; but from the oilcloth on the upper flights every trace of its once bright geometrical figures had been trodden out.

Still Mrs. Brown's establishment could boast of certain solid comforts; its furniture was an odd *mêlée* of the ancient and the modern; heavy old wardrobes on whose shelves our grandmothers had packed away their homespun linen in lavender, and the flimsiest of cheap cane-chairs; a solid mahogany four-poster flanked by a gimcrack deal toilette-table in muslin petticoats—at least, it wore these light garments when times were good with Mrs. Brown, and at other periods stood bare and unadorned.

Mr. Severne had got a fair share of the most substantially comfortable, if not the most ornamental, furniture in his room; by especial favour he was accommodated with an old-fashioned writing-table with drawers and pigeon-holes, the latter containing almost equal proportions of MSS. and dust; and as his tastes were fortunately nearly as modest as his means were limited, he made

himself very satisfactorily at home in his present quarters, and had no mind to fly from the small inconveniences that he knew, and go wandering in search of others that he knew not of.

He had only waited for his breakfast a few minutes, which to his unusual impatience seemed more, when Mrs. Mulveeny, the "help"—a wild Irishwoman with frantic hair that would have done credit to an Indian squaw—plunged into the room with a tray and dashed it upon the table with a hearty good-will that nearly upset the ink-stand.

"Good mornin' to ye, sir," she said, in a fine rich brogue and with never a full stop, "and sure it's early ye're about to-day, an' it's nothin' but eggs Mrs. Brown's got in the house, an' fine new-laid ones, and will ye have one boiled or poached?"

Mr. Severne had barely time to express

his preference for the latter form when Mrs. Mulveeny ran on,

“An’ I was to tell ye, sir, as the young woman have had breakfast with Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Brown’s now in the shop, an’ will ye have her sent up?”

“If it is convenient,” replied Mr. Severne, feeling rather uncertain as to who was alluded to, and deeming that brief answer discreet.

Some minutes after Mrs. Mulveeny had clattered downstairs, there was a tap at the door—a softer tap than had ever heralded the advent of Mrs. Mulveeny or Mrs. Brown—and his “Come in” was answered by the appearance of the object of his interesting speculations and embarrassing responsibility. She did not answer to the popular idea of a heroine of romance at all, as she entered, with a quiet, shy, and yet formal air of decorous attendance, bearing the plate of

eggs in her hand, the household cat, a large sleek tabby Tom, following at her heels. Still Mr. Severne's eyes took interested note of her.

Seen in the morning light, she looked a different creature from the pale, disordered girl whose troubled, set white face had struck him first when the flickering rays of the little lamp at the coffee-stall fell upon it—who had wandered blindly to the river, helpless, hopeless, alone, and turned upon him like some hunted wild animal when he laid his hand upon her arm.

Now her face was carefully composed, and with a certain sweetness in its composure, and if in the unsure and retreating glance of her eye there was still a touch of shy, nervous appeal, there was nothing but that flitting expression to mark that she felt this meeting. Her fair hair was neatly put up in sleek, thick coils; her dress, shabby

and worn of course, was tidily arranged; her whole aspect seemed somehow to have freshened and brightened; she looked very young, and—he could not help seeing now—very pretty. She was rather tall and very slight in figure; there was a sort of untrained grace about her, and she moved with a quick softness that was so far cat-like that it had something of the beauty of a cat's supple curves.

“Mrs. Brown asked me to bring this up, sir,” she said, placing the dish on the table.

“Thank you. I hope you are better this morning?”

“Yes, thank you, sir.”

“And—Mrs. Brown gave you a good breakfast, I hope?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“I am glad to see you looking so much better,” continued Mr. Severne, a little awkwardly, harping back to his first remark.

Then, as he fancied she seemed about to retreat, as if her duty was done, he added, "Won't you sit down?—I should like to have a little talk with you, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, if you wish, sir," but she hesitated before she took the chair he pointed out.

The cat leapt up on her lap and rubbed its head against her; evidently cat and girl had made friends speedily. Tom was a spoilt cat—the one pet of the house—and his attentions to strangers were few and far between. There were times when Mr. Severne had not deemed Tom's presence an unmixed blessing, but this morning it was undeniably a boon, as offering a safe and easy means of gliding into conversation.

The topic of Tom's tabby charms, and the charms of his species in general, however, did not prove inexhaustible, especially as the girl did not seem conversationally in-

clined. She sat quietly, smoothing the cat's sleek fur as he arched his back complacently under her hand, and Mr. Severne's observations received only demure monosyllabic replies. Once, at something he said, she smiled; it was one of those sweet, subtle smiles—half arch, half sad, that would have lit up a plainer face into attractiveness and made this girl positively lovely.

Still she was resolutely laconic, and made no allusion to the previous night, so Mr. Severne determined—now that the ice was a little broken—to take the initiative.

“Do you know,” he said, kindly, “that I have not even heard your name yet?”

She answered the implied question unhesitatingly.

“My name's Cressida Lane.”

“Cressida? An uncommon name.”

“Yes. It's out of a play—Shakespeare, I think, isn't it?” she added, doubtfully.

“Yes, quite right.”

“It was mother’s name,” the girl continued; “it was the lady who stood god-mother to her that chose it.”

This afforded Mr. Severne exactly the opportunity he wanted.

“I think you said you were an orphan?” he observed.

“Mother died three years ago.”

“And you have no father?”

She shook her head.

“I don’t know whether father’s alive or dead,” she admitted, half reluctantly.

“Now,” said Mr. Severne, “I want to help you! I am anxious to do all I can to help you. But, as you see, I’m poor. I have little money and little influence in the world. Still what little influence I have I want to use for you if you’ll show me how to use it. Will you tell me, have you any plans for the future, in carrying out which

"I could in any way be of use to you?"

"You're very kind," she said, lifting a pair of wistful grateful eyes. How changed she was from the girl who had shot looks of sullen defiance and sobbed out passionate reproaches to him for staying her rash haste only last night! "I didn't think as there was anybody would ever be kind to me again! I haven't got any plans. I should like to get work to do—but work's so hard to get."

"What kind of work do you want?" he asked, practically.

"Well, I'm a good hand at my needle. I was 'prenticed to a dressmaker."

"Couldn't you get that dressmaker to take you into employment or recommend you to some place?"

"No," she said, reddening, and with just a touch of the sullen pain he had seen before hardening the mobile corners of her

mouth. "She wouldn't do anything for me; she turned me off without a character—I wouldn't go near her again."

"Is there any other kind of work you have been accustomed to?"

"There's nothing else I've been used to do; but there's very few things I wouldn't be willing to do."

"I don't want to pry into your affairs or press you with questions," he said, gently, "but if you would tell me as much about yourself as you choose—where you have lived, how you were brought up, and so on—I might be better able to help you."

She looked at him uncertainly; her glance, if it had been a shade more searching, would have been suspicious; she seemed struggling between impulses of caution and secretiveness, and responsiveness of gratitude. At last the latter feeling seemed to sway the balance down.

“I’ll tell you all—” she began, and then paused, and started afresh. “I didn’t think when I was a child that I’d ever have come to stand as I stood last night! Nor I oughtn’t to, if things had gone well with us. Father had as nice a little shop as you could wish; and mother when she married—she married from service; she’d been with the lady eight years—she had her savings in the bank; she took it near all out to help set up the shop. We were very comfortable; I and my little sister and brother went to school; and we used to go and play with the children at the place where mother had lived. Mrs. Montrose used to give me Miss Louisa’s frocks when she grew out of them. Mother used to think, I remember, that when Miss Louisa grew up and got married I might be her lady’s-maid. Poor mother! I used to look higher. I didn’t want to be anybody’s

maid. I always thought I would like to be free."

She paused, and Mr. Severne was listening comprehendingly and somewhat sadly ; he knew the old, old story.

"Well," continued Cressida, with a sigh, "things went pretty smoothly with us till one winter troubles began. Father lost both his horses with the cattle disease ; it came all the harder because he had just spent more than he could afford on a new horse, and it didn't live a month. And mother had an accident ; she fell downstairs and hurt her back, and wasn't ever strong again. And there were doctors' bills—and the horses' death was a great loss—and we began to get in debt. Then my little sister and brother took the fever and died—I nearly died too. I've wished I had sometimes. But the worst was when father took to drinking. He was very fond of me, was

poor father—but when he'd had a drop too much he'd strike even me."

She said this so simply and quietly that Paul Severne, habitually the soul of mercy to all sinners, found himself yielding to vindictively merciless judgments on the "poor father" alluded to. Cressida sighed, looked down, and smoothed the cat on her lap, who lay rolled up into a comfortable round cushion, and purring like an organ. Its luxurious contentment contrasted with the patient repression of the girl's look, as she recalled these painful memories, and sleeked the animal's ears with almost unconscious fingers.

"Well?"

"And mother was ailing and fretful, and luck turned against us all ways. Father drank himself out of house and home; all the business—what was left of it—went to ruin; he sold it and took a smaller shop,

and that went to smash too ; and at last he came down to a barrow—father, who used to hope to get on and retire with a fortune, as others have done !”

“And failed and fell as others have fallen,” Mr. Severne rejoined, sympathetically. “A sad story—and there are a hundred like it enacting round us every day. Well, and you? the only child left—you were quite a child at this time ?”

“When father took to the barrow I was twelve years old. I remember I cried all night. I used to be ambitious and think of the day when we should be rich—and that’s what came of it ! The drinking kept father down ; he couldn’t get on, and by-and-by he fell into bad company. Mother used to cry and talk to him ; but it was no good ; at last he used only to swear at her and go out and bang the door. But he was never unkind to me—never except

when he wasn't himself. And one day, I recollect so well—it was just before the worst came upon us—he was going out, and he came back to me and kissed me, and said, 'Never mind—perhaps the luck will turn some day.' ”

She stopped, her eyes full of tears, and gulped down a great sob.

“Poor child! poor child!” Paul Severne said, gently. “If it pains you too much to speak of it, don't go on.”

The kind words were too much for her; they seemed to set her checked sorrow suddenly free; she broke down all at once, and hid her face in her hands and sobbed convulsively—rousing up the cat, who lifted its head discontentedly, as if resenting its sweet sleep broken, and then got off her lap with an air of offended dignity.

“And this is how it ended,” she said,

between her sobs. "I'll tell you the worst—father was led away by the bad company he'd taken to keep; he got into trouble, and one day the police came after him. They took him away handcuffed, and he was tried, and he got fourteen years. It was—it was—the Weirdale bank robbery; but he used to be drinking with that set, and so got led on, and it was they tempted him, for he was the best educated and could write well, and they thought that he'd be useful to them, and he thought to make his fortune. I went to bid him good-bye, and that's the last I ever saw of him; it's six years ago, and I don't know whether he's alive or dead."

"It was indeed a sad childhood for you, and I fear you have had as sad a girlhood."

"I never was happy—only once!" she said; and as the word "once" left her lips she flushed scarlet, and with a sudden

lapse back into the agitation she had controlled, she burst into sobs more painful and passionate than ever, but still in a stifled repressed way that moved Paul Severne infinitely more than if she had shrieked and wailed aloud, after the natural wont of humanity developed beyond the stoicism of the savage, and not yet attained to the reticence of culture.

That word "once," which seemed to slip involuntarily from her lips, had told him a history in its one syllable, but he forbore to ask "When was that once?"

"The lady you were telling me of at first, whose children you used to play with," he said, by-and-by, when she was calmer, "did she do nothing for you?"

"They all went out to India; I don't know what's become of them, nor they don't know what's become of me. But before she went, she got me 'prenticed to a dress-

maker, and I was quick at learning and didn't dislike the work, only one of the girls found out about father and was nasty to me, and I wouldn't stand it; Mrs. Johnson, she took the other girl's part and said I was quarrelsome, which I wasn't!—I never was counted bad-tempered, at home or school. And then she said I was idle, so she gave me warning, and I went back to mother; but when mother died, she sent me some mourning clothes and recommended me to a place at Mrs. Smithers, but everything's been against me—everything, since father got into trouble.”

“And was it then this last employer who dismissed you without a character, as you mentioned a little while ago?”

“Yes.”

She looked at him uneasily through her half-dried tears, as if wondering whether he was going to press her with questions on

that point. He was silent, and waited to see if she would volunteer any explanation, but her lips were locked ; he saw that if he waited for ever she would offer no word of further statement.

He looked at her with deep compassion ; she was so young and slight and fair. Involuntarily he thought of Athelyn, and wondered, would *her* heart open in pity and sympathy for this girl, or would she gather her garments away from her ?

“So now,” he said, after a pause, “you have no relatives nor friends to help you—no employer that you can go to for a recommendation ?”

“No, none !” she answered, desolately.

“I see,” he said, regarding her thoughtfully—his eyes fixed upon her rather because he was thinking and pondering about her than in any attempt to scrutinize her face ; but as if she fancied his look was

penetrating her, she shrank and bent her head and buried her tear-stained face in her hands.

“Come! Do not cry any more,” he said, kindly; “we must see what can be done for you.”

“I want to do my best,” she replied, half lifting her hidden face; “I *do* want to try to get on—honestly,”—the word came with a sob—“I don’t mind work—I don’t mind what I do. But I *do* want to find some work to live by and do my best for.”

She spoke with such simple earnestness; her face, although the curves that should have been full and rounded were sunk and hollowed, was so child-like in its soft outlines still—the expressions he had seen upon it were so incongruous with its tender youthfulness—that his heart went out to her in an irresistible gush of honest sympathy and tenderness. Not being demon-

strative or sentimental, however, he made no manifestations, but let her dry her own tears.

“ And you *shall* find work !” he answered her, with an earnestness that had in it just the ring of cheery energy needed to rouse up a drooping disheartened spirit. “ Don’t fear and don’t despond any more. There’s a place for you, and you shall find it ; there’s work somewhere waiting for you to do, and you shall do it. You’ve had a rough struggle with the world, I see, and perhaps there may be more conflict still before you ; but you will conquer and hold your post yet, in time. I have a hard battle to fight myself, and I’ve but weak weapons against the world—but I shall be strong enough to help you, never fear ! Something tells me that it was all for good that I was moved to follow you last night. Your past *is* past. Let it rest, whatever it may

be. Look to your future! That's full of hope—full of possibilities. You are young—there's nothing you can set before you that you may not reach in time. I have three watchwords for you—Wait; work; and hope!”

“Oh, I will! I will!” she said. “But I didn't think last night that there was anyone could make me hope again.”

CHAPTER IX.

TWO DAUGHTERS OF EVE.

One to the world's wine, honey, and corn,
 Another, like Colchester native, born
 To its vinegar only and pepper !

While Margaret, charmed by the Bulbul rare,
 In a garden of Gul reposes,
 Poor Peggy hawks nosegays from street to street,
 Till—think of that, who find life so sweet!—
 She hates the smell of roses !

PAUL SEVERNE'S will to help Cressida Lane was strong as man's good-will could be. Dreamer though he was, he was not a dreamer only ; he was bent on giving her not only sympathy, but help. Still the ways and means of helping her were hard

to find. A sense of reserve and reluctance, which he would have found it difficult to explain, kept him at first from appealing too strongly to the Hastings on her behalf. He mentioned her and her needs to them, touching but very slightly on the way in which they had met and the state of desperate distress in which he had found her.

Athelyn listened with sympathy, but with a certain measure of caution; he had glided too lightly over the tragic element in the case to move her deeply or appeal to her personal feelings; she conceived from his cool and careful account the vague idea rather of a "case" such as she often saw described than of a living breathing fellow-woman; she did not realise enough to feel much; and all that she could suggest as likely to help Cressida seemed to be that "she believed Lady Manville had been inquiring for a still-room maid." Mrs. Hast-

ings, with fatal feminine pouncing on a weak point, inquired why, if she had already been employed in dressmaking, the young woman did not get a character from her former employers? a question which Mr. Severne, having no satisfactory answer to give, hastened to avoid.

He could no doubt have exerted his influence over Athelyn to a far greater extent if he had put forth all his powers. But he did not set himself resolutely to move her. At first he only skimmed very cautiously round the subject. Afterwards he would no doubt have appealed to her sympathies more strongly and successfully; but soon he began to think that there was no real need to do so.

Mrs. Brown manifested a disposition to be kind to Cressida. The girl made herself useful and handy in many little ways about the house and shop; and the "shake down"

in the back-kitchen, while still the form was kept up of regarding it as a temporary arrangement, gradually assumed the aspect of a permanency. Then a friend of Mrs. Brown's, who was in the millinery line, took the girl on as an "extra hand" during a press of business. On the whole, while things drifted along this way, Mr. Severne saw no reason for resorting to endeavours to arouse an active interest in Mrs. or Miss Hastings. It was probable that, even given their good-will, they could or would do nothing more under the circumstances than bestow a few kind words, a little practical help, and an introduction to some branch of domestic service. Somehow he could not fancy Cressida in service.

She rallied with wonderful speed from her despondency ; and as her natural spirits revived, and by fits and starts she would be merry, and seem forgetful of all her past,

and run about the house singing, she was a pleasant presence to be about one. In her gayer moods she was a kitten-like, playful creature. A certain fitfulness about her helped to interest, and a little to puzzle, Mr. Severne. One hour she would be singing "The Rat-catcher's Daughter" at the top of her clear voice with all the *abandon* of a child; perhaps the very next hour he would find her sobbing, though on being questioned she would shrink into herself and declare that nothing ailed her. Sometimes she struck him as being like a shy free bird starting from net or cage; sometimes she was all softness and submission; sometimes he detected with a sort of pained perplexity glimpses of a sullen defiant spirit under her sweetness, undercurrents of secretiveness and evasion beneath her occasional frankness.

He did not see very much of her, since

he was satisfied that she was set in a fair way of living, at least for the season ; he was very hard at work, but still there was never a day passed without his having a few words with Cressida. He liked to see the sparkles of mirth dance in her great blue eyes at even the mildest joke ; he liked still better to meet their intent, interested look following him when he talked to her in a graver strain.

Paul Severne was one of the men who do not talk on many subjects, and to whom chit-chat is an art unknown, but who make up for the few subjects they talk *on* by the limitless kinds, classes, and types of people they talk *to*. There was no creature Paul would not talk to—the policeman on his night-rounds, the costermonger with his barrow, the Sister of Charity next him in an omnibus, or the “proud young porter” at the railway-station.

He was a favourite of Mrs. Brown's; he was not above coming down to the kitchen "to take a bit of lunch" when it suited Mrs. Brown to turn his room upside-down and leave him no place for the sole of his foot in his legitimate quarters; nor was he above fraternising with the cobbler who occupied the attic. He had always a kind word for old Mrs. Tenterden, who could seldom drag her limbs across the threshold of her own room, and often a story, or a toy, or a cake for her little lame grandson, while he was on terms of quite cordial friendship with the night policeman who lived *au second*, and like an owl slept most of the day and sallied forth on his "beat" by night.

The clerk and his wife on the first floor were the only people in the house who did not like Mr. Severne; they considered him—perhaps very justly—a person of low tastes. Neither did they like Cressida.

“The airs that wretched young woman gives herself are disgraceful!” Mrs. Helmore said, indignantly, the truth being that the young woman, when requested authoritatively to bring up coals and make haste, had replied tartly that she was not their servant, and though she brought the coals, set them down with the manner of a person condescending for once to do you a favour that you are not to expect to be repeated. Cressida had a temper of her own, though she was plastic as wax in the hands of those who dealt gently with her. Occasionally she jarred with Mrs. Brown, and declared she would not stay, and Mrs. Brown would retort that in that case the sooner she was gone the better; but peace was generally restored speedily, as in her heart Mrs. Brown had a kindly feeling towards the girl whose quick, clever fingers were so skilful in executing repairs of dilapidated linen, and whose

lively chatter, when she was merry, made the lower regions bright; and Cressida, when her ruffled feathers had been a little smoothed down, would submit to be called a "foolish girl who was always wanting to quarrel with her bread and butter."

Of all the household, Cressida was most frequently with the two most helpless and useless creatures there—old Mrs. Tenterden and her little lame grandchild Dick. Paul Severne noticed this, and liked to see it. He used to meet her leading the tiny, puny lame boy by the hand—the thin, and, sooth to say, not over-clean hand clinging confidently to hers; she would mend the child's ragged jacket, tell him the old nursery tales that always seemed new to him. As Paul passed the door he would hear her voice, catch a glimpse of her sitting singing with Dick on her lap—singing a Christy Minstrel ballad generally, or some popular music-hall

gush of cheap sentiment to a catchy tune, unless, indeed, it was a hymn at old Mrs. Tenterden's request.

The old, half-invalided woman—the four walls of whose one shabby room comprised her world—through age and sickness had grown past all but two considerations, had but two centres to all her thoughts—her dinner and heaven. It was always a toss up whether she was dreaming of white robes and golden harps, or deciding on the day's meal. There was little affinity between her and Cressida, but they met in the mutual interest of the girl's kindness to little Dick, who was the one connecting link between his grandmother and the life of to-day.

In Paul Severne's dreams he walked on the heights with his ideal; but in daily mortal life he took a warm interest in his neighbours, and especially in the little stray

soul he had found adrift and helmless and so near to dashing on the rocks. Perhaps the happiest days in this winter to him were those when he took Cressida and Dick to the pit to see a pantomime and enjoyed their delight, and was probably by his benevolent smile mistaken for a father treating his two children (indeed it was a question which of the party was most of a child in simple and overflowing pleasure); and another time when, well-satisfied by the success of these former experiments, he treated the same two protégés to the Zoological Gardens on a day when the weather was bright.

Unluckily for his reputation amongst his family connections, it happened that the stately head of the family, a magnificent old gentleman—with a troop of little silken-clad ladies and velvet-coated little gentlemen, with elaborately crimped and curled flossy

hair, frolicking round "Grandpapa"—passed by the bear-pit at the very moment when his erratic kinsman was admiring the antics of the bears with *his* party. Paul was holding Dick up in his arms to see the brown bear climb the pole. Dick was clad in his best, but his best was much patched and darned and faded; no one of his small shabby garments was *en suite* with any other; there was a gaping gulf between him and the pretty little knicker-bockered lad trotting at "Grandpapa's" side. Cressida was leaning over the railings uttering small shrieks of delight, behaving scarcely less like a child than Dick, and pulling Paul's sleeve to attract his attention as she tossed a bun to the bear. Paul thought her looking very nice and neat that day; she had got a new hat for the occasion; but the eye of the head of the family fell on the whole group with dismay; he passed on quickly,

gathering his flock around him, and rejoicing that Paul had not caught sight of them, while Paul in happy unconsciousness applauded the gymnastic bear, ignorant that he was crossed out of "the family's" good books that day.

Meanwhile, as the winter wore on, Athelyn Hastings was living happily, hopefully; in some moods lapt in a perfect dreamy peace, in others restless with feverish doubts—never doubts of her lover, only nervous anxiety as to the dangers of flood and field that might yet stand between him and her, and passionate longing for his return. She was too devotedly fond of her mother, too tenderly trustful in her, to have kept her secret from her long. Before the happy summer that had brought her such new joy and new sweet sorrow had begun to wane, Athelyn, kneeling at Mrs. Hastings's side, with her flushed cheek hidden on her mo-

ther's breast, had told her all there was to tell. That "all" was so little, and yet meant so much; the story was comprised in the three brief words "he loved her!" And Mrs. Hastings never asked, never needed to ask, whether Athelyn loved him too. The mother, romantic, impressionable, and unworldly, was easily led to look on the matter with her daughter's eyes. She had married Edgar Hastings for pure love's sake. Love seemed to her the more priceless and sacred because after a brief time of happiness it had been snatched away from her. And to her mind this fair Athelyn of hers was a good and sufficient cause to turn any man's head, and root in any man's heart such a love as should be more precious to her in her future than fine gold.

Athelyn, naturally and instinctively averse to concealment—although a proud and modest reserve made her sometimes appear

secretive—mentioned to Mr. Parkhurst in her next letter (they kept up a steady correspondence) that she had confided in her mother. She was half afraid lest he might be angry or annoyed at this confidence, as he had never expressed any desire for her to speak of their correspondence to her family, and indeed had always treated it with an air of secrecy. However his sentiments, as expressed by return mail, were to the effect that “she had acted like the innocent angel he always thought she was. He loved her for her truth; he loved her for her candour;” and so on, in the lover’s repetitions that to the beloved do not savour in the least of tautology, until it would have led an indifferent reader to ask if there was any quality left that he did *not* love her for?

* * * * *

As the weeks drew out into months, and

the spring on swift and noiseless feet came nearer and nearer, breathing blue into the white winter sky, and touching with tips of tender green the earliest budding trees, Athelyn began to notice an undefinable and gradual change in her friend and brother, Paul Severne; and he on his part began slowly to awaken to the fact that Athelyn too was somewhat changed.

Neither could have explained what they saw; but each did see in the other a something that either was not there or that their eyes had not recognised before. Paul perceived a ripening and a development in Athelyn; a sense of purpose seemed to be wakening in her; she had always been dreamy, imaginative, and poetic; now her dreams and aspirations seemed to be falling into order and harmony, and revolving round a centre.

And it was a somewhat similar change to

that which Paul saw in Athelyn that Athelyn saw in Paul. Crude angles in his nature seemed to be softening down; yet his tendency to extremes, in sympathy with the lowest, in aspiration towards the highest, was more marked than ever. His ardent human interest in all that was of the earth earthy, the strong bond that tied him to all humanity, seemed strengthening daily; yet, dreamer as he had ever been, he wandered more wildly in the cloud-lands of Utopia than ever.

Athelyn, woman-like; not contented with studying these signs, wasted a good deal of time in conjecturing what could be the key to them; and sometimes she wondered, with a sort of reluctant discernment, whether the key could be—"Cressida."

He did not tell her much about Cressida; he had added little to the brief sketch he had given her at first of the girl's posi-

tion and prospects—or rather want of prospects; yet somehow without will of his own, Cressida's name would keep introducing itself into all his conversations with Athelyn. He did not mean to talk of her; he had nothing particular to say about her; only he never managed to steer clear of some casual mention of her name.

And Athelyn wondered—*Could* this girl have attained to such an influence over Paul as to effect in him this subtle change that was visible to her sisterly eyes? It seemed to her almost impossible. For although she had known Paul many years she did not quite know him yet. She could follow him up to the heights of his highest ideal; but she did not follow him far down into the depths of his intense humanity, his deep-piercing sympathies, from which none could fall so low as to be wholly out of reach. She could comprehend his worship-

ping an ideal ; but she could not understand his loving a frail mortal woman between whom and himself there yawned what to Athelyn seemed the bridgeless gulf of caste.

For the fact that Paul Severne was of a good old family and drew his life from a line of ancestors *sans peur et sans reproche* was more prominently present to Athelyn than to Paul himself. To the purity of the *sang azur* that ran in his veins he was passably indifferent ; he took more satisfaction in the smallest of his own personal good deeds than in the long muster-roll of his ancestors' achievements. He had certainly a mild and temperate pride in belonging by birth to the upper ten, but of this pride he was not proud ; he regarded it rather as a concession to the weakness of humanity than as a source of legitimate strength.

It was rather a sore point with him that

the reigning Severnes did not pay him the compliment of the slightest notice, and probably regarded him as a degenerate and unworthy offshoot of their noble line. But he despised himself heartily for feeling this as a sore point, and penniless wanderer and worker for bread as he was, he would have held his head as high among the Severnes as if he had been the hope and pride of the race, nor have yielded an inch of the way he had chosen for himself in life, if there had been a chance of the head of the family taking a whim to appoint him his heir. The more conscious he was of pride at heart in the name of the family that in no way discarded, but still quietly ignored him, the more he professed to scorn that pride, and walked through the world genuinely and healthily prouder of being Man than Gentleman.

Thus while to Athelyn it seemed a marvel,

almost an impossibility, that Paul Severne could take any interest beyond pity and sympathy in a girl of the people—who carried about coal-scuttles in a common lodging-house, and soiled her fingers with kitchen toil when she was out of work, and stitched at a milliner's with a room full of other girls of the people when she was lucky enough to be in work—who probably could not spell correctly and very likely misplaced her h's, and whose past life was, to say the least of it, a good deal veiled in mystery—it was to Paul Severne no especial matter of wonder that any man should love any woman. King Cophetua appeared to him, perhaps, a trifle rash on the score of the brevity of his wooing, but not at all so in his choice.

Between Paul and Athelyn there was less expansiveness of personal confidence than might have been regarded as natural between

two such frank and fraternally intimate friends. On all topics of current discussion, all theories and differences of opinion, political, social and religious, they were plain-spoken to the frankest degree; but a certain innate and mutual reserve had prevented them from ever taking each other into those depths of their own hearts where Love sleeps, and stirs, and wakes. So neither could know the source of the faint and scarce perceptible stir and upheaval that each detected in the other's nature, though Paul, manlike, was less curious about Athelyn than Athelyn was about him.

If her curiosity was aroused by his constant though casual allusions to Cressida, it was still more excited and deepened when a time came that he suddenly and utterly dropped all such allusions, and even appeared cautiously to avoid all mention of

her name on occasions when it might naturally have been introduced.

One evening there was a little gathering of friends at the Hastings'—the first of a series of receptions which they intended giving during the early season. Paul Severne was there, in his rarely produced swallow-tailed coat and gloves, which he hated, but put them on, less as a concession to society than to Mrs. Hastings, to please whom he would have made a far greater concession. He was as usual placid and taciturn; he looked perfectly gentlemanly, and, as Athelyn reflected with friendly satisfaction, “almost good-looking.” But nearer to that adjective than “almost” Paul Severne would never get.

Athelyn was charming in the *rôle* of hostess, gracefully seconding her mother, and skilfully bringing up the second detachment while Mrs. Hastings marshalled the

first into order. Old Mr. Hastings looked like a picture by Raphael, smiled benevolently, and moved slowly about the rooms, dropping words of kindly courtesy into everybody's ear, and somehow always finding just the right thing to say in the right place, and although he was short of memory and a stranger to many of his daughter-in-law's guests, never asking a widow after her husband or a bachelor about the number of his children. Lady Manville was there, gorgeous in rose-colour satin and diamonds, like a little humming-bird, flitting about full of gaiety, darting across the room to whisper to Athelyn, who had been taking compassion on two shy gawky brothers who were making their first appearance.

“Latest victims, eh? two of them at once. How many more? Poor Mr. Parkhurst! by the time he comes back from India he'll find himself quite at the bottom of your list.”

The quick colour flamed on Athelyn's cheek, though she hated herself for blushing.

"I like to make you blush!" exclaimed Lady Manville. "It makes you look awfully pretty! Do you know, Athelyn, my dear, you're actually improving," she added, frankly. "If you go on at this rate you'll leave us all behind. There's your philanthropical friend over there, Paul Severne. Looks, as usual, as if he were evolving theories for the benefit of the world. Pleasant theories too, I should think, by his unusually smiling aspect. I wonder if it's a plan for the importation of the prettiest girls, or the deportation of all rival *littérateurs* and philanthropists to the Cannibal Islands! Anyhow, he looks most uncommonly amiable. He is actually smiling to himself! I think even frivolous *I* might venture to speak to him in this mood."

This attracted Athelyn's attention to Paul. Lady Manville had not exaggerated the fact. He certainly *was* smiling to himself. Athelyn watched him curiously. She never remembered to have seen him look as he was looking to-night. He seemed strangely abstracted, silent, happy; there was a sort of radiance in his expression as of a man who is brooding over some glad discovery. What could it mean? She sought her opportunity, and taking advantage of a pause when everybody seemed pleasantly occupied and in no need of her attention, she glanced across the room at him and silently summoned him to her side.

Paul came with prompt obedience, and took the seat she had reserved for him. They spoke a few common-places; and then there was a silence; then Athelyn looked at him and said,

“Paul, what has come to you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Only what I say. Something has come to you, Paul—has been coming gradually; but to-night I see it plainer than ever. You are radiant to-night, Paul; what makes you look as if you were lit up from some inner light? You move about as if you were among us, but not of us. Your eyes are seeing something none of us see—are they not?”

Paul looked in her face with a sort of surprise, not denying any of these soft impeachments, but as if her recognition of them was unexpected. In answer to her question he only smiled and said,

“Perhaps! But, Athelyn, the very change you say you see in me—something of the same sort I have long fancied I saw in you. A year ago your eyes did not look so far away. Don’t you see, we are both changed?”

It was odd that never in their frequent *tête-à-têtes* had these two come so near to confidence as they did thus suddenly and impulsively in a room full of the buzz of conversation and the stir of people moving to and fro. There is no spot more safe for confidences than the heart of a talkative crowd; and consistently enough there are few places where a secret burns on the lips more. If you can confide in a person at any time, the hour of all others is when the world is buzzing its common-places round you, and for the moment you stand alone together in the crowd.

“Both changed?” repeated Athelyn, “yes! But you—did not see it, Paul, until—until——”

“I think my eyes are keener now,” he said. “Keener, and yet blinder in some things. I see puzzles, mysteries, where I never saw puzzles before. Life seems

clearing—and yet deepening in mystery. There is a change taking place in me, I know.”

“And to-night—to-night?” she questioned softly, eagerly. “Have you found your ideal, Paul?”

“No,” he answered, “no! I shall never find her now. I think I shall never seek her more!”

She cast a wondering, searching glance at him. Was it in bitterness, she wondered, that he spoke? or could it be in triumph? Certainly there seemed a ring of joy in his tone. She saw with concealed annoyance a pair of guests steering towards them, evidently with the intention of a parting chat. She calculated she had just time to exchange one more word with Paul, and she hit a nail home direct.

“How is Cressida?”

“She’s well,” he said. Only “She’s well,”

briefly and quietly, but his tone told Athelyn more than his words. No man ever spoke of a woman to whom he was indifferent in that accent.

“Paul?” she whispered, questioningly, anxiously. “Oh, dear Paul, take care!” feeling vaguely as if Fate must be digging pitfalls somewhere for Paul’s unwary feet.

They had no time to say more; the departing guests were already upon them; and Mr. Severne subsided into his usual Spartan brevity—which, although it may be the “soul of wit” does not go very far alone; it was the only element of wit his conversation ever contained; and a bodiless soul is rather a helpless thing in this mortal world.

It appeared that not Athelyn’s attention alone had been drawn to Paul Severne’s new radiance of look and abstraction of manner this evening. Mrs. Hastings com-

mented upon it to her daughter with some interest.

“I wonder what it can be?” she speculated, vaguely. “Have you any idea, Athelyn?”

“I have a fancy, a groundless fancy.”

“So have I—but I don’t know that it is so groundless. Was he speaking to you of that girl—Cressida?”

“He only answered when I inquired if she was well. But still my fancy, or instinct, or whatever it is, points out—there is the cause!”

“Yes,” assented Mrs. Hastings, seriously. “Poor Paul! I am anxious about him, Athelyn. This girl, a low-class girl, picked up out of the gutter, is a dangerous interest for him to get entangled in. Paul is a dear, good fellow, and hitherto I have never felt at all doubtful about him with all his eccentricities. But I am anxious about the boy

now. You don't understand, my darling——”

“Yes, I do understand,” protested Athelyn, somewhat aggrieved at the implied doubt of her worldly knowledge. “But, mamma dear, Paul is so good, so honourable!—you can't be afraid that he—that he would——”

“I hope and trust, my darling, that he will never be tempted into any folly of which he need be ashamed, or we ashamed for him,” said Mrs. Hastings, cautiously.

“After all,” mused Athelyn, with the air of one judicially solving a problem, “if Paul is fond of this girl, everything, for good or evil, depends on whether she is a bad girl or a good girl.”

Athelyn saw no medium between the two adjectives; she had no idea of the multitude of natures who, through life to death, are always ferrying backwards and forwards

between the two shores of good and evil, and have in neither land their abiding-place. She looked upon the world as divided into those two kingdoms; and although theoretically she believed in the existence of that kingdom of Evil which she did not know, yet it never occurred to her that she or any of those she knew and loved could be brought into nearer contact with it than surveying it through an opera-glass; and in her defective view of Life, the wide border-land where so many of us live and die was entirely overlooked.

It was not want of sympathy, but habit and inexperience that narrowed her views; nor was it likely that she should instinctively enter into the feelings of the tempted and the fallen—the weak souls who could not conquer in the conflict with mortal frailty—when she had been bred in the heart of love and tender care, and in her own nature

no flash of light had ever revealed to her the potentiality of sin that lurks in each human soul. She had never known what it was to feel any but good impulses stir in her heart. Beyond an April gust of childish ruffled temper, all senses of anger and unkindness were unknown to her. No least word, thought, or act had ever yet sullied the snow of the pure soul that was as soft and humanly loving as it was stainless. How should she realise the force of temptations and trials which were mere words to her?

Meanwhile, if Athelyn was curious about Cressida, the curiosity was mutual.

“How was Miss Hastings looking last night?” was one of the first things Cressida inquired, when she saw Mr. Severne the next morning, “And what did she wear?”

“She wore,” began Paul, slowly and hesitatingly, racking his brains to recollect

what colour Athelyn's white beauty had been framed in, "a pale blue dress—or pale green—one can't tell blues from greens now-a-days, and I think—let me see—yes! she had white roses and pearls."

"Ah!" said Cressida, with a little discontented sigh, glancing down at her own sober-coloured linsey, with a big apron pinned round the waist. "And did she look very pretty?"

"Well, yes; Athelyn mostly does look pretty—like some other people I know," pointing the compliment by a look of sincere approbation. In his eyes Cressida looked as charming as could be wished in that dingy dust-coloured dress, with a bit of red ribbon in her ruffled bronze-gold hair.

Cressida, however, was not at all of the same opinion.

"I was looking at that photograph of hers yesterday. Does it flatter her?" she

asked, still harping on the subject of Athelyn's appearance.

"No, I don't think it does at all."

"I'd half a mind to burn it, do you know?" the girl said, with a little smile and a mischievous glitter in her blue eyes.

"Had you, child?" he answered, with a light on his face, in no way vexed. "No need—no need. I've told you so often enough."

Thus while Athelyn wondered about Cressida, Cressida thought of Athelyn; and in the interest of each in the other there lurked a certain suspicion and a sense of possible antagonism; and all the while Fate was gathering up and weaving in the threads that should draw those two lives together.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL'S QUESTION.

“Of all good things upon earth, I hold
That a faithful friend is best !”

IT was a glorious spring day. Winter had cast up his barriers in vain against the soft encroaching tide that crept on over his frost-white shores, stealing over banks of snow-clouds and melting away the icy mists, until at last a great sea of spring had washed over all the land and flooded it in beauty.

Even the London smoke, that stretches its murky wings over city and suburb, and broods so darkly down on both in the days

of winter fog and frost, seemed to have fled far away, like an ill-omened night-bird scared back by the bright dawn. It must have sought some other haunt, for now no shadow of it blurred the blue light of the sky.

Athelyn was sitting by the window, looking out upon the strip of garden, the square of turf and border of trees that kept a breath of country freshness and fragrance always round the London house. There were spring-flowers opening their bright eyes timidly all over the garden-beds; spring-flowers in full bloom on the window-sill; the room was sweet with the breath of hyacinths; delicate primulas unfolded their shy blossoms, and golden cowslips showed their rustic faces, beside the bold brilliant self-asserting tulip that flaunts its perfect beauty before the eye in a challenge of audacious colouring.

And Athelyn, in face and form, in heart and soul, was all in harmony with the season; there was not a note in her being that was not attuned to spring. She looked like a delicate spring-flower herself; her heart was full of hope, her soul of dawning dreams that were daily growing clearer.

She was alone, lost in reverie, floating over sunny seas. She was back in the by-gone summer, buried deep in that delicious past, living it over again so vividly that it seemed indeed to be

“But a dream within a dream!”

For if those days had been real, even equally real seemed these reflections of them now. And if those days were dreams—and they shone with all the ineffable moonlight brightness of dream-land—then these reveries were no more unreal than they. Past and present, the ideal and the real, so blended and melted together in her mind,

she lost sense of time and distance, and drifted away from earth over smooth seas that seemed to know no shore.

Her eyes were looking beyond the tender green of the budding trees—beyond the blue unclouded sky,—looking back into the gardens of Lakeside, seeing the dawn break golden across the East again, as they two had watched it together—seeing the lazy lilies lie with sleepy petals outspread on the sunny water, as they had seen them on that day which was shrined in her memory apart from all other days. His words echoed in her ear again, stealing subtly round her heart, and taking up possession in her soul for ever, words not pleading, but forceful,

“If you do not love me, Athelyn, you shall! For *I love you!*”

“I did not think I loved him then!” she said to herself, simply. “When did I first

fully realise it, I wonder? It crept on me so insidiously—so unconsciously. And I never told him! Strange to think that I never yet have said to him, in spoken or written words, 'I love you!' I wonder—does he know it now?"

Then the passionate plaintive cry of that song which tells the secret story of a thousand women's hearts, came into her mind, and she repeated to herself softly,

“‘ How could I tell I should love thee to-day
Whom that day I held not dear?
How could I know I should love thee away
When I did not love thee near?’

But that's an ill-omened song," she interrupted herself, shrinking a little. "He never came back 'from the ice-fields and the snow!'"

Jim, the terrier, who lay curled up at Athelyn's feet, making a cushion of the hem of her dress, did not understand the custom

of talking to one's self, even in poetry. He woke up at Athelyn's quotation, and probably thinking that her intonation was mournful and that she needed comfort, he stood up on his hind-legs, put both paws on her knee, and began licking her hand. His well-meant attention did not in the least distract her from her thoughts; it only shunted her off on to another line of the same sweet subject.

“Dear old Jim! good Jim!” she said, caressing his sleek white head—with the crooked tan patch over one eye that spoiled his beauty. “Do you remember, Jim, how *he* took the thorn out of your foot? and how you followed him all the morning after? Do you remember how you went limping after him down the orchard path? They say the instincts of dogs and children are always true. And you liked him, you ‘took to’ him, good Jim, did you not?”

Jim wagged his tail in high satisfaction, and tried to scramble up into Athelyn's lap. He was a philosophical dog, and did not trouble his brains as to *why* his young mistress patted his head and rubbed him under his chin—a mark of affection which he greatly appreciated—so long as she bestowed these signs of favour upon him. When Athelyn was in a sentimental mood, he generally got a bigger bone and a fuller basin of milk than Tim, to whom there had not fallen the good fortune of having a thorn extracted from his foot by the beloved one's hand. Jim took the goods the gods provided him with, and was thankful.

Presently he pricked up his ears, and squinted with one intelligent brown eye towards the door, and then scampered on his hind legs with demonstrative fore paws, that luckily were clean, to give welcome to Paul Severne, whom all dogs and chil-

dren loved, though Athelyn, so prompt to admire their instincts where her lover was concerned, had probably never noticed their voluntary attentions to her friend.

“Well, Athelyn,” said Paul, as they greeted each other in a placid friendly way, “and what are you doing here all alone?”

“Day-dreaming!” she responded, truly enough.

“You look as if you were. You are far away, Athelyn, are you not—far away from here?”

“Not so far but that I can come back to earth,” she replied, smiling.

“I think *you* are day-dreaming and far away now, Paul,” she observed, presently, as he sat abstractedly pulling Jim’s ear and making monosyllabic absent answers. “You are silent to-day?” with an interrogative accent.

“Am I?—I daresay. I am silent because—I want to speak.”

“If you have no better reason, I wouldn't continue silent, if I were you. Speak, Paul, if you want to; here is a first-class listener at hand, so speak to *me*. I am waiting—ready.”

“It's nothing much, so don't prepare to be interested. A year ago I would not have asked you this question, Athelyn,” he said, somewhat disconnectedly and abruptly. “It's only just a question. It seems to me that you are in some ways changed from the girl you used to be—else I should not ask you now. I want to put a case to you.”

“Put it!” she said, promptly, as he paused; and leaning on the arm of her chair she turned her fresh, bright face towards him and waited, all wide-awake and sympathetic attention, prepared, in spite of his injunction, to be deeply interested.

“If,” he began—“if you saw a girl, poor and of low position, or rather of no position at all—a girl younger than you and beautiful like you (only *her* beauty had been a snare and an evil dower to her, while *yours* is only a blessing!)—a girl who had been flung alone and defenceless into a fight with the world, the hardships of which you can’t conceive, and who——” He paused, yet not in hesitation, and then looked up and spoke on boldly as he added, “I will tell you all the truth, Athelyn—who had been tempted, and too weak to resist temptation, lured by false lights down the path that slopes so fearfully downhill and ends in depths you can’t imagine—who, I say, had erred, but yet had had the courage to climb painfully and toilsomely up the steep way to right again, whose struggle has been so hard that the sternest fates might relent to her now—would you, Athelyn, here is my

question—would you take her by the hand and give her the help and sympathy that only a woman can give a woman?”

Athelyn was silent, startled, doubtful. She felt breathless, as if she had been plunged into cold water. Her pure and delicate nature, fastidious and refined, shrank away quickly as the shuddering leaves of the Sensitive Plant from any suggestion of contact with one whose past had been such as Paul so plainly hinted. All the strong instincts of caste, too, were enlisted against Paul and his plea. But on his side all the tenderer and more generous impulses of her soft little heart were silently and secretly undermining the opposition forces.

“Well, Athelyn,” added Paul, earnestly, but not in the least degree reproachfully or urgently. “Would you do it? Could you?”

“I do not know,” she said, candidly, looking fearlessly in his eyes. “It is not a matter of *could*. I could if I had the will. I am not sure, Paul, that I *should* have the will. There is the plain truth, unpalatable as plain truth always is.”

Paul was not surprised. He did not know much of the world of women; but he knew just enough not to be astonished that the tall pure white budding lily, that had never known a spot on its chaste marble petals, did not bend in yearning love and pity over the broken rose that had been torn from its height and trampled in the mire. Still he had no idea of giving up the battle.

“I wonder,” he said, “if I told you something more, whether it would alter your views? I think, Athelyn, I think you scarcely do yourself justice.”

Athelyn passed entirely over the latter

half of the sentence in the eagerness with which she fastened on its first part.

“If you told me something more,” she repeated. “Paul, what more is there to tell?” She looked at him with quick anxious eyes.

“Little enough in words ; yet it’s a good deal to me. You know—you guess, of whom I have been speaking?”

“Yes. Of—Cressida,” she hesitated on the name.

“Well, here is my confidence, Athelyn—I love this girl with all my heart, and I mean to marry her.”

“Marry her!” exclaimed Athelyn, the anxiety passing away, lost in a flush of surprise and relief and even joy. “You will marry her? Oh, Paul! dear friend—my good true brother! I am glad!” and impulsively she caught both his hands in her own honest sisterly clasp.

“Thanks, Athelyn!” he said, warmly. “But—you seem surprised? Good Heavens! did you dream then, when I said I loved her, that I should *not* marry her? What is the gulf of caste to *me*—to me, a penniless worker for my bread—that I should not reach across it for the girl I love? Did you think that where I loved I should not marry?”

“I don’t know what I was thinking; you took me by surprise,” she said, quickly, colouring. “You love her, Paul; and you are going to marry her? That is all I have room to realise. It startles me a little—I want time to take it in, to look at it steadily. But I am glad, Paul; and honestly and with all my heart I wish you happiness.”

“And Cressida? You will wish her happy too?”

“She *must* be happy, Paul, now.

She knows—that you will marry her?”

“I couldn't have settled that without asking her, could I?” he responded, smiling. “The days are gone by when you could carry a woman off and marry her against her will.”

“Yes,” she assented, vaguely, still absorbed in wondering and realising the fact of Paul's intended match.

“Paul,” she said, presently, “will you—will you put your question again to me now? You have thrown a different light on it since you put it to me first.”

“And yet,” he said, “the only difference is—that I have shown you she is not quite friendless, not quite hopeless, not quite alone!”

“But in showing me that, you have shown me more,” she said. “I see she cannot be unworthy of your love; you would not love her if she were.” This was

the utterance rather of Athelyn's hope than of her conviction, but with her the hope was always father to the faith. "So, Paul, if you ask me now——"

"I do," he said, eagerly; "I know how wide the gulf of caste is in your eyes—I know the depth of the sea that rolls between you two! But I do ask you, Athelyn, if you can and if you will reach your hand across that gulf, and be kind to my little girl?"

She looked at him earnestly with her beautiful kind eyes, in no hesitation now.

"Yes! Bring your Cressida to me, Paul," she said, softly; "I am anxious, very anxious to see her."

So Paul went away happy, with his battle won. He had enlisted Athelyn's sympathies on his side; he had got her promise that she would talk to Mrs. Hastings and endeavour to win her interest in Cressida too; he had

a satisfying faith, not only in Athelyn's influence with her mother, but in her loyal observance of her promise to exercise it, and in the sympathetic, if somewhat indolent, gentleness of Mrs. Hastings's nature, which would render the task of such influence an easy one. Having once gained Athelyn's word, he trusted in her implicitly, and did not trust in vain.

He had taken her into confidence about his plans for the future, which, although necessarily somewhat vague in detail as yet, were evidently of very definite form, the fruit of reflection. He did not intend to remain in London. Life was a tough battle to fight there even now, and after his marriage it would probably be harder. He had some cousins in Australia, and was going to write to them, informing them of his intention to join them with his wife. There, in a new world, among new friends, with all their

past cut adrift, they would begin a new life, not in idleness nor in luxury, but a healthful, hopeful life of work.

These were Paul Severne's plans, and Athelyn listened to them sympathetically, appreciatively, the parting with their friend seeming too distant and undefined to regret, and the wisdom of his decision in seeking a new world appearing unquestionable to her.

She had promised kindness to Cressida, and she meant loyally to keep her word. But it was more for Paul's sake than for Cressida's that she had promised; it was of him, not of her, that she thought, except when the disturbing question occurred to her. How should that "gulf of Caste," which he had truly said she saw yawning so wide, ever be successfully bridged over? Could she and Cressida ever meet "soul to soul as hand to hand"?

In her mind's eye she pictured Paul's bride-elect as a red-cheeked, red-handed, coarse milkmaid beauty, who cried and wailed aloud in her sorrows. He had said she was fair and of a fresh complexion; that meant ruddy, of course; and she had big china-blue eyes no doubt. She was good-natured and good-tempered probably; and those qualities and her unknown sorrows—for Paul had ever been as tender to a woman in distress as the stage sailor—had captivated him. Then Athelyn wondered again whether she dropped her *h*'s, and decided hastily and eagerly—the wish still father to the thought—that it was impossible Paul Severne could love and seek a woman for his wife who neglected her aspirates, or—worse still—who added them where they should not be.

Thinking thus, she laughed to herself; and then her face grew grave, and she

leant her head on her hand and pondered.

“I can’t understand! Paul puzzles me. What did he mean? What does he think? I cannot rest until I see—what manner of a girl *is* this Cressida?”

CHAPTER XI.

BROUGHT TOGETHER.

For the rest, thou shalt not be lonely in thy welfare or
thy woe,

But hearts with thine heart shall be tangled!

MORRIS.

“**C**ROSS old cat!” said Cressida, pouting, and apostrophising the back of Mrs. Brown, who was sweeping out of the kitchen like a whirlwind.

Mrs. Brown had worked herself up into what she deemed a state of most righteous wrath. The “drawing-room lady” had been making herself disagreeable about the display of goods in front of the shop.

“Fruit, and cut flowers, and even greens of all kinds, were very well, and so were potatoes *in their place*, which was the *window*; but when she took the rooms she had bargained against baskets standing out on the pavement; and potatoes in sacks flaunting half across the street she could not stand!” Mrs. Brown had retorted that if her gentility couldn’t abide the sight of sacks of potatoes, she had better buy them all in, for there they would stay until they were sold! Her warlike spirit aroused by this passage of arms, Mrs. Brown had whetted her weapons by a little skirmishing with Cressida, had refused to let her put an iron down to the fire to iron some collars and cuffs, and sweeping the aforesaid limp articles across the table with a contemptuous hand, had observed that the kitchen had to be scrubbed and couldn’t be littered up with such frippery, and flounced

away, launching a Parthian shaft over her shoulder in the shape of an illusion to "idle useless chits as some people cockered up and spoilt."

"Niver ye mind, me dear," said Mrs. Mulveeny (whose rich brogue always seemed full of the milk of human kindness), as Mrs. Brown's indignant pattens clattered down the passage; "sure ye can do yere bits iv things in the afternoon?"

"But I'm going out with Mr. Severne, and it's a shame for her to go on so at me to-day. And I wanted her to lend me her brown paletot too—and in this tantrum she won't lend me a ribbon!"

Mrs. Mulveeny, like many well-meaning people, by way of comfort immediately suggested a might-have-been.

"Sure and there's my best plaid silk skirt as ye'd have been welcome to, me dear, if it wasn't in for twelve-and-sixpence,

and it's sorry I was to put it in, bein' the last thing my blessed Mulveeny ever bought me! An' there's Mrs. Helmore as has a beautiful silk mantle she might lend ye, if she wasn't that stand-offish and stingy, she won't hardly say good mornin' to ye, nor give the cat, poor baste, a drop o' milk when she goes in at breakfast-time, which Mr. Severne he always do."

Cressida turned a deaf ear to Mrs. Mulveeny's voluble discourse, as she sat down disconsolately on the table, there being not a chair that was not either broken or converted temporarily into a dresser or a china-shelf, and regarded her limp bits of muslin ruefully, and contemplated in her mind's eye two pictures—a bright one of herself in Mrs. Brown's new paletot with gorgeous beaded trimming, and a shadowy one of herself facing Miss Hastings (to whom this

day she was to be introduced) in her only available cape.

“What’s up, Cressida? you look quite woe-begone!” said Paul Severne, swinging cheerily into the kitchen, and regarding his beloved seated Cinderella-like among tea-trays and pastry-boards with as satisfied a smile as if the picture had been framed in a satin-curtained, velvet-carpeted drawing-room.

Cressida expounded her grievances, Mrs. Mulveeny (whose discretion would probably not have urged her to the length of leaving the lovers *tête-à-tête* even had she not been fettered by the occupation of cleaning the grate) assisting by a running chorus. Paul smiled to himself. One thing about Paul Severne, which proved aggravating to some people, was that he so often passed over the fact presented to him in the reflection

suggested by the fact, and very frequently entirely forgot the incident in a train of reflections arising out of the incident.

He was pleased at the simplicity which looked upon the limp cuffs and the shabby cape as obstacles; it seemed to him as if the *naïveté* that halted at these slight barriers must, in its charming unworldliness, ignore the greater ones. Then the child-like vanity rather gratified him than not. He probably looked on Cressida altogether as a more child-like and simple creature than she really was, and idealised her simplicity into innocence. He was pleased, too, with the surrounding circumstances that marked the contrast between the two girls. There was, to his contemplative mind, a gentle and agreeable titillation about this difference. He liked contrasts of life always; they gratified him as a harmony of colour gratifies an artist's eye. He amused himself by

changing in his fancy the external positions of the two girls, imagining Athelyn in the kitchen in a linsey gown among unwashed dishes and troubled by difficulties of un-ironed cuffs.

He dwelt amusedly on this picture, while Mrs. Mulveeny mingled her sympathy with Cressida on the deficiency of her wardrobe for "sich an occasion," with reflections on her own departed grandeur and the silk she wore on her wedding-day, in a rapidly increasing *crescendo*, to drown the clattering of the fire-irons as they rattled under her busy hands.

"Never mind, Cressida," he said, breaking in upon a train of reminiscences of the deceased Mulveeny, over which the widow was seeming inclined to weep. "Come along out; put on your things and get ready quickly; we'll take an omnibus and go and sit in the Park till it's time to go on to the

Hastings'. "And we'll get you some cuffs and things on the way," he added. He felt princely that morning; he had got a cheque, and had paid his rent and ordered himself a new coat—not at all too soon.

"*Some* cuffs!" said Cressida, brightening. "How many do you suppose I want? Am I like the devil-fish, all arms?"

Paul had been translating and reading to her fragments of "Les Travailleurs de la Mer." Perhaps he had hoped that she would have interpreted the octopus symbolically, as the embodiment of evil lurking in the heart of the world, and stretching forth its myriad tentacles in search of victims. It had apparently not impressed her in any other light than that of a zoological curiosity.

However, nothing Cressida said was ever disappointing to Paul. If he did not read in it sweetness or brightness, or the first

struggling flights of a half-fledged imagination, he read in it the childlike *naïveté* of a half-developed soul.

He walked off with Cressida contentedly, as happily and well-nigh as proudly as if his bride-elect had been gathered from that "garden of girls" from which the Severnes had been wont to pick and choose their mates. This was not so strange, considering that Paul's father, like himself, had loved and chosen a woman beneath him in rank (only somewhat less rashly), that Cressida grew prettier and prettier as she grew happier, and, above all, that Paul was as deeply in love with her as ever was a man of idealising imagination and affectionate heart, in whom the feeling is the motive power that guides the fancy's flight.

As it was too early for them to need to go straight to the Hastings's, where they were expected to luncheon, they went into

the Park, and sat down on a shady and secluded bench.

Cressida looked round upon the fresh, tender green of the trees, which as yet no summer sun had scorched, and in whose boughs the birds were twittering—up at the blue sun-shot sky—down on the emerald velvet of the turf.

“How lovely it is here!” she said, with one of those deep sighs of pure enjoyment that are so much happier than a smile. “How peaceful! Back there in the city it crushes me! I feel as if the brick walls were closing together on me. But here one’s breath comes freer.”

“You will like open-air life, Cressida—pure country life, such as you can’t fancy yet, such as we shall have in Australia, far, far away from cities, perhaps not a village in view, not a curl of smoke to be seen by day or a lamp by night, only long, vast

stretches of hill and meadow—pure, unpolluted air, that it will be fresh life to breathe, and such a sky as England never knows!”

“Oh!” she sighed, with a radiant look on her face, “it is like heaven to think of! To see nothing but trees, and fields, and sky, and know I’ve left the smoke of this cruel city a world behind! What is there in the open air that’s like magic? Doesn’t the breeze seem to blow everything like trouble and thought away?”

“It’s blowing a little pretty colour into your cheeks,” said Paul, appreciatively. “You look so well, Cressida! I am glad. I want you to look your best to-day.”

“To look my best for *them*—for Miss Athelyn, that is?”

“Yes, to be sure.”

“Well, I *feel* my best,” she rejoined, thoughtfully. “To-day life seems to be widening out before me somehow. I sup-

pose it's because it is spring. And then I want to see your friends. I feel like at the gates of a new life. But Miss Athelyn seems standing by the gates," she added, half doubtfully, with a touch of sadness.

"She could not shut them on you, Cressida, not even if she would. And when you know her you will be as sure as I am that she would not if she could."

"No?" she said, slowly, half doubtfully still. "But—she might give me a pinch in the hinges as I get by."

"I don't think Athelyn's the sort of girl to give anybody a pinch! you'll see, Cressida. I hope you'll like her. She—she is very anxious to see you."

Paul in his masculine truth and straightforwardness, unaccustomed to the exercise of warily walking over delicate ground, had quite involuntarily allowed Cressida to perceive that Athelyn's reception of the first

expression of his wish for her to know Cressida had not been one of unmixed delight. He was however safe, strong, and free now, in literally quoting Athelyn's words, "She is very anxious to see you! I hope you will get on together?" he added, taking Cressida's hand fondly, re-assuringly, even half entreatingly. Now that the hour was so near he was beginning to realise the importance of her producing a favourable impression at first sight.

"I hope so. I *want* to," she said, with a little child-like sigh. She had probably been thinking more about her introduction to Miss Hastings than her words hitherto had betrayed to him.

An hour afterwards Paul walked into the big drawing-room where he had lounged away so many of his hours with Athelyn, and entered now with Cressida by his side. He looked round. Mrs. Hastings was not

there. This was rather a relief than a disappointment to him; and as Athelyn, alone, came forward from the back-room where she had been sitting, he, with an almost boyish impulse, took his betrothed by the hand and led her forward.

“Here is Cressida, Athelyn,” he said, simply.

Cressida was half shy, half curious, and her face flushed faintly. Her first impression as she looked up was of a graceful vision in pink and grey—the softest of pinks and the most dove-like of greys—which might for correctness of prevalent style have walked out of the last month’s fashion-plate (only no fashion-plate form was ever so lithely supple!), and might for æsthetic harmony of form and colour have sat to a painter. Then she was aware of a slim white hand pressing hers—a pair of beautiful kind eyes bent with an interest too

delicate for curiosity on her blushing face.

Athelyn looked on "this daughter of the people" who was Paul Severne's choice with veiled surprise and pleasure. Cressida had on a brown holland dress; it had been washed a good many times, but was fresh and clean, and looked fitter for the season than her sombre linsey gown of every day. She had on a queer old-fashioned little black *moire* cape, which by the antiquity of its cut might have belonged, and probably had belonged, to her grandmother in early youth. Her fair hair was simply combed back and loosely coiled under a little sailor-hat with a plain band of blue ribbon; she had a blue bow at her neck, and the collar and cuff difficulty had been satisfactorily settled.

This quaint attire, an odd mixture of the old world and the new, of the child and the old woman, became her admirably.

There was something very child-like about Cressida's face ; the roundness of cheek and freshness of tint had come back to it, and from it all traces of the expressions that Paul Severne had seen on it first had melted utterly away. There was a sweetness about the ripe rosy lips, a simplicity that looked like perfect innocence in the large blue eyes ; the fair guileless face kept its secrets and told no tales.

The two girls looked at each other earnestly, face to face, their spirits seeking each to read the other in their meeting eyes ; and from each spirit the shade of potential suspicion and subtle half-antagonism faded entirely away and died as they exchanged their first greeting words.

The conversation which commenced their acquaintance was, it must be admitted, not very brisk. It found a difficulty in getting away from common-places about the

weather. It flagged, went on in jerks, and then flagged again until picked up by an effort of Athelyn's. Paul took little or no share in it; he sat gravely glancing from one to the other of the girls, with his anxiety that they should "take to" each other, his satisfaction that this consummation he so devoutly wished appeared more and more probable written with sufficient clearness in his honest brown eyes. Cressida spoke little. Just at first it occurred to Athelyn that she was, like Miles Standish, "Embarrassed, and culling her phrases." But very soon she became at ease; and Athelyn noted, with a relief and satisfaction equal to Paul's, that her *h's* found their proper homes—at least, if one did occasionally stray away and get lost, he was an exception from his correctly-behaved brethren.

On the whole, by the time Mrs. Hastings joined them, a better satisfied and more

thoroughly contented trio could scarcely have been found in London, although so far their conversation had not got much beyond such remarks as these :

Athelyn, animatedly—"The only weather I can't bear is fog."

Cressida, mildly—"Fog is very disagreeable."

Paul (who would find a good deal to say in behalf of the Evil One)—"Yet there's something interesting about a thorough-going yellow fog in the city, when the link-boys are out offering to help you across the street for a penny; it's about the only thing that ever seems to clog the great wheels of working London's machine."

Mrs. Hastings came in with her cat-like soft step and indolent, kindly smile. She behaved herself charmingly to Cressida, was as amiable and hospitable as, being Alice Hastings, she could not help being, and

treated Paul and his betrothed with a kind of " Bless you, my children " air.

They sat down to luncheon, a quartette of people on unusually good terms with themselves, each other, and the world in general. Only Cressida glanced with secret doubt at the fish-knives, and Athelyn, with concealed anxiety, followed her glance, and then observed, with relief, that Cressida had hit upon the correct manipulation and *raison-d'être* of these implements.

Cressida was monosyllabic; but Paul, mounting on one of his favourite hobbies, talked enough for the two. Under the circumstances, he avoided attacking the bigotry of society, the flaws in its codes, and made no allusions to the gulf of caste; but as Mrs. Hastings truly observed, he was never happy unless he was charging wind-mills, so this day he ran a tilt at the law of the land, and as he had certain unanswer-

able if exceptionable cases of hardship to cite, and set them forth fluently and forcibly, he carried all his points triumphantly.

He might have had a more difficult victory certainly, as Mrs. Hastings seldom argued; Cressida was too cautious and shy as yet to venture into the field of discussion, even had she not agreed heart and soul with Paul; and Athelyn, who would combat Paul by the hour, and even on some occasions had beaten him with his own weapons, had in this case neither power nor will to oppose him. With all her conservative and aristocratic instincts leading her to defend what *is* against what *might be*, you had only to show her a just grievance to enlist her under your banner. Paul swayed her even more than he or she realised. He pointed her attention to individual cases of suffering and led her through

her sympathies; he hurled the gauntlet of his opinion valiantly against the mighty force of custom, and extorted her admiration; he argued clearly and logically, as he could do, with the keenness of a lawyer and the force of an enthusiast, when he did not take wing and fly too high up into cloudland.

He carried Athelyn and Cressida with him; yet even in the interest with which they followed his demonstration, they neither of them lost the interest in each other which led their looks to meet so often.

It is seldom, probably, that impressions so favourable have followed upon anticipations so anxiously doubtful. Personal appearance and the strangely magnetic power of beautiful eyes had in all likelihood a great deal to do with this effect. Utterly different as the eyes of the two girls were, as opposite, indeed, as their contrasted

styles of beauty, there was just this similarity between them, that in each of these two fair and contrasting faces, the eyes were the most striking charm, and bore an influence equally difficult to resist. Athelyn's large, soft, dreamful eyes, with the rare golden light in their opal-grey depths, were no lovelier than those blue orbs of Cressida's, of the palest, clearest sapphire, with a dark rim round the iris that gave them by contrast a singular vividness. As a rule, Cressida's eyes were not remarkable for eloquence; their beauty was more of form and colouring; but sometimes, when she was moved, they became startlingly expressive, and could flash and cloud and lighten on occasion even more effectively than eyes of Spanish darkness or Celtic grey.

In the afternoon, while Mrs. Hastings had a little conversation with Paul, the two girls were left *tête-à-tête*.

“Do you believe in first impressions, in liking and disliking at first sight?” asked Athelyn.

“Yes; it always seems to me as if I’d known some people in some other world.”

“That is one of Paul’s pet theories, is it not?”

“Yes, it is. But I thought so before. Do you know, Miss Athelyn, I often find it comes round so. Often when I’ve been thinking something, he—explains it like, you know, and I find he thinks so too,” Cressida said, somewhat confusedly. “What I mean is,” she added, looking up, “that he seems to put into shape fancies I had that I couldn’t myself have put together in proper words.”

“He translates those formless fancies into expression—yes, I see,” rejoined Athelyn, looking at her thoughtfully, with a smile

that was almost tender, the idea striking root in her mind that, after all, Paul Severne might have found his rightful mate. Our external lives are no intrinsic part of us; we can be torn from them, or they drop off from us like the snake's outworn skin; and what, after all, could externals matter if this girl's soul was made for him?

"If we may believe in first impressions," she said, "I think you and I will get on together."

"I don't know who wouldn't get on with you, Miss Athelyn," said Cressida, sincerely.

"I am glad that we have met, you and I," Athelyn continued, in her kind soft tone. "Paul is one of my oldest friends, you know; indeed he has been almost like a brother to me. And as you and he are to be married, why, you and I ought to be friends too, oughtn't we?"

Cressida looked in Athelyn's face, the colour fitfully flushing and fading in her own. Athelyn held out her hand. The other took it, half timidly, half eagerly; then meeting the sweet candid gaze that was bent on her she rose on impulse and came and knelt by Athelyn's side.

Into her blue eyes there came a light and warmth that seemed to change her whole aspect and expression; then they dimmed suddenly; her lip quivered, and she bent her face on Athelyn's shoulder out of sight.

Athelyn's soft heart melted in a great rush of tenderness and sympathy; she put her arm round her, and raised her head, and kissed her with a pure frank sister's kiss.

So the compact of friendship was sealed; and so from opposite ends of the social scale, from opposite sides of the gulf the

world had set, across a chasm even wider than one of them then dreamed, these two came together.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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