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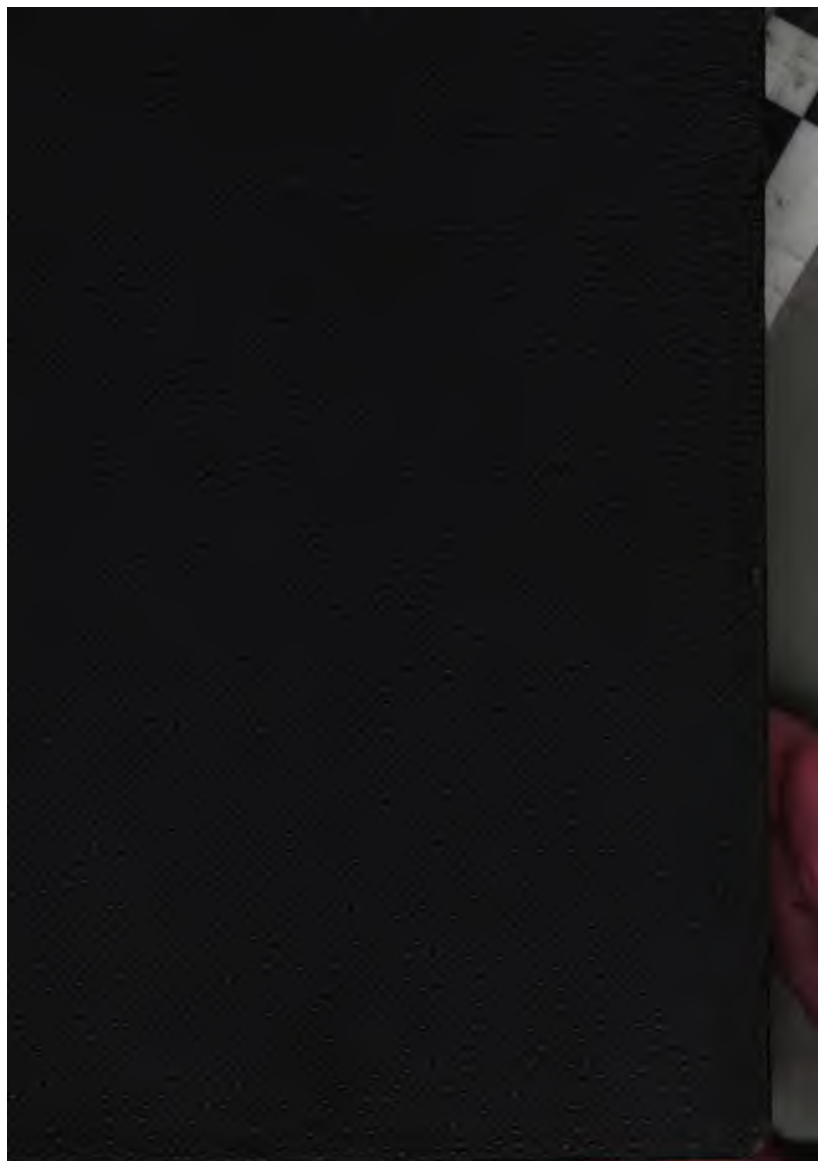
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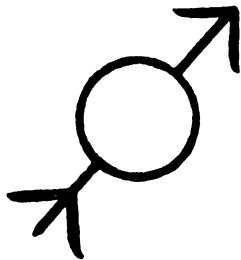
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the same way, the β parameter is estimated by the following equation:

$$\beta = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2} \quad (1)$$

where \bar{x} and \bar{y} are the mean values of the independent and dependent variables, respectively.

After the estimation of the α and β parameters, the regression line is defined by the following equation:

$$\hat{y} = \alpha + \beta x \quad (2)$$

where \hat{y} is the predicted value of the dependent variable, given the value of the independent variable x .

The regression line is used to estimate the value of the dependent variable for a given value of the independent variable.

The regression line is also used to estimate the value of the independent variable for a given value of the dependent variable.

The regression line is also used to estimate the value of the dependent variable for a given value of the independent variable.

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The "Blue-bell" Series



THE DISTURBING ELEMENT







THE
DISTURBING ELEMENT

OR

Chronicles of the Blue-bell Society

BY
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE
AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLIFFE"

Illustrated by Percy Macquoid



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THE DISTURBING ELEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

TRUE BLUE.

AS an invalid, I am always supposed to have more time than any one else. I am not sure that it is the fact, for languor makes work go slowly even at the best, and, besides, those who are supposed to do work for everyone sometimes end in doing work for no one.

However, my friends are so kind to me that I am glad to be able to show my good-will in working for them, and fortunately my invalidism is not very severe or disabling, being chiefly a weakness of spine, which prevents my walking or driving for more than half-an-hour at a time, and—connected with that, as they say—an asthmatic affection which will not let me breathe anywhere

but at this little place of Poppleton St. Barbe, and not much there at night when the wind gets into the north-east.

My sister Susan and I stumbled into it by a sort of chance, when, on the break-up of an old home, we were trying all the world round for a place that would agree with me; and as my breath grew better here, and my bones rebelled at the notion of going up all the hills that fence it in, "we wintered and summered it," as our maid Rebekah says, and ended by setting up our staff, *i.e.*, by taking a long lease of this house, which we did *not* name "Violet Villa." Indeed we did our best to alter the name, so much did it disgust Susan's love of common sense; but custom has been too strong for her, and I see her dating her letters from V. V. without the slightest compunction.

Poppleton St. Barbe is an odd little town. It would fain be a watering-place, but fate is against it. The nearest station is twelve miles off, and between lie no less than three tremendous hills. Barbe Torr hill generally needs four horses to draw up a tolerably well-filled fly, and the leaders appear to be in a nearly perpendicular position above the head of the inmate. Ben Boldre, who shuts in the eastern side of our little bay, is not so severe, in spite of his name, but then he leads to

no particular place, and till the railroad shoots out the threatened branch, we are not likely to have incursions on that side.

There is another objection, namely, that our beach consists of nothing but pebbles, big pebbles and small, varying from the size of a pea to that of a bombshell, all rolling about under the feet of the walker, so that only practice can make perfect in the art of avoiding the getting the ankles and insteps crushed among them. Susan used to come home with her feet black and blue the first year we were here, and though there is a nice smooth walk and carriage-road along the top, where, alone, I can take my walks abroad, it is only half-a-mile long, and storms and spring tides are apt to make such havoc of it that we have to pay heavily to keep it in repair. Moreover, it is only a narrow shelf, deposited, as the learned tell us, by the Boldre, and a very little way out the sea becomes so extremely deep that bathing is very dangerous, except in one tiny cove behind Barbe Head, where an enterprising old woman keeps two machines and a-half.

So it was a failure when, some forty or fifty years ago, a bold speculator, the same who began the great reservoir on the moor, added to the original little town half-a-dozen lodging-houses and sundry

villas with fine names. He ruined himself, poor man, but the buildings have their use. The few who know Poppleton are passionately fond of it, and we dread nothing so much as that it should get a general reputation for being a quiet and unsophisticated place, and all the world should rush down on it together and spoil it. There is one London family connected with the county, who always come here as regularly as the vacation comes round, and sometimes are met by other relations, and it is the established haunt of sundry old-fashioned friends who like to meet here in the winter, and escape the fall of the leaf at home. Other visitors we have, when holiday children want a little sea air, and the old boatmen and bathing women have plenty of custom from merry young folks. Everybody knows everybody ; we think ourselves extremely select, and glance at outsiders as if they were the skirmishers of an invading army.

The Boldre comes down from the moors, rising in a long ravine, or gully, between our two hills, with a beautiful course through woods and rocks, foaming, sparkling, and leaping, and causing his visitors to rave almost as much as he does on a stormy day, when he tears down, all yellow water and foam, roaring into the sea and overflowing all


his bed, spreading over the road, and bringing fresh instalments of stones to the shingle.

The stream divides into two branches, on either side of a sort of delta. I fancy this must once have been one of those rocks, with a gradual slope towards the land and a precipice towards the sea, which form islets, and that the river enlarged it gradually by the deposits it brought down, lengthening it in the rear, raising the ground below the precipice, and filling up the gorge, while the south side was raised by two successive elevations of coast, forming two shelves above the beach and under the cliff, so that the island, as our little nephew Edward used to delight in calling it, contained about fifty acres. On the summit, with a dark grey precipice coming nearly sheer down from the south-eastern buttress of its chancel, most picturesquely perched, is our church, with a magnificent high square tower, with one tall staircase turret pointing up like a finger, intended to serve as a landmark at sea, and certainly worthy to be St. Barbara's symbol. The churchgoers from the eastern side have to go up a grand flight of stone steps, most beautiful and picturesque, but the descent of which is formidable to skirts in wet weather. On the east side, below the churchyard, slopes the Rectory garden ; on the west, Delta

Lodge, a very pretty and beautifully arranged house with a tiny farm, belonging to Captain Walton ; on the south, on the uppermost shelf beneath the precipice, and with two small terraces below to secure it from spring tides, our own Violet Villa. The Rectory lies behind in the fork of the stream, standing high, and its garden sloping down.

The main body of the river—not that it is much in summer time—goes to the east of this islet of ours, and there is a bridge, that generally looks ridiculously high and large, connecting the church steps with Brackenridge, Mr. Arrowsmith's house, and the hamlet beyond. The other branch is generally a mere thread of damp among stones and greener grass, though it too has a bridge in case of accidents, and to lessen the ascent of the hill. The side of Barbe Torr is beautiful park, golden with gorse, purple with heath, and here and there with glades of turf, studded with trees. The chief part of the town lies curving in rows, connected by steep lanes on the lower, south-western corner of Ben Boldre, looking very pretty from this distance, though within, I fancy it is very fishy. The gentry live in terraces above it, and there is a little iron chapel for the fishermen at the further end.

We think ours the most charming situation of all. The church is just above our heads, delightful





MAP OF POPPLETON ST. BARBE.

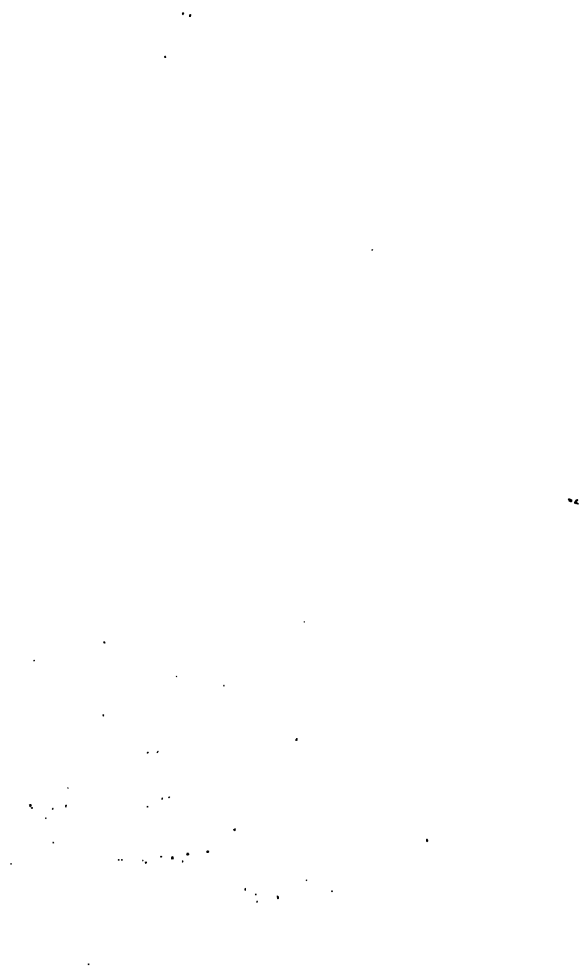


creepers and ferns cover the cliff behind the house, and we have the benefit of Captain Walton's precious pines. Our magnolias and myrtles never perish, and our terraces are lovely with all kinds of rarities. My window looks on the sea, and my music, as I sit alone or wake at night, is the splash of the waves, and the rush and rattle of the pebbles on the beach.

Not that there is much sitting alone. Susan is in and out all day long about her various occupations concerning house, garden, and parish, where long habitation and usefulness have made her a kind of authority.

But this is all aside from the mark. My purpose is to write the history of the Blue-bell Society.

It was one hot June day, when the blinds were keeping out the glare of the sun, and I was sitting half-asleep over some idle reading, that I heard a rippling and a babbling, over and above the noise of the pebbles and the sea, coming up the garden walk, warning me to settle my hair, put away my book, and take up my knitting. I heard the bell, and I also heard through the open window the fresh, and I must confess rather loud, young voice of Lettice Arrowsmith, declaring she knew Miss Webster was out, but was Miss Frances well enough to see her?



Morland, but her voice was lost in the general castigation that fell upon Penny for her precipitancy, which was supposed to have alarmed me, and she was suppressed, and ordered to leave Lettice free to explain the matter.

"The fact is, dear Miss Frances," said she, "that we all feel that we are wasting a great deal of time in a desultory manner, and we want to arrange some scheme for working together with a view to the local examinations——"

It was a great way for one speaker to have gone on uninterrupted, and Winifred Walton plunged in, "So we thought of forming a society——"

"Because Winifred doesn't belong to societies enough already," broke forth Penny. "Let me see," counting on her fingers, "she gets up by the Early Rising Society, that's one; she reads by the Half-hour Society, two; she practises by the Classical Musical Society, three; draws by another, four; walks by the Out-of-door one, five; works by the—is it two or three working ones, Winifred?—Sewing, Knitting, and Fancy Work, and an Essay Society besides——"

"The Essay Society has broken up," said Winifred, in the unconcerned tone of one far too intent on her purpose to perceive a joke. "That's the thing——"

"So you see," added Penny, "poor Winny having only eight societies is obliged to come begging for a ninth. I believe she will soon not be able to cut her nails without a society to tell her when."

"Perhaps some people's tongues need a society for their repression," I could not help putting in. "Here is Lettice burning to go on with her speech, and myself on tenter-hooks to know what you want to do with me."

"To make you our critic," cried out the general voice, while particular ones explained, "To get you to look over our essays;" "To let us meet here once a week;" "To direct our readings;" "To look at our questions."

"For," explained Winifred, "that was the rock we split upon. One of our girls asked the history of the Reform Bill, and as some of them were tremendous Tories, and the critic an awful Liberal, there was such a row we could not go on together. We had been nearly as bad before about the character of John Knox, and then we made a rule to have no party questions, whereupon this girl declared that she didn't know that there were two opinions about the Reformation."

The injured way in which Winifred related all this, as something far too sad and serious for a

spark of fun to be visible in it, set all the others into screams of laughter, from the midst of which came Lettice's voice, entreating that the whole might not be turned into nonsense, when Winifred's grave assurance that she had said nothing—it was not her fault—reduced Penelope to a choking state.

"I knew how it would be if she came," sighed Winifred; on which Penny started up with, "Ladies and gentlemen, I appeal——"

Here, however, Lettice got up a cry of "Order, order," in which Dora Morland and Marjorie Carstairs both joined, and we came to an understanding—for as all the voices impressed on me at once, "it was no joke." They did really wish to form a Mutual Improvement Society, and to study with some method and object. Several of them wished to go up for one of the local examinations for women, and all thought that it would be best to work together. "With some one to keep us in order," added Lettice.

Their present notion was to give out some subjects once a-week, work them up at home, and meet to correct and compare results, and they had unanimously fixed on Violet Villa as the best place of meeting, and my stupid old self as the president, critic, or, as Penny called it, cricket, who

was to chirp comments on my own hearth, and serve as a kind of centre.

Well, I was flattered—I was touched. I liked to have the young things about me. I am glad if I can help them. I think it will be fun. Only what will Susan say? However, that suggestion was overwhelmed by, "Oh! she'll be all right!" "Never mind;" "I'll tackle Miss Webster" (this from Penny the undaunted); and then I was called a dear, delicious, darling Miss Frances, and my head was nearly hugged off—my apology for a cap quite so.

Then we subsided, and I was told of the other four members, and of a few more who would correspond. Then what were we to call ourselves?

"*Le salon bleu*," suggested Winifred, looking round at the room, which had lately come out in a summer garb of chintz with a running pattern of blue coral all over it, to agree with a blue brocade arm-chair and curtains to match, which were relics of an old home.

"No, no," I protested; "I'm not going to set up for a *Hotel Rambouillet*. We should soon be known as the *Précieuses Ridicules*."

"I think we had better steer clear of blue," said Dora.

"And I think we had better take the bull by the horns, and call ourselves the *Bas bleu* at once," said Winifred.

I thought that would sound rather pretentious, but the girls had, it seemed, set their hearts on having each a little blue badge, and using the name of some *blue* flower as their *nom de plume*. Such fancies, half play, half poetry, must go along with girlhood's plans, and very merry all were over the choice of names. Ours was then to be the Blue-bell Society, and our first Bell was Canterbury-bell, *i.e.*, tall, bright, cheery Lettice Arrowsmith.

Winifred chose the *Gentianella*, and nearly relinquished it, because Dora was overheard muttering, "Darkly, deeply, beautifully blue;" and Penny exclaimed, "Really, Dora, you should be Viper's Bugloss, you have such a sting!"

"I meant it, thank you," said Dora, with her accustomed *sang-froid*. "I particularly admire Bugloss."


Maisie Carstairs could of course be only the Harebell, or Blue-bell of Scotland, and Penny began by appropriating the Shamrock, and being reminded that it was not blue, proposed the Sapphire, because it was the next thing to an Emerald. "Oh, Penny, Penny! you'd better take care they don't drum you out of the society

altogether," cried Lettice, as she heard Winifred's indignant whisper of "How can you be so silly!"

"You had better be Forget-me-not, as a wholesome reminder," observed the Viper's Bugloss.

"Not I," rejoined Penny; "I'll leave that for some one more sentimental. No, I mean to be the Blue-bottle, that is always buzzing in your ears."

There was another outcry, but Penny proved that Blue-bottle was really the popular name of the wild Hyacinth, and was left in peace therewith. After all, she was not nearly so Irish as her name appeared, and as she chose to affect to be. Her father's family had been settled for several generations in England, her mother was purely English, and she had never seen the Green Isle; her brogue was studied out of books, and though inherited nature had done something in making her what she was, enthusiastic imitation of everything Irish had done more. Nothing made her so angry as to tell her so, and I was thankful that it did not occur to Dora to do so, before a message came in that Miss Dove had called for Miss Carstairs, and, silent member as she had been, this broke up the conclave, and I was left to face my sister Susan.





CHAPTER II.

THE BELLS.

FOR my sister Susan is seven years older than I am, and she is the head of the house, and of me too. We have never changed in that matter, since she was my little mamma in play, before in sad earnest, when my dear mother bade Susan take care of the little ones, and told us to look up to her and obey her. I am her last home-bird, and I don't like doing what she does not heartily approve—not only for affection and duty's sake, but because she is really so much better and wiser than I am, and I always observe that nothing she really dislikes turns out well.

So it was with some trepidation that I awaited her return from her Mothers' Meeting, and rang the bell at the first click of the latch of the gate, sure that she would be thirsty after all her cutting

out and talking, though Jane Morland is reader. And I was prepared to hear on her entrance, "Frances, what *have* you been doing?"

"What have you been hearing?" I asked, and I found that she was in a bewildered state, Jane Morland, our Vicar's eldest daughter, having told her that Dora was going with half-a-dozen more girls to get me to consent to *It*. Jane could not understand what *It* was—great nonsense, Dora said, and she thought so too. Then Miss Dove had met her in the street and told her that she did not half like *It*, and would not have permitted *It*, if Miss Frances had not taken *It* up. Next, Penelope Ryan had danced round her on the Parade, beseeching her to be a dear, good, darling Miss Webster, *It* would be so jolly with Miss Frances at the head of *It*; and lastly, Winifred Walton had, with a solemnity that alarmed her more than all, shaken hands with her, saying that they were infinitely obliged to Miss Frances, and considered *Its* future as secure. No wonder poor Susan came in startled, and desiring to know what I could have been undertaking.

"Suppose I had a Daughters' Meeting while you have a Mothers'?" said I, trying to put a good face upon it; and then we came to an explanation as far as I understood the scheme, for many details had

yet to be shaped, since the whole had been a good deal contingent on her consent. She was not much delighted.

"I don't see any sense in it," she said; "you will have all these girls for ever rushing in upon you and talking you to death."

"It won't be for ever, only on Tuesday afternoons, and I mean to be a dragon of a chairwoman, and ring my bell at all extraneous chatter. It will be very entertaining, and, indeed, Susan," I humbly added, "I should like to be of some use."

"What use?" said Susan (she was very thirsty still, for the water did not boil, and we could not get any tea)—"what use but to make those girls more pretentious and noisy than they are already. I really was quite ashamed of the disturbance Penelope Ryan was making."

"Poor Penelope," said I (for Susan did not love "foolish names")—"I should like to give her a little ballast."

"Do you expect to do it in this way?" said Susan. "Much the same sort of ballast as the feather of a bit of thistledown!"

"I told them I could promise nothing without you, and if you think it would only do harm——"

"That is going too fast. I never said anything."

Here the tea came in, in the dear old daisy-

patterned cups, whose very touch was soothing, and by the time Rebekah had drawn up the blind at the south window, and reported a message left at the door, Susan was in a much less disturbed frame of mind.

"All I wish," she said in a voice pitched much lower than before, "is that you should not undertake too much, and let yourself be at the mercy of all the girls in the place; but if you really have a fancy for it, and it amuses you, I can have no objection."

"Thank you, Miss Webster," and Lettice Arrowsmith's bright laughing face came dipping under the blind that still kept out the westering sun. "Indeed I haven't been listening. I only came this moment. I've had to go on and order some fish, and I thought you would sustain me with some tea before crossing the bridge. Papa said he should be late to-day."

I suspected that this was a little coaxing art on our Lettice's part. She is a great favourite with Susan; of late from a fellow feeling, for it was three years since she was left to be the stay of a motherless family, and she has owed a great deal to the help and sympathy she has always had from Susan. Mr. Arrowsmith is the chief partner of the County Bank at Warchester, but he bought some property

and built a house at Brackenridge, on the lower ground of the ravine, just on the other side of the river. The gardens slope down to the bank, and the lodge gate is close to the bridge, and the plantations run up the steep slope of Ben Boldre behind. His flowers are the pride of the country, and he spends all his leisure days on them and his model farm, giving most of his time, however, to Warchester, and sometimes looking in on the little branch bank in Poppleton.

Lettice was, at this time of which I am writing, twenty-five—a tall, brisk, fresh-coloured creature, with a pleasant look of health and energy. She was the only one of the elder half of the family who had been spared by a grievous visitation of diphtheria, so there was a great gap between her and her fourteen-year-old brother, after whom there came another boy and two little girls. We had, and still have, a little vision about Lettice, but I don't know whether it will be fulfilled. At anyrate, she is such an excellent young mother that it was a wonder to see her without her two little sisters, and Susan enquired after them.

"I left them to play in the garden to-day," said she. "I had some calls to make, and, besides, I wanted to talk over this matter."

"My dear Lettice, you don't mean that you

are bitten with these schemes?" exclaimed Susan.

Lettice made a droll shrinking gesture, and put up one hand between herself and Susan.

"I am sure you have enough to do!" said my sister.

"Not so much as I had before Jamie went to school, and now Mary and Bessie have a governess. You know papa wished it, now they are growing too old to be left to servants whenever we go out to dinner; and, besides—now we come to the point—I do know so very little that I'm not fit to teach."

"My dear, I thought you had a first-rate education—a German governess and masters!"

"I do know German pretty well, but I know my French accent is horrible. I have read a good deal, but in an aimless sort of way, just because the books came to hand; and though I have kept up by working with the boys till they went to school, I found, even in Tom's last holidays, that he was getting beyond me, and that I soon shall not be able to help him. While as to the girls, I find I don't know anything really and properly as a teacher ought to do, when I get above the merest foundations; and the worst of it is," she added, laughing, "that Miss Coles seems to me to know

less still, and not even to have arrived at perceiving that she does not know."

"But you are not to be a governess, and you are not bound to Miss Coles for ever?"

"No, but I like her; the children are good with her; papa is interested in her family, and would not like a change, which would be wholesome for none of us. I had rather make something of her. Now if I was to propose to her to work up for the local examination by herself, she might very likely think it a burden; but if I did it with her, and it became the means of introducing her to something pleasant and lively beyond the schoolroom, I think she would take to it, and really be improved."

"And what is to become of the children in the meantime?"

"Oh! she has plenty of time in the evening, and I in the morning. You see we have to breakfast early for papa to get off to the bank, and I shall be very glad to have an object now that I have so much less to do for the children."

"You won't go up for one of these examinations?"

"I don't know how papa may like it when it comes to the point, but, at anyrate, I shall have done the work for it, and that's the important point."

"I am glad you think so," said Susan.

"Besides," added Lettice, "I was really anxious to make the thing succeed when Winifred Walton spoke to me about it. It would be so good for some of the girls here to have something sensible to think about."

It was quite true, as we had always said. The parish work was pretty well disposed of between Mrs. Morland, her daughter, the curate's wife, with Susan, and a few other ladies, for Mrs. Morland preferred having district visitors of a certain age, and except that some took classes in the Sunday school, there was nothing for the girls to do, save that Lettice looked after some cottagers on her father's property, and Penelope after the mining families among whom her father lived. There was Dora, as we all knew, getting quite cross and bitter for want of interest and occupation; there was Penny attempting all sorts of things in her slap-dash vehement manner, and getting opinionated for want of some standard to bring her to book; there were Edith and Alice Parnell, a pair of sisters, who were a grief to Susan's eyes, because they seemed to do nothing but pace up and down the Parade drying their hair after bathing. Then there was Emma Lacy. Lettice and I looked at each other drolly, read in each other's eyes that we had received her confidence, and straightway

betrayed it, thinking it good for my sister to hear it. Poor Emma Lacy was always sending manuscripts to magazines and always having them rejected, and she had secretly appealed to both Lettice and me to know why it could be that editors should be so cruel. To me she had shown a poem entitled, "My crushed buds," written in the person of a mother who had lost all her children in infancy; and to Lettice a romance on some early Christians, who, fleeing from the persecution of Caligula, got into a cavern on the sea-coast of Sicily, and were nearly drowned by a spring tide, but beguiled their sufferings by singing the Ambrosian hymn and reading the Book of Revelation. When Lettice had made certain suggestions as to the nature of the Mediterranean and the chronology of the early Church, she found the would-be authoress quite ignorant of such trifling details, and destitute of books whence to supply them.

Susan had come the length of allowing that it would be much better for these damsels to have something rational given them to do. Only, she continued, that she would not have me worried and tired, though she should be less afraid on that score if Lettice undertook to look after me, and she further stipulated that the members should

never be more than the nine proposed, or she knew it would be too much for me. We were thankful for having gained this much, and acknowledged both her wisdom and her goodness, knowing well that her consent went much against the grain.

Moreover, I was to have a secretary, and the choice was left in my own hands. It was not a very wide field, for there were only four of the Blue-bells whom I knew to be capable, and of those Lettice was too busy, and Dora had a temper I did not trust, so that only Winifred and Marjorie remained.

Winifred was the moving spring and author of the whole scheme, and perhaps had the first claim; but, to say the truth, I was a little afraid of her, she was so methodical and dictatorial, and had such a lack of fun, that I did not want to give her the power of dragooning us all. Her life was really, as Penny said, portioned out by societies, and she seemed to have very little object in life but fulfilling their rules, so as to get prizes and avoid fines. Her chief subjects of conversation were, "Can you lend me a book where I can get up the properties of light?" Or, "Isn't it a shame? There is a translation not nearly so good as mine with eight marks more. I shall write and complain." Or, "Good-bye, I can't stay, or I shall not have had my open-air hour."

Dora said she was nothing but an automaton with brains, and cared for nothing but stuffing them. It was not untrue, but Winifred's was a curious position. Her father was a very highly-cultivated and accomplished man, who had been in the army. He had married a very young wife, exactly suited to him, and they had always been so much devoted to each other and to their pursuits that they really had no time to attend to their daughter. They had leased Delta Lodge, with a little land, and had made it a wonderful place for all that is artistic. They went abroad a good deal, and at home were always finishing up drawings for exhibitions, gardening, and doing a little picturesque amateur farming—quite inseparable, and wanting no one else. When Winifred outgrew the age for being a pretty plaything, she was sent to school, and at eighteen was taken from thence, with a good deal more brain and less beauty than her mother, with a real turn for study and very little for accomplishment, and even that little diminished by her distaste to a certain affected manner and overstretched-enthusiasm in her mother, and by finding what she felt to be shallow and empty made the business of life. She was now twenty, and had had two years of—not being told she was *de trop*, not exactly feeling it, yet of being not

wanted, and, therefore, becoming less interested in her parents' pursuits, and more wrapped up in her own, and living a life outside the home where she ate, drank, and slept. Thus hers was more an intellectual than a human life. She had not known tenderness enough to be very attractive, and even at school had made no warm friendships. Her contact was only with fellow-members of societies, and though I believe she had a soft spot in her heart, I knew that, if I made her my secretary, I should be winding up a steady-going, self-acting machine, which would pinch my fingers as ruthlessly as anyone's if I tried to stop it.

I preferred the notion of Maisie Carstairs, the Honourable Marjorie, as she was rather maliciously called. She was a very silent inoffensive girl, with shining observant eyes of the same colour as her red knot of hair, and a tall, awkward figure. The poor thing had the misfortune to be the child of a late, unwelcome second marriage of an old Scottish nobleman, and, when left an orphan, had been turned over to the care of her mother's aunt, who regarded her as a most precious deposit, and made such a fuss about her precedence as rendered life a burden to her, and even prejudiced people against the girl herself. Maisie, who had had a winter of Edinburgh before she was consigned to

good Miss Dove's little square abode on the heights of Ben Boldre, had really seen more of intellectual society in that space than any of us had ever met, and though she had never been heard to utter a word of complaint, she must have found the world of Poppleton very dull and dry. She was still in mourning for her father, and there was a look on her face that might be weariness or sadness, there was no knowing which, and I once or twice fancied her heart might be in the Highlands. Any way, she treated my offer of the secretaryship as if it was an inestimable favour, and the manner in which she drew up the notices of our first meeting augured well for the future.

"And do you think," asked Susan, "that you are going to reform all these young ladies with your Blue-bell affair?"

"Certainly not," I answered; "only to give them some infinitesimal help."

"Humph! Much they will care for it the first time a man appears."

"When the Prince comes, Susan, to put it gracefully. But in the meantime, before the disturbing element comes, let us try to make the most of the creatures."

I am sorry to say Susan was so inconsistent as to laugh herself into tears at my way of mentioning

the other sex as the disturbing element. For Poppleton society certainly did resemble a story we used to read in our youth, called "The Daughter at Home," in which the only masculine character was the carpenter who came to mend the door. The male sex was conspicuous only by its absence, and in the aristocratic quarter of the church an isolated grizzled bald head or two rose from the mass of gay bonnets and hats like solitary grey rocks in the midst of a flowery plain, such brown bare heads as there were being too much below the surface of the feminine head-gear to make any show. Indeed, Mr. Morland used to tease Susan by saying he should have to make her churchwarden, since Captain Walton systematically avoided all unpleasant duties.

Poppleton was a place where widows and maidens did congregate, and though, like other people, we had our clergy and our doctor, lawyer, banker, &c., they were all married men, and chiefly figured as parents to the Blue-bells. Even our curates were married. One was elderly and had a very hard-working wife, the other had brought a rather silly little bride with him. We had a squire, but only in name, for his predecessor had involved the estate so much, that it had only been saved by his early death, and the long minority that had ensued. The

house had been shut up, for it was too much out of repair for letting, and there was no power to repair it; and Mr. Ryan, whose wife was a St. Barbe, and first cousin once removed to the young squire, lived in a house on the moor on the opposite side of the park, trying to nurse up the estate into good order again, and looking after a copper mine, which had ruined a good many people, and was at last beginning to be profitable.

Meantime, young Mr. St. Barbe was only heard of occasionally as salmon-fishing in Norway, lion-hunting in Africa, or cricketing in Australia, and a beautiful library, which by some strange irony of fortune had descended to this very unliterary house, served as valuable pasture to the intimates of the Ryan family. The Waltons, who were the only people who had any love for books, haunted it a good deal—the parents for art literature, Winifred for whatever she wanted to hunt up. Mr. Ryan would not sanction the taking home of books, but his daughter, Miss Arrowsmith, and the Waltons could take anyone there whom they liked.



CHAPTER III.

PENNY WISE.

I AM compiling this history from the minutes drawn up by my invaluable secretary, Maisie Carstairs, otherwise the Harebell, who sat in her corner, with her little table before her, speaking seldom, but recording as faithfully, and almost as quickly, as a reporter.

I find that our first meeting took place on the 19th of June, 187—, and that it was then agreed that the Oxbridge local examination would suit us best. Only two of the girls, Edith Parnell (*alias* Speedwell) and Mary Morland (Borage) were young enough for the juniors, who must be under eighteen; all the others had to prepare for the higher one. We were to write to the head of the committee for information, and in the meantime, as Winifred had found out from one of her correspondents what play of Shakspeare's was

to be worked up, we could begin upon that, each bringing a Shakspeare next time. Most of the girls were very anxious for a subject to be given out for an essay. The prudent doubted whether there would be time for this when the classes were arranged, and Winifred was pathetically saying it would be nothing if it was not an essay society, when my sister came in with the tea, and asked if we had finished, and how we were getting on.

"We only want a subject," said Winifred. "If our president would only give us a question!"

"I'll give you a question," said Susan. "Why did none of us ever see a new moon rise?"

"Ah! but that's a catch, Miss Webster," cried several voices.

"Not at all," she said smiling, as a majority of voices declared that it *could* be only because one was never up in time, and Emma Lacy (Forget-me-not) added—

"Indeed, Miss Webster, the new moon was just rising when Hilda Bevan was lost in the wood in the middle of the night. Wasn't it, Alice?"

"In 'Hilda's Dream Voices,' in the *Maidens' Monthly*," Alice Parnell (Lobelia) confirmed her.

"My dear, can you find it anywhere but in 'Hilda's Dream Voices'?"

"I've seen it!" here burst in Penelope.

"What, in the *Maidens' Monthly*?"

"No! In the sky—the horizon, if you please."

"My dear Penny," observed Lettice, in the gentle voice she put on when Penny was in one of her rampant states of positiveness; but it was to no effect.

"Yes, indeed, Letty. Do you think nobody can ever look out of their window or make observations when other people are asleep. I assure you I saw it with my own eyes, and a most beautiful sight it was."

"The *new moon*?" said my sister.

"Yes, the new moon, I do assure you, Miss Webster. It was at five o'clock, I know, for I heard the bantam cock beginning to crow, like a jolly little darling that he is; and I know it was last March, for I saw my old white alpaca hanging up just like the ghost of a banshee! And there was the moon rising over the moor. I can't think why you won't take my word for what I've seen."

"No one doubts your word, my dear," I here managed to say, "only we want to know how you knew it was the new moon."

"Why, because it was!" reiterated Penny; "it was the dearest little scrap of a moonie, like a tiny slice of a red gold melon, coming up gently, gently over the cliff of Hark-tor-mire, and getting first gold

and then silver and then white. I can't think what's the matter with you, that you should think I don't know the new moon when I see it."

"How do you account for it?" gravely asked my sister.

"Oh! every beginner can do that. The moon makes phases every month. What *are* you laughing at? She is *always* exactly opposite to the sun, and rises when he sets, and *vice versa*."

"So the sun set at five o'clock in the morning?" interposed Viper's Bugloss.

"No, nonsense; you know what I mean. I said *vice versa*. The sun illuminates the moon when he shines upon her back, and then she is a crescent."

"Well, Blue-bottle," I said, "if you will write us an account both of your sight and its explanation, it shall be preserved in the archives of the Blue-bells. Let the question be, 'Who has ever seen the new moon rise, and why?'"


A good many hard words were spent on the positive Penelope that evening, but Lettice confessed that, though she knew the impossibility, she could not account for it without looking it up, and we suspected that everybody was in the same case except Maisie and Winifred, of whose comprehension we were informed by the face of the one and the tongue of the other.

The next morning we had not quite finished family prayers when we were aware of a scuffling and a crunching outside, and just as the servants filed out of the room, two wonderful faces were seen at the window, one over the other, the lower being that of the Ryan pony, Leprechaun, wriggling his mouth with intent to devour our jessamines, with a black bristly tuft of hair over his forehead, and a great fern leaf over that to keep off the flies, both wringing wet with dew; above was Penny's face, not much less shaggy or dewy, for that hair of hers was loose and dank with dew, and so was the fur trimming of an old hat with a fox's brush in it, which she was wont to wear in private moments, and which she had further decorated with another frond of fern. But oh! the dancing of her eyes and the flashing of her smile, as she called out—

"Miss Webster, I'm come to beg your pardon, and call myself ten million donkeys for making such a goose of myself, and contradicting you."

"So you've found it out," I said.

"Yes. 'Twas the old moon that I saw, poor old dear! Well, really, I couldn't believe it, till I turned out all the astronomy books I could get, and when I saw what an obstinate mule I had been, I couldn't rest till I'd come to tell you how



sorry I was for standing out against you. Please say you forgive me, Miss Webster!"

"Of course I do, you silly child," said Susan, quite melted by the charming eyes and coaxing voice, "on condition you'll come in, dry yourself, and eat some breakfast."

"And that I can't do, thank you. So you must forgive me without that. Papa wants me to help choose a horse, and mamma will want me to preserve the strawberries, and they don't know I'm come. You must give me your pardon without conditions, there's a good Miss Webster."

"There, then," said Susan, handing her out a roll spread with marmalade, "I'll only make one, and that is, that, whenever you feel most sure and certain of anything, you'll stop and count twenty before you asseverate it."

"I'll count twenty before I asseverate that marmalade is made of oranges, or that Miss Webster's the dearest jolly old lady in the world."

"You'd better," said Susan. "Do you know what the grocer's errand boy answered when they offered him marmalade at the school feast?—'No, thank you, ma'am, I've seen it made.'"

With which parting shot we saw Penny ride off, shaking her merry head.

Our next meeting produced a capital account of

the changes of the moon, illustrated with neatly-drawn diagrams from Maisie, and other answers in a varying scale, from Winifred's clear cut-and-dry style, Penny's clever poetical answer, with the inevitable bit of inaccuracy, down to Edith Parnell's copy from some schoolroom catechism, and Emma Lacy's protest in verse—

“Who ever saw the new moon rise?
And would you ask me why?
And in the secrets of the skies
And the earth bid me pry?

“In secret opens forth the flower,
In secret falls the dew,
Secret the insect's rising hour,
Hid from man's searching view.

“Veiled is each working of the earth—
Her marvels rich and rare
Delight in a mysterious birth,
Hid from the day's broad glare.

“I would not with dissecting eye,
And curious hands and rude,
Thus into Nature's secrets pry,
In scientific mood.

“No, leave me the poetic thought,
The dear fantastic dream—
Nor call them tales of the untaught,
Who see things as they seem.

"Tell me not of a huge machine,
Going like a clock upwound ;
All measured out each space between,
Marked out each weary round.

"I hate such cold and dreary talk,
No such vain lore I know ;
Let Lady Moon in brightness walk,
In secret turn her bow.

"Seek not from me the reason why,
I love too well to ask ;
Or make the wonders of the sky
Only a schoolroom task."

"Awfully jolly!" was, I am afraid, Penny's exclamation, echoed by Alice and Edith Parnell; and others of us said "Very pretty;" but Winifred demanded, "Is this all the answer?"

"Yes," responded the poetess, simpering a little, with the evident conviction that no one else had done as much. "You could not expect more of poor little me."

Being afraid of what Winifred might say, I assumed the didactic, and observed, "We are obliged for these pleasant verses, but of course we cannot take them in earnest, for we know how much more really wonderful and poetical the works of creation are when we even know them in part.

No fear that they will lose their mystery. It only goes deeper."

Lettice took her cue from me, and would not let Winifred scold or Dora sneer, but carried the session on to further business. We had our orders from the headquarters of our corresponding class, and knew what we were to work at. We really were to go on principles of mutual improvement. Lettice was to manage the German class, Miss Coles (Chicory) the French one; Winifred was up in English grammar and analysis; I thought I could undertake guidance in history and English literature, but arithmetic and algebra and Euclid were the difficulty. I used to like the first of these, but my calculating powers had grown rusty, and I knew nothing of the more recent modes of teaching. Maisie, however, came to the rescue. She had worked last year for the Edinburgh examination, though her father's illness had hindered her from going up for it, and she believed she could help the others.

Three faces grew longer and longer as the work was marked out—those of the two Parnells and of Emma Lacy. I rather expected a resignation, but the Parnell sisters were not so high in the social scale as some of the others, and it was promotion to them to be associated with Miss Carstairs, Miss

Walton, and Miss Arrowsmith, and this perhaps might sweeten the bitter draught of unwonted application. Mrs. Parnell was a widow, whose pension was only for life, and she had told Susan that it was important that her girls should be able to help themselves in case they should not marry before her death. They had shared a daily governess with Dr. Lacy's family, one who had been tried by the Morlands, and found to make everything she taught a dreary dull routine, hateful to her scholars—and no wonder, for it had been ground into her on the same system at some school, and was the mill of her life, just endured as the sole means of subsistence. Emma Lacy was a little older and a good deal brighter-witted than either—just clever enough, in fact, to be splendidly silly—and had a good deal of influence with them. So I thought I had better get her alone, and asked her to come early and help me on our next afternoon with some little preparation for the Shakspeare class which I had undertaken to hold on, "Coriolanus" the specified play.

She was a pretty girl, with a creamy pale skin, large soft brown eyes, and dark hair, and she moved with a languid kind of grace, taking thrice the time in doing anything that Winifred or Dora spent over it; but she was obliging, and did all I

asked, though she looked with an eye askance at my Roman history, my dictionaries, and notes, and she presently took the opportunity of hinting that she could not bear picking poetry to pieces, it was like dissecting a flower.

"Not always," I said. "All so-called poetry does not grow upon us by being dissected, and our sense of the perfection of a flower always does."

"Not to me. I *couldn't* analyse what I loved," she said in a touching voice.

"Do you love Shakspeare?" I asked—with, I confess, a little malice, for I had certain suspicions.

"Oh yes," the propensity to gush prompted at once; then probably truth came to the front, and she added, "I do love that scene where *she* sits like Patience on a monument and sings, "By fair Fidele's grassy tomb."

"I am afraid that is not Shakspeare," I said.

"Isn't it? It's in the book of 'Flowers from the Poets,' and I always thought it was."

"What play do you like best?"

She hesitated, and then candidly confessed, first, that Shakspeare was a big book, and then that it had been spoiled for her by her having been made to recite Wolsey's speech when she was in the schoolroom. She only liked little bits here and there; she could not like what had been a task.

I congratulated her on the improbability of our spoiling anything she already cared for by analysing "Coriolanus," and had nearly addressed her in the words of Lewis Carroll—

"And would you be a poet
Before you've been to school?
Ah, well! I hardly thought you
So absolute a fool,"

only she evidently viewed going to school as cramping her genius, and presently avowed that, if we would not be hurt, she had rather withdraw from the Blue-bells. She had, it was plain, expected them to form a sort of easy-going essay society, where one might have the opportunity of airing one's performances, and had no notion of being brought to book, and forced into serious study.

I attacked her on two sides ; one that, if she gave it up, Alice and Edith Parnell would follow her example, and would lose the chance of improvement, which might be very needful for them—at which she was a little flattered ; and secondly, appealed to her experience of editors and publishers, who seemed not inclined to accept—in her case at least—productions that would not stand analysis. I assured her that she had some native ability, but that unless she would condescend to learn to write good English, and obtain some accu-

rate knowledge of history, geography, and literature, it would be of little use to her. This was not pleasant, but she did to a certain extent believe it, and she only objected that she was sure so much pains would put all her best ideas to flight.

"So they may for the time," I said, "but you will find that when careful grammatical language has become natural to you, and you have learned a few more facts accurately, these ideas will return in fuller force——"

We were interrupted, so I did not know how far she accepted this suggestion.

However, a few days later, Dr. Lacy called, not medically, but to express his warm gratitude that his little girl should be taken in hand, and have anything put into her head that was not nonsense. He was a sensible and clever man, though rough and hasty from being overworked, and he had no time for guiding or sympathising with his daughter, even if he had known how, but had left all to his wife, a good, motherly, handsome body, but with the mind of a housekeeper, and quite incapable of dealing with a girl who inherited her husband's brains and her own beauty.

I felt triumphant, but Susan said she was a little afraid that what parents pressed eagerly became distasteful to children.



CHAPTER IV.

DR. KNOWALL.

IN spite of all predictions, the Blue-bells flourished.

Even our season brought very little of the "disturbing element," for our summer visitors were chiefly families whose gentlemen had gone off for more enterprising expeditions, and whose boys were young enough to herd together without expecting much attendance from their sisters.

However, when the time approached when names had to be entered for the examination, there was a panic. I believe both Winifred and Maisie could have passed, but they both aspired to extras, and the one doubted of her algebra, the other of her German, while the others were bogged in various parts of the Slough of Despond.

Dora drew a picture of them—where Penny appeared endeavouring to leap from tuft to tuft, and Alice Parnell floundering deep in the arith-

she was a little less slapdash, though she was so droll about her mistakes that one could hardly wish her to cease from them. Emma Lacy had worked all the spring very well, and in history and literature her native cleverness told as soon as she paid attention.

And we began to have hopes of better help than even the schoolmaster's. Lettice heard of a gentleman who was teaching classes at Warchester, and who on inquiry turned out to have graduated at the University of Bonn, and to have all manner of certificates of proficiency.

Mr. Arrowsmith, at his daughter's entreaty, undertook to make inquiries about him, his antecedents, and his terms, and we began to tease each other on every mistake by asking, "What will the Herr Professor say?" "How will that suit Dr. Knowall?"

The excitement increased when we heard that his respectability was quite unimpeachable, and that when the Warchester schools, where he was teaching, broke up for the holidays, he would come into lodgings at Poppleton, and give us lessons in whatever we pleased, at a rate by no means extravagant.

Expectations varied about him, but were of two principal kinds. Mrs. Morland trusted that I should

metic swamp, whence Maisie was vainly trying to drag her. Indeed, sums and grammar turned out to be the worst regions of that morass, and I doubted whether a masculine hand was not wanted to help out even our best. But it was not worth while to ask for such aid till we had succeeded in clearing Emma Lacy's ideas about the verbs *to lie* and *to lay*, taught her the difference between *whom* and *who*, and brought Penny to the pitch of uniformly remembering that three times six did not make twenty-four, and distinguishing numerators from denominators. If we were obliged to invoke the assistance of the National School master, we would not be inferior to the fourth standard, whose proficiency Susan was wont to bewail.

So we resolved to wait for another year, and when the visitors were gone, and autumn set in, we worked with a will—characteristically indeed, but steadily; and by the time the year came round, Susan declared the Blue-bells a much greater success than she had ever expected.

Edith Parnell had developed much more brain than her sister, and was one of our most promising scholars, quite raised above the mere wandering-on-the-Parade state. Dora Morland was, the family declared, more good tempered, though we did not think her less caustic; and Penny—well, perhaps

she was a little less slapdash, though she was so droll about her mistakes that one could hardly wish her to cease from them. Emma Lacy had worked all the spring very well, and in history and literature her native cleverness told as soon as she paid attention.

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be very vigilant, and take care that no approach was made to any German heterodoxies; and as we sat awaiting our first lesson, Penny delighted the hearts and fluttered the spirits of the Parnells by asseverations that all German students were Burschen, wore long beards and moustaches, drank quantities of "krugs" of Bavarian beer, and were always fighting duels, and called everyone else Philistines.

"Whom is he to fight with?" asked Miss Coles, while Mary Morland timidly observed that duelling was prohibited now.

"In England, but not in Germany," said Penny, with her usual boldness of assertion.

"Penny will have to undertake him herself," said Lettice, laughing, "if his thirst for battle can't be slaked otherwise. A single-handed duel would be more awkward than a triangular one."

"Serious consequences may be apprehended," added Dora, "if Penny adheres to her last week's view, that Frederick Barbarossa was an Algerine pirate."

"But *indeed*," eagerly put in Emma Lacy, "they don't fight duels away from their universities. Since the war, they have been like the Baron von Rosen in the 'Strange Adventures of a Phaeton,' who sung all manner of charming war-songs, and groomed the

horses, and had a big brown beard and moustaches, and had fought in real battles in France."

"A very dangerous person to Bells," whispered Lettice, with a drolly guilty look. "Dear Cricket, what have I done?"

"Has he been in the army?" eagerly asked Alice. "You said he was half a German, didn't you? Is he a Baron?"

"Of course," said Dora; "all the Germans are Barons, except the Counts."

"Well," said Winifred, "I don't care, as long as he can carry me to the Binomial Theorem."

There was a foot on the gravel, and a thrill went through the assembly. Edith, who was the nearest to the window, however, whispered back the information—

"'Tisn't him. 'Tis only an errand boy."

"Grammar, Speedwell! a forfeit!" called out Dora.

"Will he give us lectures on Goëthe?" Emma was in the act of saying in the security that no one was approaching, when Rebekah ushered in Mr. Sneyd.

Lettice and I knew the name, some of the others might be dimly aware of it, but we had all grown so used to talking of the Professor Knowall, that the brevity of the appellation was almost as startling as the contrast with the public expectations. No

bristling Bursch was this! He had no hair on his face, scarcely even eyebrows, as they were so pale as to be invisible, for his German half manifested itself in the whitey-brown hue of his very short hair, and likewise of his cheeks. As to his eyes, they were under his spectacles, and his size and figure were those of a lad of seventeen; nay, Penny's brother, Leonard, would have made two of him at fifteen. He looked as little likely to groom horses or sing war-songs as to fight duels, and the English half of him seemed to manifest itself in the most ineffable state of bashfulness and *mauvais, honte*, which seemed to make him blind and deaf, bowing at first hither and thither, as if he were going to butt, only did not know at which of us (so Penny said)—clinging to his hat as if it were a rope in the hands of a drowning man, and stammering helplessly when inquiries were made about his transit from Warchester.

We got him into a chair at the head of the table at last, and his first lesson began. That moment the mist seemed to clear away from his senses. Very far was he from being deaf to a mispronunciation of German, or blind to a mistranslation. If he was frightfully afraid of his scholars as ladies, no sooner were they his class than they were nothing but pupils—mere abstractions, to whom

he uttered the plainest truths in the plainest form. Everyone "caught it," to use Penny's expression, more or less, even that first time; and on the second, when he had put all back to first principles, and given them work to prepare for him, he was still more uncompromising. He told Lettice, our German authority, that she had been taught by an imperfectly educated Austrian; Maisie, who had been our arithmetical professor, that her methods were cumbrous and unphilosophical. Winifred was informed that she had no idea of the logical construction of a sentence; Miss Coles, that her French grammar was mere surface, just what is called rule of thumb; Penelope, that she did not understand one principle correctly, and did not know what accuracy was; Emma, that she wrote like a milkmaid. Really, those that fared best were the youngest, who, as their master said, had not had time to go so far in a wrong direction. We could not help glancing at each other in amusement, as each had her turn of slashing rebuke; and it was the more amusing, that though he was such a lion of a preceptor, he was the meekest of frightened lambs, the instant his magisterial work was over—nay, scarcely even like a lamb, but rather like a newly-caught bird, afraid even to flutter in the bottom of its cage.

Yet we all felt that he had brought what we lacked. He was lucid and philosophical, a born teacher, and thoroughly a scholar, taught in the complete German manner, but with the fine choice and discrimination of style that belongs not to the German, but to the Englishman. The feelings of the class were very different about it. Maisie, Winny, and Dora were delighted and triumphant at feeling themselves really instructed at last; indeed, Winny was the favourite scholar, and got the most of his very chary commendation, for Maisie's Scotch mind went in a different groove, and was too original to suit him so well as Winifred's more mechanical processes. Poor Miss Coles had not bargained for so much scolding or such hard work, and did not like it at all; indeed, but for Lettice's good management, she would probably have seceded. Naughty Penny, on the contrary, was greatly diverted by his horror, made more mistakes than ever, and argued in her own peculiar fashion, till he seemed half distracted to find that anyone could be so foolish.

Emma Lacy, for whose gentle prettinesses of inaccuracy he had no toleration, was one of the displeased faction. What might have been borne from a whiskered Baron, was offensive from a white weak creature like this, and her nature was

of the indolent kind, which is essentially averse to application and trouble, so the increased pressure made her more and more slack, and we were sure that she only went on because her father would not let her withdraw. Alice Parnell followed her lead, called Mr. Sneyd "that horrid man," and took no sort of pains; while good little Edith worked well, but looked strangely unhappy.

It was arranged that when the vacation time began, instead of putting all his subjects into one three hours once a-week, which was a terrible strain, each should have an hour or more if required every day, a subscription having been raised among us to make it worth his while, on the modest terms that he asked. The classes were held in turn at V. V., or at Mr. Arrowsmith's, where Miss Coles could be chaperon; and those who wished for extra lessons, as did Winifred and Maisie, could pay for them separately. Both knew some Latin and some logic, and they agreed to study them with Mr. Sneyd, and take them up as subjects in June.

Judge, then, of Winifred's horror when a fancy seized her parents to go abroad in July, because Captain Walton had an inordinate hatred of all boards and committees, and had just been made a magistrate sorely against his will!

"Just," she said, "when, for once in my life, I have a chance of really learning something."

"You learn at every pore abroad," said I, in consolation.

"It is all very well to say so," quoth Winifred; "but I know what it is. I have tried it twice, you know, and the first time I liked it, when I was just out of school, but it is nothing but mere seeing, and then, the moment one wants to get beyond the guide-book, being dragged on. My people care only for sketching and pictures, and oh! I do get so sick of galleries, and tints, and distances, and sitting about under umbrellas. Nothing is worse, except getting into a bric-a-brac shop, and hearing an endless discussion on old pitchers and bronzes—as I firmly believe, made at Birmingham."

"Ah! Winifred, you are despising opportunities many would rejoice in. Seeing is a great deal more than book learning," said my wise sister, Susan.

But poor Winifred shook her head. The major and minor premisses, and the binomial theorem, were far more to her young aspiration than Alp or Vatican.

"It is perfectly unwholesome," said Susan, when she had left us. "Girls are getting into a morbid state with all this learning. I cannot bear to see it."

Winifred had one comfort, namely, that letting the house was indispensable to this expedition, and till the tenant was found, she could continue her studies, taking each lesson with the zest and vigour that are imparted by the fear that it is a last opportunity.

On the first day of the holidays at Warchester School, a fly was seen creeping and grating down Barbe Torr Hill. I saw it drive along the Parade, but thought no more of it till my sister came in, unusually excited.

"What do you think I have seen, my dear?" said she. "A carriage at Mrs. Hales's lodgings—a wretchedly poor place, you know, only just clean, and your poor little German getting out and helping another lad on crutches—deformed, yes, miserably deformed. All the children were just come out of school, and stood staring, and I had to keep them from crowding in, or I should have gone the other way; but I do assure you it was a sad spectacle. To think of that poor washed-out rag of a youth having anything like that dependent on him! I wonder what we can do for him!"

To send him some of the strawberries with which Lettice's bounty had provided us was her readiest idea, and while I was questioning whether the gift would be an offence, Susan had packed a little

basket, and was sending them off with Miss Webster's compliments.

"Mr. Sneyd was very much obliged," was the message that came back, and at the next lesson the poor youth, blushing scarlet, managed to mumble some thanks, but in such a manner that I feared that I had been the one in the right, and that benefits were galling.

A pale, white, thin face, a curious narrow lint-white head, and a pair of big light blue eyes, might now be often seen gazing between the geraniums on the sill of the window of one of the ground-floor rooms, sometimes let to humble lodgers.

All of us were much moved, considerably curious, and ardently desirous to do something for the poor fellow, who was never seen out of doors; but any offers of books, fruit, or the loan of my wheel-chair, only put poor Mr. Sneyd in an agony of blushing refusal, so that we concluded that the unfortunate lad must be imbecile, and therefore to be kept from all view. Some gossip that floated up at the Mothers' Meeting rather tended to this view. "The poor dear young gentleman," said the woman who assisted Mrs. Hales when she had lodgers, "he were so afflicted, as it was a pity to see him—which his brother was so attentive to him, waiting

on him like any mother on her baby—which he was as helpless, a playing half the day with a lot of little images, which both of them was like, blessed innocents! and it was well as they had fallen in with them which would think it a shame to wrong anyone by a penny.”

However, at the end of a week, Penelope burst on me with, “I’ve seen him, I’ve talked to him, and he’s no more an idiot than I am. That mayn’t be saying much for him,” she further laughed; “but, any way, he’s got all his wits about him, and his little images are just chessmen!”

“But how did you get at him, my dear?”

“This way. I was coming round by the beach with my basket full of water-lilies, that I was going to bring to you, Miss Frances—and you mustn’t grudge them, for out of the window I saw those two great eyes fixed on them with such a wistful, hungry look, the next thing to tears, that I couldn’t help making Leprechaun come up to the window, and saying, “Would you like any of them?” And then to see the sparkle of his eyes, and hear his “Oh! thanks,” and watch the long thin hands hold them, and put them against his cheek, was enough to break one’s heart—I couldn’t but offer to come and settle them in water for him.”

“Where was his brother?”

"Deep in Cicero with Winnie and Maisie, so you needn't fash yourself about the proprieties. I got a soup-plate off Mrs. Hales's dresser, and put them in, and I hope they may live till to-morrow, for the poor lad seemed just to gloat over them. You should have heard him thank me. He is not shy like his brother, but has a nice voice, and oh! such a sweet face! He said he did so enjoy that window with the view of the sea—it was like life to him. He had a table by his side with a chess-board, and a book—I think it was Schlegel's *Philosophy of History*; at any rate it was something German—and some carving tools and wood. He said he was never at a loss for amusement. I did not like to ask him if he ever got out, but I am afraid he does not."

"Do you think he could go in my chair? His brother refuses it."

"I don't see why he should not. He sits up in a big arm-chair, and has a rug over him, but I am afraid he is terribly contorted; and there were a pair of crutches, so short that he plainly can't be able to stand up his proper height. Poor fellow! I shall go down and see him as often as I can. I fancy he is ten times as amenable and rational altogether as Dr. Knowall.

"Don't get into a scrape, Penny, whatever you do."

"I promise you I don't want to have my nose snapped off. I shall only pay my visits when the wise professor is chopping logic with our Gentianella and Harebell, or tutoring Mrs. Dart's holiday boys, which he has gone and undertaken by way of relaxation! So you see my flirtation will have all the charms of secrecy;" wherewith our merry good-natured Penny departed.


Just at this time, Mr. Arrowsmith's inquiries into the antecedents of our little tutor obtained a full answer. He had remembered the name of Sneyd in the *Gazette* of bankrupts, and, pursuing this clue, had learnt a sad story.

Charles and Emilius Sneyd were the sons of a man who, from being a clerk in a merchant's office, had, by a sudden success in speculation, become immensely rich, and, trusting too much to the same good fortune, had ended by dying insolvent. His wife, who had begun life as a German governess, had died at the birth of her poor little deformed son, just after the tide of prosperity had set in, and Charles had been educated chiefly in Germany, with a view to working in his father's office, which was chiefly concerned with foreign railways, so that a knowledge of languages was required. His thirst for study had prolonged his sojourn at Bonn till the latest possible period,

and he had barely taken possession of his desk when the death of his father brought on the crash, and, after months of suspense and trouble, the youth found himself utterly destitute, and with the helpless Emilius dependent upon him. The creditors had been paid fifteen shillings in the pound, and they unanimously declared the young man to have behaved most honourably.

Why had they not done something for him? it was asked. It appeared that offers of employment had been made, but such as involved separation from Emilius; and that a proposal to obtain an election for the poor boy to some asylum had so wounded the sensitive and tender feelings of his brother, that he had refused everything in a high and cold tone of offence, and the pair had been lost sight of. It was supposed, by those who were glad enough to be quit of them, that they had gone to their German relations, and no one had thought any more about them for the last half-year, until Mr. Arrowsmith's inquiries had revealed their whereabouts to his correspondents.

Charles Sneyd's desperate shyness and sensitive pride had no doubt been far from prepossessing. His father, though all called him an honourable man, had carried speculation to the pitch of gambling, and had no interest outside the money market, so



that he had made no friends. He had surrounded Emilius with every luxury and alleviation that wealth could give, giving him governesses and tutors according as he fancied them, but was unable to do more than pet and indulge him, and shrank from introducing him to any one, or giving him society, so that it was generally imagined that he was as deficient in mind as in body.

We learnt most of their subsequent history from Emilius himself; for when Susan heard of Penelope's visit, she declared that she should go with her next time. If Mrs. Ryan chose to let her daughter run about alone to all sorts of places, she (Susan) did not think it proper, and we were accountable for having introduced her. Besides, that unfortunate cripple was not to be mewed up there and neglected because his brother chose to be absurdly proud. So Susan watched for Penny, and trotted down with her to Mrs. Hales's lodgings. She came back, to the full as much moved as Penny, and as much delighted with the attractive countenance and manner of poor Emilius; and the passionate devotion of the brothers.

Emilius had none of his brother's reticence. As we learnt, his character and mind had been formed by a kind old motherly governess, who had made him truly conscientious, and helped him to be

religiously cheerful. The seclusion in which he lived had been far more owing to the feelings of his father and brother, and to those they attributed to him, than to any dread of his own of meeting people's eyes, for his small experience had been all of tenderness, and he had a deep confidence in kindness, especially of women.

So he expanded gratefully to Susan as well as to Penelope, and talked enthusiastically of Charles's bravery and kindness. Charles's vacations had always been the sunny days of his life in their prosperous time, and since they had been left alone together, Charles's personal care and tenderness had supplied all that had been lost of the attendance of a household.

The elder brother had answered an advertisement for a tutor at the school at Warchester, using his Bonn certificates as recommendations, and had brought his brother into a lodging there, in two rooms, where they had lived as best they might upon his scanty earnings—so scanty, that it had been worth while for him to walk the ten miles and back, once a-week, for the sake of the poor guinea from the Blue-bells.

Would they have done better in Germany? Emilius said Charles thought not. Living might be cheaper, but employment was more restricted,

and teaching less well paid; and they had no kindred left there willing to be charged with them. "Indeed, Charles *could* not go among them in such changed circumstances," said Emilius. "He would not like it."

There was no doubt a great deal that was heroic about Charles Sneyd, but he was not half so pleasant as his brother. He was all over prickly pride, and pride requires something to carry it off properly, and did not show off becomingly in a small washed-out man, looking five years younger than he really was, and constitutionally bashful to excess. He did try to show some gratitude for his brother's evident pleasure; but I think he had really, secretly, much rather have been let alone, and was annoyed that Emilius should enjoy these attentions, instead of sharing his shuddering distaste. However, he was better after one day, when Susan fell upon him and gave him as thorough a scolding as ever he gave Emma for her ill-compacted sentences. He had been refusing the loan of the chair, and declaring that indeed his brother could not go out—it was quite impossible.

But Susan, who had seen enough of Emilius to know his mind, came out in force. "That's all nonsense, Mr. Sneyd—you know it is! You know your brother would enjoy the air and the change,

and that he is perfectly capable of going out, and that you are only keeping him cooped up there to gratify your own sinful pride."

She had made her worm turn at last, and he exclaimed, "No, no—not that, Miss Webster. I would—nay, I do, sacrifice my pride constantly to my brother's pleasures; but you do not consider, nor does he, the difference between private gardens and this public parade."

"I tell you he has no such feeling. He is too simple and confiding, and I tell you, Mr. Sneyd, you ought to thank God on your knees for having made him free from your own self-conscious sensibility, and abstain most carefully from infusing it. I don't say that he should go out just as the children, little scamps that they are, are loose from school; but a turn about eleven o'clock, when not a creature is out but a few maids with perambulators, could not lead to anything that would be annoying."

"Well done, Susan!" I could not help saying, when he had yielded and fled.

"I've no patience with him," she said.

However, it was much to his credit that not only did he consent to his brother's frequent use of the chair, but from that time forward he treated Susan like a kind of aunt or mother, consulting her about

Emilius's health and comfort, and talking to her as he did to no one else. She was so much flattered as to grow exceedingly fond of both brothers. She took me to see Emilius, and even brought him up to drink tea with us and spend an evening, and very happy he was. They were both good lads, though Charles would only submit to a black coat while actually in church, and lounged about on Sunday in disreputable grey ; but there was a wonderful charm about poor little Emilius, while it was not easy to like Charles as much as one esteemed him. When he talked at all, it was like a book, and he was altogether more like a library incarnate than a living man.

He was much like, as Dora Morland observed, a masculine Winifred, and the two got on so well together, and had such long and learned discussions, and such an interchange of thin shabby German books on his side, and thick English ones on hers, that I wondered what would have happened if he had come into these parts as Charles Sneyd the wealthy, instead of the penniless.

Indeed, as it was, I marvelled a little at the heedlessness of Captain and Mrs. Walton, when I found that, on a rumour of a tenant, they were willing to leave Winifred to stay with a succession of friends till her course should be completed, and

the examination over. I hinted my doubt to my sister, but I was snubbed. "I won't have such folly talked of, Frances. Charles Sneyd has far too much good sense and honour."

It was hard, for I never said there was any danger now. It was only a case of *ifs* and *ans*; but it illustrated that, even between us two, the most innocent of the other sex could not help being a "disturbing element."

Susan was the first to claim a visit from "that poor neglected girl," and Mrs. Walton gratefully accepted it for her. "I am very glad that Winifred should follow out her own line," she said. "We shall never give the child any real feeling for beauty. Hers is one of those minds that have that realistic, scientific, ungraceful turn, which is essentially out of sympathy with her father's. She would rather botanise on a rose than admire its charm! But it is no use to try to force nature; only her father must not be sacrificed. One barely *exists* here—one *lives* in Italy."

I was not at all sure that, if the sympathy had been really sought, Winifred would not have given it with all her might, and that, if the admiration of the rose had seemed to her a more true and spontaneous thing, and, above all, if her participation in it had been really sought out of love

and affection, she would not have given it with all her heart.

At least the granting of her wish so easily had mortified her, unreasonable though it might be. "Oh yes," she said. "I am very welcome to stay at home, like the cat and the pony."

"My dear, if you wish it, I am sure——" I began hesitatingly, and I was cut short.

"No, I don't wish it. It would be rather worse abroad, with nothing to do but drag about *en tiers*."

Presently she softened a little, and looked up with moistened eyes. "I seem very ungrateful. I really am thankful to stay with you, dear Miss Frances. I think you can tolerate me more than most people can."

I ventured to ask whether she could not throw herself a little into these tastes of her parents. "I wish I had tried more when first I came home from school," she said; "but I am quite sure to like the wrong thing; and lately, when I do make any little attempt, I am told, 'My dear Winny, you are far too material. Your turn is for physical science. You can't appreciate this.' You see they are sufficient for each other, and don't want to train me, even if I *could* be trained into caring, and not pretending. And yet, they little know how much I care for them, though I can't care for a

trumpery old sham pre-Raffaelite or a bit of Dutch crockery."

It was an unusual burst for Winifred, and she was probably sorry for it when the hoped-for tenant failed, and the journey was put off; for she was more brief, dry, and mechanical than ever.





CHAPTER V.

GEOLOGICAL RESEARCHES.

SOME more certain and profitable occupation for Charles Sneyd, than acting as preceptor to the Blue-bells, needed to be found. Mr. Arrow-smith and Mr. Ryan were both in search of employment for him. In the meantime, Mr. Morland proposed to try his powers as a lecturer in the parish reading-room. Shy as he was, he did not seem to object to the idea, for, as Emilius told us, if he shut his eyes and once started, he could always go on. What should be the subject? He wrote out a list for Mr. Morland to choose from. They were—

“The Relative Balance of the Intellectual Powers.”

“Goëthe and Shakspeare compared.”

“Geology in its Primary Elements.”

"Frauenhoffer's Lines."

Mr. Morland did not think even the senior pupil teachers likely to enter much into the Relative Balance of the Intellectual Powers, or even into Goëthe and Shakspeare. He shook his head at Frauenhoffer's Lines, though Penny averred that "you might see them in any sunbeam," and Wini-fred "that they were as simple and interesting as the day."

Geology, he said, might serve the purpose, but he stipulated that the lecturer must steer clear of all perilous controversies, and he suggested that specimens collected from the somewhat rich mineralogy of the district would interest and edify the population. Thereupon began a zealous collecting. Penny set on her miners, of whom a selection were to attend the lecture, and Susan, in her zeal, actually started off on an expedition to which politeness urged her in general only once a-year, to call upon the clergyman's wife in the next bay, her chief inducement being to borrow a geological map of the district, which she had seen in the Parsonage hall. For a misgiving was growing on us, though it would have been high treason in me to utter it, that Mr. Sneyd knew the strata much better in the map than in real life, and without its assistance would not have known whether the

cliffs before his eyes were limestone or sandstone, chalk or cheese.

Susan toiled back at last, very hot and tired, with the map rolled up under her arm, for on "safe bind safe find" principles she had declined all offers of sending it by possible fishwomen. She said as the tide was out she had come home round the point, preferring the shingle to climbing the hill on its worst side, but fatigue hardly accounted for her discomposure, the cause of which she did not impart to me till we were settled after our evening meal, and Rebekah's ministrations were over. And then she began—

"I've found out what's the matter with your Blue-bell, Frances."

"Which?"

"That Lacy girl. I never thought she would come to much good."

"But what's the matter? I know she has not worked so well lately, but I thought it was only that we are feeling the difference between play and earnest."

Then Susan narrated how in a little cove on her progress she had heard a giggling, and expecting to come on some maid-servants or dressmakers' apprentices out for a holiday with their young men, she had beheld, sitting in a little boat that

was moored to the shore and rocking with the water, two pairs of young people. In the girls, she recognised Emma Lacy and her friend Alice Parnell; in the young men, the sons of a "gentleman farmer," whose farm stretched from the moorland to the coast. I could hardly believe it, for the elder one, Philip Harcombe, was a regular ne'er-do-well, always at the low varieties of sports that Warchester afforded. He had been tried at various professions, but had always been returned on his father's hands, bringing home a little external polish, but, as was feared, a good deal of knowledge of the world of the wrong sort.

"I could not be mistaken," said Susan; "I knew his black moustache and long whiskers. He's exactly the sort of looking man to captivate a silly girl like that Emma. I believe Mrs. Parnell is a sort of cousin of the Harcombes, too. Mind you, I don't think Alice Parnell was flirting on her own account. Her companion was only one of the younger boys. I think she only comes as confidant."

"And depend upon it," I answered, "that good little Edith has refused to have anything to do with it, and does not know how to stop it, or whether to speak, and that is the reason she looks so worried and unhappy."

The next thing was to consider what was to be done. Susan was sure that she had been seen, and therefore it seemed best to speak to the girl, and to find out how far it had gone, affording her the possibility of the grace of even involuntary confession, rather than at once letting her parents know. How was it to be done? was the question. "For," said Susan, "you may be sure that in her present state of mind she looks upon us as nothing but a pair of old cats, to whom all lovers are necessary hateful."

"Disturbing elements," I said. "Yes, she would regard you as a sort of Queen Bess, and me as a governess, both equally beyond the pale of humanity. We had better ask Lettice to speak to her. I think she has more influence with her than anyone else."

Poor dear Lettice! She did not like the mission at all, but she undertook it at last. She was at first relieved to find Philip Harcombe was connected with the editor of a Warchester paper. He had contributed to it himself, and had promised to introduce some of Emma's poetry to it. But Emma herself was too much delighted with the fact of having a lover not to volunteer that poetry had not been all that occupied them. That cove had been the trysting-place for the last six weeks,

and Emma thought herself a model of discretion for always bringing Alice. Philip Harcombe was a hero of romance in her eyes—*i.e.*, of that modern type of romance which makes dissipation a part of manliness, and has turned muscularity into coarseness. Emma, however, believed herself to be influencing him for good. He had called her his good angel, talked of what he could be if she was always at his side, and told her—perhaps in full sincerity—that when with her he longed to rise to her level of innocence and purity—but no, that was possible for women, not for men.

The poor girl declared, with tears, that if Miss Webster thought proper to interfere and bring her father down upon them, the ruin of Philip, body and soul, would be on her head. Lettice had been in great difficulties how to answer, but she had stuck to her point, that what was underhand and disobedient could not prosper, and that she was lowering instead of raising Mr. Harcombe's ideal by stooping to act a deceit for his sake. Emma had of course the rooted idea that secrecy was a charm, and that love ought to be conducted like the changes of the moon; but when Lettice told her that the Miss Websters' mind was ruthlessly made up, and they would certainly tell Dr. and Mrs. Lacy if Emma did not do so herself, she cried a great deal, but

allowed that it would be better if she told her own story, and finally promised that she would make her confession to her mother, and have it out with her, if only Miss Webster would not speak to her father.

“Humph,” said Susan, but she was obliged to abide by the decision of her plenipotentiary.

We had not long parted with Lettice before there was a laughing scuffle, and Penny, with the peculiar rippling accompaniment of laughter that would have put anyone else out of breath, dragged in Winifred, solemn, rigid, blushing, and confused, but with a bigger book in her arms than she could well carry.

“Oh! oh! what do you think our *Gentianella* has been taken for?” was Penny’s cry. “Oh! I shall die of it! What a pity I was there, so that it won’t go down to generations hence as a proof of the march of intellect. The literary housemaid! Oh dear!”

With all her good-nature, Penelope did not always know when to stop, and seeing that Winifred was evidently annoyed, we tried to check her, and get a rational account of the adventure.

“All in character with the housemaid,” still laughed Penny.

“It was very wrong of Penny not to have given me warning,” said she, gravely.

"Housemaid's language! There! And how could I, when I'd none myself?" said Penny. "He came like greased lightning on the wings of his telegram, which we rescued half-an-hour after from being drowned in the reservoir."

"Who came?"

"Why, the true Prince—Stephen St. Barbe himself. Yes, I assure you, in *propria quæ maribus*—no, I mean *propria personâ*—he walked up to our door a couple of hours ago, just as mother and I were nailing up the roses. Luckily, mother knew him by his likeness to all his belongings, for he is altered to the last degree since he was a little boy in knickerbockers, has got an immense yellow beard, and is as brown as a berry. Well, we sent for father, and regaled him with luncheon, and heard how the friend he had been going with to the moors was hindered by the trifle of losing his mother, so that he bethought him that, while waiting for him, he might as well run down and take a squint at the old place. He had telegraphed, he declared, and by the same token, when we set out to walk down to the House, as we were coming along the bank of the reservoir——"

"Is the reservoir the new Irish way to the House?"

"No, but Stephen was not to have or to hold but

he must go to see the reservoir, to see if the place in the embankment was there where he and Johnnie and I were caught making a cavern, as part of the furniture of our desert island. I believe, if we had not been discovered in time, of our bones would, long ere this, coral have been made. At any-rate, I then had my first and only taste of a whipping, and Johnnie and Steffie were both sent off to school as perilous to society at large, nor had we met since. Well, as we indulged in reminiscences, I undertook to show him the stones which had built up our hole. As we went, we heard a wail, and discovered a small black cap bound with red floating on the vast inland sea——”

“My dear Penny, the boy——”

“The boy had been incapable of withstanding the delights of making ducks and drakes on such a surface as that. So engaged, some of the miners’ boys on the way to school had caught him, and on the ‘eave arf a brick at un’ principle, had come behind him, twitched off his cap, and shied it into the water. A telegram without a cap could not be delivered you know, and, besides, the stream carried it so enticingly near the bank that the deluded victim hoped to recover it, as of course Stephen did immediately with his stick. No sooner was it on his head again—wet as it was—than with

repaired brass (I beg the company's pardon for my lapse ; I've been keeping bad company, you see) the youth presents his orange-coloured envelope to my father and demands his fee, as fearlessly as did Davie Mailsetter. So, having had adventure the first, we proceed to the home of Stephen's forefathers, through the overgrown gardens, grass-grown courts, &c., which, by-the-bye, took his fancy greatly. We enter the hall, echoing to our tread, peep into the darkened chambers, Stephen immensely impressed, papa studying disconsolately the increased inroads of dry rot. He was making me assist in poking out the extent of it, when Stephen, who had grown tired of that department of the subject, and wandered off to look into the rooms, came suddenly back, exclaiming in a low voice, 'I say, there's a literary housemaid in the library, and such a pretty one !' Rushing in then and there, I perceived Winny elegantly poised on the library steps, with an enormous atlas before her. I say, Winny, were you altogether wrapped in the book, the book, the mighty book, all the time he was wandering about the room ?"

"No, but I thought he was the man that winds up the clocks, and that he wasn't bound to see me."

"Oh ! oh ! oh !" cried Penny, going off into fits

again. "Fancy anyone winding up the old clock that has been dead these fifteen years!"

"I didn't think of that. And he looked just like the man that does ours."

"Now you are quits," cried Penny. "Just like Joseph's foreman! I must tell him!"

"I beg you will do no such thing," said Winifred, seriously.

"Ah! you didn't add a note of admiration as he did! You should say he was the most courteous of clock-winders. It was very ungrateful of you, for he not only laid all his books metaphorically at your feet, but actually lugged down this huge one to this very door for you."

"Yes," said Winifred, "he was very kind, and when he offered to lend me Johnstone's Physical Atlas, I thought I had better bring it here than take it home, because Mr. Sneyd can consult it here, and I know he wanted to make out the formation of this part of the coast. I was trying to do it for him."

I could not help glancing mischievously at Susan. There was something very droll in the two ladies starting in opposite directions, both for geological maps for the young lecturer; but Susan pretended to be quite unconscious, and observed in an unconcerned way, "So Mr. St. Barbe is

come home! I suppose it is only for a day or two."

"So he said. He only came to wait till his moor is ready for him, but I fancy he cares a good deal for the old place now that he has seen it. He has never set eyes on it, you know, since he was sent to school. His mother went away and died the year after, and I think he dreaded coming home. You can't think how nice he was, and how things seemed to strike him as they never had done before. Hurrah for Steffie! I say. I expect he will stay and rebuild the house, and be a jolly blessing to the place, as he was meant to be."

I made a foolish little attempt at admonition by suggesting that, if such were the case, it would be perhaps as well to drop the habit of calling Mr. St. Barbe "Steffie," but I underwent the usual fate of the remonstrant on such occasions—I was hugged, and called a dear old thing of the last generation.

So—as if all the rest had not been enough—here was another stone dropped into our once quiet waters. Yes, no other than the Prince of Poppleton himself!

Nor were we surprised, after the character we had heard of his sudden and vehement impulses, that after walking about his estate with Mr. Ryan and Penelope all the next morning, and seeing so

much game crying out to be killed, his boyish affection for the old place revived.

Penny came in tumultuously just before luncheon. "You'll give me some food, please, dear Miss Webster, to be ready for the class. Papa has taken Stephen St. Barbe to the Waltons, and we thought three of us would be too much for Mrs. Walton's equanimity—and her small cutlets. We wanted to show him that we can really boast of a male person—a gentleman at large. For, do you know, he told me at night that he was quite undeceived. He had always set down Poppleton as a horrid stupid little hole, as dull as ditch water, with nothing in it but women and skates' tails and big pebbles."

"I should not say he was so far wrong," I answered. "Has anything happened to make him alter his opinion?"

"That's what I can't anyhow see," said Penny, gravely. "You haven't a hat hanging up in your hall to deceive the housebreakers as they did at Cranford, have you? No, the fact of the matter is, it is home, you know—his home; and though he has galloped all the world over from sheer fear of facing it again, all alone as he is, poor fellow, now he has come, the spell of it is upon him. He would be made of worse than granite, or fel-

spar, or gneiss, or whatever is hardest, if he could withstand the welcome everyone gives him. He says he can't think, now he sees it again, how he ever came to stay away so long. And he is going to send for an architect on the spot, to build up the old house just as it ought to be."

Penny's tongue rattled on all luncheon-time, and then she declared she should come to utter grief if we didn't let her have ten minutes to herself to finish the translation she took, all crumpled, out of her blue serge pocket.

She sat down, but for one word she wrote she chattered twenty, and she could hardly have done more than scribble a sentence when up she bounded, "There he is, I declare! Why, Stephen! Yes, with papa and Winifred!"

So they were! We were gratified by the call, for we had liked and pitied the young man's gentle widowed mother, and had known him as a merry young pickle. A fine-looking bronzed man he was, big and powerful, with locks of a curious variety of shades, a brown neck, reddish beard, and quick, keen blue eyes—and he was courtesy itself, carrying all Winifred's store of books."

They had come, it proved—to our great delight—to ask the address of an architect, whom Mr. Ryan

had mentioned at second hand, from our brother's mention of his abilities.

"I'm to be your neighbour, too, Miss Webster," he said. "Captain Walton is good enough to let me rent his house while my own is in the builder's hands."

"Does he! Oh, what fun!" cried Penny. "Then you come and live among the Blue-bells."

"Come, get up, Penny," said her father, "and don't talk nonsense. Give me your pen. I dare say Miss Webster will allow me to write here, and save the post, as we are going round by Harcombe's farm, and shall not be at home till too late."

"But don't you want to write for the post too, Penny?" asked Mr. St. Barbe, as she made way.

"Far from it," she laughed, holding up her German book.

"Doing impositions—eh? Going to school still?"

"You'd better take care! We're all in classes here. Miss Frances and Winny will put you to school too. It's a dangerous place to live in."

"Are you much alarmed?" somebody asked—Susan, I think.

"Not much. Learning would never stick upon me."

"Like a duck's back," said Penelope, who seemed intent on showing off her wild beast. "Now, Stephen, tell me true. Exclusive of 'Bradshaw,' what was the last book you opened, and when?"

"Oh! I never open 'Bradshaw.' I let the railway fellows do all that for me."

"Then what was the last book?"

"Let me see—'Leech's Caricatures,' I think. And when? When I was waiting at the dentist's."

"So you have a few human weaknesses, after all! Your teeth are like other people's."

"If you must know the truth, some brutes of niggers stoned us at the N'yanza, and I got a tooth broken."

Then enquiries elicited that the stoning had been incurred, with, indeed, far worse perils, in rescuing a missionary party in danger of their lives, but whom the little hunting party had brought off successfully. When we read it in the missionary's own narrative some time after, we found that Mr. St. Barbe had been a far greater hero than he had implied in the brief, rather facetious description that Penelope obtained from him, and which at the time shocked me a little by terms applied both to negroes and missionaries—but perhaps that was our want of comprehension of the language of the

period, for Penny looked exultant, as if she had done it all herself, and Winny's eyes shone, bedewed with moisture, as one who had found something real at last.

They lingered on and talked, till Mr. St. Barbe gave a great start, exclaiming—

“Hullo! here are a dozen more ladies coming up to the house! Is there any way out here? Excuse me. Good morning.”

And he fairly fled into the garden's deepest recesses, put to flight by the dozen ladies as he certainly would not have been by a lion, and leaving us laughing almost as much as his cousin Penelope.





CHAPTER VI.

GAFFER'S HOLE.

MR. SNEYD was duly grateful for the maps, and studied them intently, nearly sweeping them with his eyelashes. The "disturbing element" had not yet made as much difference as might have been expected. It was true that Penny's written performances were more wonderful than ever, both in what they said and what they omitted, and that Winifred was a good deal taken up in helping her parents put away their objects of "virtue and bigotry," by special desire of their incoming tenant, who declared that he should be among them as a bear in a china shop. This did not last long; the Waltons were soon ready, and Winny was handed over to a succession of friends, among whom we came first.

However, our zeal was unabated, and the outcome of it was, that the lecturer must, before his lecture, see the curious rocks high up in the ravine of the Boldre, and most especially Gaffer's Hole, a cavern of stalactites above and stalagmites below, which Penelope and her brothers had explored once in the prosperous days of the St. Barbe estate, when it was lighted up for a party at the house, and which she had ever since believed to be the rival of the Peak caves, if not of those of Policandro.

A picnic should be had, the miners should be employed to light up the cavern, and there should be no end of fun. Mr. St. Barbe, in spite of his dismay at the sight of the Blue-bell inroad, obeyed the spur of his cousin, placed his park and cavern at her service, and only stipulated that he should neither be obliged to give or to hear the lecture on Gaffer's Hole.

"Unless you are going to give it," he said, turning to her and Winifred as they stood together.

Winifred gravely said "Oh no," and Penny, "Wouldn't you like to hear it? This cavern, ladies and gentlemen, was hollowed out by the action of antediluvian—I mean submarine—rivers dripping

with limestone, and of such wonderful ingenuousness—no, ingenuity, which is it?—that they have constructed statues of Gaffer himself—supposed to be the forefather of all the St. Barbes—as well as of all the remarkable preachers, statesmen, poets, including Homer, Venus, Nebuchadnezzar, and Gladstone, &c., just like a new underground Madame Tussaud.”

“Well, really, I did see such a likeness of the old Duke of Wellington as fairly made me start,” said Mr. St. Barbe. “Oh no, not in this place. It was in the Rocky Mountains—a place where we sheltered for the night when we had lost our way.”

He went on, the eager eyes of the two girls drawing out his description, almost at unawares to himself, of one of those majestic caverns, scarce yet explored, where the most wonderful freaks of nature in the form of statuary occur. Finally, Winifred, with a long breath, said, “Thank you,” and Penelope laughed and said, “Never say you can’t lecture again.”

He looked greatly discomfited, and entreated, “Now, Penny, there’s a good girl, you won’t say anything about it.”

Apparently he, like her other friends, had found

out what it was to put himself in the power of Penny, who was almost as trying sometimes as Dora, not from irony, but from her inconsiderate love of fun, and she went on teasing him now. For the interview took place in our garden. He was leaning over the low wall that separated it from Captain Walton's domain, of which he had just taken possession, while Penny and Winifred were standing by the garden chair where I sat under the shade of the pear-tree. It was very odd, considering his distaste to ladies, that the sound of voices in our garden always brought Mr. St. Barbe to reconnoitre. I could hear him rustling in the laurels, and smell his tobacco, even if—with his pipe pocketed—he did not make himself visible, with his elbows on the wall.

He never did so when our companion was either Maisie Carstairs or Dora Morland, not often even when it was Lettice. This we thought somewhat bad taste in him, but we could not help being rather glad, for there was a certain castle deep down in our hearts that we never mentioned to one another save in our most confidential moments.

For we were like all single ladies of a certain age, in that the hero of our souls was our nephew. Our

nephew *par excellence*—for we had plenty more, only they were less interesting—was our clerical brother's eldest son, Edward Webster, a civil engineer, now about twenty-eight years old. Of course I need not say that we deemed him one of the ablest, best, and dearest fellows in the world, for was he not the only one of them all whom we had known intimately during the first five years of his life? had he not performed two quarantines with us in his school days, and voluntarily made us flying visits whenever business brought him anywhere into what he called our neighbourhood? Nay! I shudder to think of it, he had once driven the express train at extra speed down to Warchester to be able to surprise his aunt Susan on her birthday at dinner. Of course he had a permit from the managers, but we thought Miss Dove, who happened to be in the train, would have died afterwards of fright at the perils she had unwittingly run.

Latterly we have fancied ourselves not the only attraction. We are sure that Edward and Lettice are pleased to meet, and though not a word has ever been breathed, we think that the dear fellow was only waiting till he shall have realised enough to offer her, and till she is a little more free of

home claims, to make his affection more evident. Thus, all things considered, we did not regret that her fresh cheeks, sensible face, and ready, alert manner did not seem to attract Mr. St. Barbe, though he was always ready to fight sharp battles with Penelope, or to answer Winifred's enquiries about the places she had read of, and he had seen; or to look out the books she wanted, either in his own house or in hers.

Still, when Mr. St. Barbe was being invited to dinner parties all round the neighbourhood, and Mr. Arrowsmith in especial had ordered Lettice to have all the *grande*s within reach to meet him, and everything *en grande tenue*, and when the picnic scheme was acquiring more brilliant proportions every day, we more than once wished for Edward to take care of his own interests; but he was hard at work superintending the throwing a suspension bridge across a Scottish firth, and we had not seen him for more than a year.

Behold, however, a letter from my brother, whose present incumbency is in a great manufacturing town, telling us not to be alarmed—Edward had been hurt by a splinter of stone which had flown into one eye, and had had to be kept in the

dark for a week! His sight was now adjudged to be safe, provided he would give both it and his whole self complete rest, relaxation, sea air, and bathing for the next six weeks, and abstain from touching pen, pencil, or compasses. Of course he was coming straight down to his aunts' the very next day, and fortunately we could easily make room for him without turning Winifred out. We were glad he was coming when so much was going on to amuse him, and, privately, I was glad it was the day of the Arrowsmiths' dinner-party, to which Susan was chaperoning Winifred, so that I should have him all to myself the first few hours. He was to join them in the evening if he was well enough, and off they went, Susan grumbling a little in her state grey satin, and Winifred looking better than her best, her bonnie brown hair tied with a bunch of blue ribbons. He walked into the house, with shaded eyes, about half-an-hour later; he seemed far too tired to think of it. He looked ill and jaded, allowed that he had a headache with travelling in the heat and dust, and did not feel up to the lights and chatter. "Besides," he said, "one wouldn't have a chance of a word with anyone in the crush."

So I had him all to myself, and found out that he had been thwarted, overworked, and worried, and that all this had conspired to make a slight disaster tell seriously upon him. He let out as much in his cheerful, uncomplaining way, showing how exceedingly he enjoyed the perfect calm of the gentle rush and ripple of the ebbing tide and the soft summer breeze, after the clash, and jar, and screech, and scream, and rattle around his home.

When he had enjoyed his duck and green peas, his shrimps and cream cheese, and, above all, the pie and the grapes that Lettice had sent down (hypocritical maiden) as my share of the feast, and when he had heard all my news, and told all his own, leaning back in the basket-chair in the window, with the tabby-cat purring on his breast, and the lamp shaded, so that his eyes could be set free, he looked more like his dear old self, though he had much more hair in his brown beard than on his head, which was too bald for his years; and when the church clock struck ten, he rose up and said that he thought he would go and see "Auntie Sue" home from Brackenridge.

I waited, writing a report of him to his father and mother, till the party should come home, peeping

out now and then at the shimmering moonlight-path over the sea, seen between the dark projecting shoulder of Barbe Torr on one side, and the lights of Poppleton clustering like glow-worms on Ben Boldre, listening for them, often hearing only the lap of the tide, the carriages rolling away, but soon catching now and then the far-away call of some fisherman putting out his boat for a night's work, I did not wonder they had tarried, when I saw them at last, Susan all silvery in her greys and whites hanging in perfect content on her boy's arm, and just behind, our big and bearded neighbour exchanging good-nights with Winifred, who came into the light with the hood of her cloak over her head. It is wonderful how becoming those hoods are to some people. Winny's usually formal and sedate little visage was quite beautified now that it both softened and sparkled, and she had a lovely colour as she apologised for having kept Miss Webster waiting, but the moonlight was so lovely over the bridge, and Mr. St. Barbe had been telling her about the expedition to the Pacific for observing the great eclipse.

No, neither of the others had perceived that she had kept them waiting. They had been the last

to depart, and after Lettice had wrapped them up, she had come out to the door with them, and refreshed herself, after the hot evening's task of playing hostess, by accompanying them down to the gate of the drive. Thus, when Susan and I found ourselves alone, we did not at all agree as to our nephew's looking worn and depressed.

The details of the picnic at Gaffer's Hole had been discussed and ratified, all the better, Susan said, because it was a sort of select committee, none of the other Blue-bells being at the party but Dora, and Maisie who came in the evening.

Mr. Arrowsmith had not allowed Lettice to have her to dinner, because Miss Dove would have been furious if she had not gone in to dinner with Mr. St. Barbe, next after Lady Elizabeth, the Member's wife, and that would have been a dire offence to two portly married ladies of baronet blood.

Mrs. Morland, Susan, and the four Bells had discussed the matter. Mr. St. Barbe had wished to make it altogether his party, and let it serve as an entertainment to all his neighbours, but this was not to be thought of. We did not want the neighbourhood, and we did want those Blue-bells who were of too humble a growth for him to have yet

discovered. "Besides," said my sister, "if it were his party, I do not believe that Mr. Sneyd would be got to it."

"That would be very foolish."

"I don't say it is wise, but one must feel for a man who was brought up to be as wealthy as any of them, and now feels himself in what people look upon as an inferior position. He had learned to like us, and be happy with us before Mr. St. Barbe came; and now, poor fellow, it has put him all wrong again, and he is more depressed than ever. Emilius was telling me this afternoon that it is lucky he is bound to deliver this lecture, for getting it up is the only thing he seems to heed when he is at home, poor fellow."

Something I said of jealousy made Susan fire up on behalf of her protégé. It could not be anything so foolish or unworthy, but assuredly there was something trying to a young man of so much cultivation in seeing everybody running after a mere big hunter of beasts, without three ideas in his head.

I said that was hardly true of our neighbour. He might be no reader, but he was a thorough observer and thinker too. "Oh no." Susan said that she

was only repeating what poor young Sneyd called him, "and no wonder."

No wonder perhaps that the first and sole male specimen did not like the second. How would he get on with the third?

The picnic was to be on the ensuing Thursday. This was Tuesday. Susan herself had made up her mind to go, feeling the charge of Winifred, not to say of Mr. Sneyd, and likewise being far more enterprising now she had Edward. Besides, Mrs. Morland had begged for her assistance, no one being sure of what Penelope might do in her present state of excitement. Miss Dove had declined for herself and niece, though Maisie was quite independent enough to have her own way if she chose. Mrs. Parnell never went anywhere, but her daughters were sure cards, and indeed there would be a numerous young fry, between the other members of the Arrowsmith, Morland, Ryan, and Lacy families, and the Darts and Rowans, our holiday visitors.

Of course the Lacys had to be asked, though Emma scarcely deserved it in our eyes, for we were nearly certain that she had not fulfilled her promise of confession to her mother, and there was

a poem in the corner of the Warchester weekly paper on the subject of crabbed age misunderstanding lively youth, and forcing on its code of conventionalities.

Oh, let the wild rose freely stray,
Wave to the winds each fragrant spray,
Her tendrils twist around.
Far better so than tortured back,
Stretched, tied like martyr on the rack,
By gardeners pruned and bound.
Age cannot legislate for youth;
Its tender mercies are, in truth,
Mistaken e'en when fond.
Only the sympathetic eye,
Should venture into hearts to pry,
Or to impose a bond.

Even without the signature, "Forget-me-not," the remarkable fact of wild roses having tendrils would have betrayed the authorship. Emma had missed one meeting at the Blue-bells, and in the next, when we had to compare our drawing of maps, had provoked Dora to tell her that she evidently thought all outlines of countries "only conventional signs."

They could not but invite her with the others of the family, and, as we had feared, her mother

sent the younger ones under her care, which meant under nobody's.

Penelope, who did nothing all the next day but ride backwards and forwards in the wildest state of excitement, making and unmaking arrangements, came rushing up to assure Susan that Emilius had set his heart on going to the ravine, and would be awfully—*most awfully*—disappointed if he did not; and she could manage it as easily as possible, by harnessing Leprechaun to my wheeled chair; he never kicked, the darling, he didn't; Miss Frances' chair would go anywhere, and *where it wouldn't*, what were arms like Steffie's fit for, but to carry him across a difficult bit?

The consequence was that my sister—far from convinced either of the capabilities of the chair, or the other trifles Penny made so sure of—set forth to ascertain whether Emilius was really so ardently set on going, and whether it could be made feasible.

They found him sitting, as he had become wont to do, in one of the boats, whose kind owner used to lift him into it every fine day, and where he spent hours under a red German umbrella. Either there, or under Mrs. Hales's small verandah, he had become quite an institution; no one dreamt of molesting

him, but many halted to talk to him, and even the children used to run up and bring him scraps of sea-weed, or bits of brick ground into pebble shape by the waves. He was far happier than in the Warchester lodging, where he knew no one and never went out ; and his brother was thinking of keeping him here, at least till winter, and himself walking backwards and forwards to Warchester, when the holidays were over.

When he saw his friends coming, he caused the friendly sailor to lift him back to the beach, and struggle up the shingle. Poor little fellow, he was about fifteen, but his head was no higher than that of a child of twelve, and his malformed legs were quite useless, so that he moved entirely by his crutches, not with pain, but with great effort. His brother had already shown him how impossible it was for him to share the expedition, but vehement Penny had swept along his wishes with her, and he confessed that, kind as it was of her, he wished it had not been put into his head. Indeed he begged that no more might be said. It had been a foolish, unreasonable wish, and Charles had been vexed at his entertaining the notion for a moment.

The end of it was, that Susan invited him up to



spend the day with me, and went in to force out consent from Charles, who had lapsed into his most dreary and defiant mood, and declared that he had no notion of joining the party. It might once have been thought of on his account, but it had changed its character, and he was not going to intrude on ladies' and gentlemen's pleasures. He should return to Warchester. That was the best place for them both.


Susan gave him a good scolding, such as always braced him, and extracted a reluctant promise that he would not fail to bring his brother.

The weather had been taken at such short notice that it had not time to break; and in the midst of the loading of the donkey, whose panniers were to carry Susan's pâtées and cakes, in lieu of their usual load of fish, Charles, with a dolorous face, pushed up Emilius in my big perambulator. Mr. St. Barbe was showing how they loaded donkeys in South America, and I am not sure that Charles would not have taken flight again, if Edward, who had promised to do his best for him, had not proposed to him to walk forward and have a smoke up the valley, while Winifred drove my sister in the Walton pony-chair, as far as it could go. Strict

economy kept the poor youth short of that vital atmosphere, tobacco, and perhaps half his prime discontent might be due to his deprivation of what his German breeding made second nature. At any rate, he walked off so placidly, that for once we were grateful to Edward's smoking propensities.

I had been ordered not to make Emil a burden to me, but give him books and prints, and let him amuse himself. I obeyed this order for the first hour or two, by way of setting him more at his ease, and then, after luncheon, I took him into the garden.

Poor little fellow, how happy he was on the turf among the verbenas! He sunned himself, and admired, and talked of Charles, his one hero; telling stories of his Bonn life with much zest, and consulting me whether there was any kind of work he could do, copying, carving, or translating, which would lighten the burden on his brother's shoulders. Indeed, he was copying a translation of Charles's into German. I promised to ask my nephew, which delighted him greatly. I found, too, that he had a burning desire to hear Charles's lecture, and, though I dared not excite his hopes, I resolved to see if it could be managed.



By-and-by Maisie Carstairs came in. She said it did not seem worth while to distress Aunt Maria by going to the picnic. She knew the Glen perfectly well, and walked there, whenever she wearied for a shadow of Scotland. The real cause of Miss Dove's refusal was—as we all knew—because she thought it beneath the Honourable niece's dignity to join a party got up for a poor tutor, and including the daughters of a deceased officer in the Coast Guard.

"Poor Aunt Maria," said Maisie, "it is not worth while to cross her about little things, when I have to go against her in great ones!"

Nor did Miss Dove know how Maisie was delighting the poor tutor's little brother, singing to him the Scottish songs that had been but romantic names to him, and answering enthusiastically, in her sweet, soft, Scotch voice, all the questions prompted by years of feeding on Walter Scott. Never had I heard quiet Maisie say so much, or show herself so deeply and tenderly moved; and when we both had begged for Auld Robin Gray, when she came to—

"To make the crown a pound, my Jamie gaed to sea,
And the crown and the pound, oh! they were baith
for me,"

she fairly broke down and ran out at the window, coming back soon again, with a blushing, half-choked apology—"Old songs would bring old scenes," she said, trying to smile.

Plainly there was a Jamie in the case, and, I think, but for Emil's presence, she would have told me about him then and there.

The party were to be back, at latest, by eight, the last hour to which Lettice could defer her father's dinner. Susan had expressed a hope of getting them home long before; but the August day had long darkened, and we had absolutely counted nine by the church clock before any sounds were heard coming over the bridge, and I went out to the door and met my sister and Winifred.


"Emil," said Susan, advancing to him, "your brother is quite safe and well," but he has had a wetting, and we thought it wise for him to go straight home with my nephew. Miss Walton will drive you down, and tell you about it by the way."

So Susan and Rebekah helped him into the low pony-chair, after a few anxious questions and eager reassurances; and Susan and I were in the little vestibule, but, true to her regular custom, hot and

tired as she looked, I could not get a word out of her beyond that it was all right, and no harm done, thanks to dear Edward, till she had trotted up to her own room, taken off her things, and made herself spruce, and having further informed Rebekah that Mr. St. Barbe would probably come in to supper, and taken out the "company" claret.

So that I knew nothing till the carriage had come back, containing not only Winifred, but Mr. St. Barbe, who, it appeared, had walked down with our nephew and Charles Sneyd, ostensibly to lift Emilius out when he came home. Supper was ready by this time, and Winifred made a far briefer toilette than my sister's. We sat down, still minus Edward, who, Mr. St. Barbe said, had gone in "with the poor little cripple." Then my curiosity began to be gratified, though the first sentiment was startling. "Well, boys ought to be abolished!" to which Susan responded more moderately—"such boys as the Lacys and Darts!"

The story came forth, as such adventures always do, wrong end foremost, telegram fashion; but I will rectify that as far as I can. The gully had been found as delicious as had been predicted, especially after it narrowed into a *goyle* (as it is here termed),




and the party pursued a narrow path beside the sparkling rushing stream, leaping over the stones, where the enterprising followed its example, and danced from one stone to another.

Little waterfalls added to the charm, and the rocky banks sometimes almost closed in overhead, sometimes sloped back, adorned with rowan trees bearing beauteous berries amid their feathery leaves, with ferns, and now and then late honeysuckles, while huge trailing wreaths of ivy and traveller's joy formed exquisite drapery in the steeper parts. It was so delightful that it was hard to believe that they had walked about three miles, and the traveller electrified us all by deliberately pronouncing it the loveliest spot he had ever beheld. No other place, neither the Dargle nor the Trosachs, no, neither Switzerland nor Yosamite, could hold a candle to its own peculiar individual charm! It was lucky, considering that he was the proprietor, and at that moment it flashed over me—or else I saw it in Susan's amused eyes—what that peculiar charm might chance to be, though I am not certain whether he had found it out by that time. After climbing some steep steps by the side of a waterfall, which so daunted Mrs.

Morland that she never would have been pulled up without Edward's help, while the unfeeling Dora only chaffed her, they came to a delightful little glade, where there was a kind of fairy parlour, well known to Penelope and her select acquaintance. There was just mossy turf enough to afford space for the feast, shut in by rocks, and shadowed by hazel and rowan trees, and by ferns growing up as high as their heads. Here preparations had been made, and the meal was held, with the cloth laid on the grass, and all, as even my sister allowed, delightfully managed by good Mr. and Mrs. Ryan, who met them there by an easier route. It was their head-quarters, and they were to drink tea there after viewing the cavern, which was half-a-mile further up.

And how had Mr. Sneyd got on all this time?

Oh! poor little chap, pretty well on the whole, Mr. St. Barbe said. Penny was uncommonly good-natured, and hauled him over the rocks; and as long as she had him in tow, it was all very well, though the notion of his giving a lecture was perfectly ridiculous. Those scamps of boys were actually making him believe that the ants were young bees.



"But, indeed," said Winifred, "he does know all the theory. It is only that he does not know things by sight—and is so short-sighted besides."

"Miss Walton is quite right," said Edward, who had come in meantime, and was vigorously cutting cold beef. "He is a thorough book-scientific man. I learnt a good deal from him; but we ought to have kept him safe from those wretched boys."

"I thought Penny was doing so," said Mr. St. Barbe; "she seemed to have adopted him as her own peculiar pet. Indeed, I am not sure that is not what riled her brothers."

"You never can reckon on Penny when she is in one of her excited states," said my sister, sighing; "and, indeed, I didn't think the boys could have been so unfeeling."

However, "the boys" had considered themselves aggrieved in every way by the poor man's presence at the party. All scorned him as a German, and as a teacher of women, in the abstract; most hated him as engrossing their sisters' time and attention; and the Darts abhorred him with a special and individual abhorrence, as being set to drive holiday lessons into them; and his ignorance of common

matters increased their contempt. So, being all the more intolerant, because their sisters had presumed to say the party was made up on his account, they viewed him as fair game. All sorts of ridiculous natural curiosities were gravely presented for his study, and traps were set, from which Penny's vigilance saved him, and often caught the mischievous setter in his own springe.

At last, however, Penny's vigilance was diverted, partly by the need of giving the signal for the lighting of Gaffer's Hole. While she was concocting it with her cousin, Mr. Sneyd detected her least brother, with the Darts and younger Lacys, making a raid on a basket of fruit which had been reserved for the evening—Hugh Ryan having been, as he afterwards tearfully owned to his sister, induced by the Lacys to believe that such thefts were part of the gallant licence of school-boys.

Not at all shy with them, Mr. Sneyd had hotly exclaimed that he was astonished at such behaviour in English boys. Numbers emboldened the boys, who were at their most impudent age, and something outrageous and intolerable had been said. Hugh had confessed to having called him no better

than a swindler's son, but in extenuation (?) added, "You said so, sister, as I told him; and that wasn't the worst. No, indeed it wasn't; for Dick Lacy told him he ought to be at home minding his hunchback little brother; and I never *could* have said that, sister."

The consequence of these amenities, which were not suspected at the time, was that the poor youth lagged, and drew apart. All his special patrons were otherwise occupied, and no one specially attended to him. The cavern was reached after a pretty, scrambling walk thorough bush, thorough brier, during which Susan confessed that she had been totally absorbed in the misdeeds of a kitchen-maid whom she had recommended to Mrs. Ryan. Penny had the little ones of the Lacy family on her hands, Emma and Alice having wandered away together no one knew where, and Edith, though she did her best, being quite inadequate to manage them. The youngest had a screaming fit of terror at the notion of entering the dark cave, and Penny had to carry her back and deposit her with these senior ladies who had a very decided dislike to subterraneous doings.

The miners had placed sconces, and at all the

remarkable points these were reinforced by the magnesian wire Edward carried; Winifred was enthusiastic about the strange natural statuary, wonderful alabaster columns, and the beautiful white groined roof of one of the chambers; but keeping the boys within bounds had been anxious work. They would wake the strange silent vaults with horrid varieties of whoops and cries, very likely as much in defiance of their own awe as in mirth or bravado, but very startling to some of the party, and exceedingly unpleasant to all. The Arrowsmiths behaved well; but all the others were nothing better than a nuisance; and Penny tried in vain to reduce her brothers to order, excited as they were by the presence of older and worse lads than themselves.

Nobody was sorry when the exploration was over, and there was a general dispersion among the pretty flowery banks until tea-time, when, at the appointed signal from Mr. Ryan's key bugle, all assembled at head-quarters.

Then, in the midst of the dispensing of tea and cutting of cake, Mr. Sneyd was missed. While inquiries for him were passing round, some one overheard one boy's suggestion that he had gone

home in a wax, and another declare that he had seen him in the cavern, and had roared to "put him in an awful funk." There was no doubt that he had gone into the cavern. The ladies outside had seen him, but it was equally clear that no one had seen him come out again. If he had gone home, he must have passed this spot, where the servants had been left in charge, and they were certain that he had not been there. There were grave looks, and Edward and Mr. St. Barbe got up and declared that they must go back and look for him. Mr. Ryan sent his elder boys to summon the miners back to assist, and a great suspense of alarm and self-reproach fell upon most of them.

The waiting was long—very long, and it was then that poor little Hugh's attempt at manliness gave way; his sister found him sobbing under the fern, and he made a full confession, in such piteous fear lest his small spite had led to Mr. Sneyd being drowned in a horrible black pool he had perceived for a moment in the cavern, that, indignant and terrified as she was, Penny could only comfort him.

The search had been anxious and tardy, for the

cavern was very extensive, and had numerous passages. It was a fearful underground labyrinth, where the travellers' habits of exploration, the miners' subterranean experience, and the engineers' expedients, were all alike needed even for their own safety. It was not for a full hour that they were relieved by hearing a feeble call in answer to their shouts, and even then it was long before, amid the winding passages and blocks of stalagmite, they succeeded in letting their light reach the captive, who, drenched, shivering, and scarcely able to speak, at last stumbled up to them, when, as all declared, they were fully a quarter of a mile from the entrance of the cavern.

They had taken a flask of hot wine and water, which Mr. St. Barbe had kept warm within his waistcoat, and this revived him a little. Everybody was waiting at the mouth when they emerged, and demonstrative Penelope, in floods of tears, rushed up to Mr. Sneyd, dragging little Hugh with her, and vehemently asking pardon for the child's wickedness. I confess I thought Penny must have overdone it, for neither gentleman could help laughing a little at the desperation of her manner and the confusion of their poor little drowned rat.

However, it was luckily nearly dark, and there were not many strange spectators.

It appeared that in trying to hold aloof from his tormentors, the boys, and creeping away from the people—after the discovery, as he fancied, of how they regarded him—poor Mr. Sneyd had wandered astray, so that he could not recover the traces of the rest—had no guide but the little guttering candle he carried. After some vain wandering, he stumbled and fell into one of the black pools that had haunted Hugh's imagination. Happily, it was not deep, and he scrambled out, but with candle extinguished.

However, to his surprise, the darkness was not total. There was a glimmer of light at some distance, and likewise a continual patter, as of dropping water. He made his way with much difficulty and caution towards the light, but only to be disappointed. There was only the merest crack between the rocks, far too narrow for any chance of climbing, and there was a continued oozing drip down the sides, forming another pool below.

There, halting under the light, such as it was, he tried to recover his forces, and consider whether

escape from so dreadful a fate might yet be possible; trying to dry his fragment of candle so as to rekindle it with his cigar lights, he had at last heard the shouts of the seekers, had called back again, and finally, after much disappointment and vain attempts to meet them, had found his way to their friendly lights and hands.

He was so wet and cold, that when they had hastily given him food, Edward had thought it best to see him home without more delay.

"I wonder," said I, "whether his lecture will be the better for his experiences."

"He takes in more than you give him credit for," said Edward. "Besides, he and I are going there again without all the boys and ladies to distract us."

"My dear Edward," cried Susan, "don't be fool-hardy. Pray don't run risks in that dreadful place. We have had quite enough of that."

"Never fear, Aunt Susan," said he. "We shall have the company of that old mole, the miner, Captain Jem, who seems to me to know his way better below ground than above."

"Mine likewise, if you please," said Mr. St. Barbe. Those two were becoming great friends. They

walked up and down the garden together for a long time that summer night, and we wondered whether anything but curiosity led them to this new exploration, and whether Charles Sneyd would venture with them. If he did so, he would show a "pluck" in which his patroness, Susan, would rejoice.





CHAPTER VII.

THE LECTURE.

OUR gentlemen did not tell us when they were going to explore the cavern, and as we heard nothing of it the next two days, we were in hopes that it was forgotten; but on Monday morning Edward was missing at breakfast, and Winifred, who used to get up to accomplish her studies at preternatural hours, deposed that she had seen him from her window shortly after seven o'clock, in a very shabby old coat and hat, joining Mr. St. Barbe and Mr. Sneyd in the garden.

We were all rather worried about it, though we professed the utmost confidence. I know I had made up my mind that, if they did not appear by twelve o'clock, we would send to Mr. Ryan to institute a search in Gaffer's Hole, and Susan

proved to have come to the same determination, while Winifred set herself vehemently to prepare her algebra, and could make nothing come right.

However, by half-past eleven the steps were near, and Edward was heard inviting in the other two with assurances that his aunts would insist on their coming in. Certainly the boy did know he might do anything with his aunts; and when he represented their ravenous condition, the cold tongue, the bread, cheese, and beer were at their service. They had pockets full of specimens of choice bits of spar and stalactite, and, in reply to our enquiries, said they had penetrated to the place Mr. Sneyd had mentioned, and looked up to the light through the crack between the rocks. Where did they think this opening was? we asked. It was making this out that had made them return so much later than they had intended, and it presently appeared they had been actuated by something much beyond curiosity. Edward had suspected that the opening could not be far from the reservoir, and thought that the drip of water which Mr. Sneyd had mentioned must be therefrom, since the genuine drip of the roof was impregnated with lime, such as formed the

stalactites, whereas that which came from Mr. Sneyd's crack was, by analysis, exactly the same with that of the reservoir. They had brought home bottles of water from the pools, which, they said, proved this guess to be correct, and had gone on to examine that side of the embankment of the reservoir. Edward looked grave about it, and said he had serious doubts whether it was safe.

It may seem odd, but we were not in the least alarmed. As Susan said, some one of the gentlemen who have a turn for terrifying women in a quiet way, was sure to predict about once a-year that the reservoir would break out, but we had lived at Poppleton for fourteen years without damage, and we had come to regard it as the stock wolf of the neighbourhood.

Edward did not press on us the alarm we were so slow to take, but enquired whose affair it was to attend to it, a question that none of us could answer, and he was referred to Mr. Ryan, to whom he and Mr. St. Barbe set off as soon as nature had been refreshed, and our Blue-bells began to muster for their German and English literature.

I asked Lettice if she knew, and she answered, "Yes, it belongs to the Warchester Waterworks

Company. Papa is chairman of it. Oh, I hope Mr. Webster does not want to talk to him about that. People have so often worried him about such nonsense that he can't bear the sound of it, and it always turns out that Harcombe has not been opening the hatches properly."

It made Lettice look annoyed, and we knew that Mr. Arrowsmith, though a very good man, was opinionated, and could be very trying when he was crossed. So we devoutly hoped that Edward would come home satisfied.

No such thing. He had made out all about the reservoir. There had originally been a little tarn or mere, high on the moor, the source of a tributary of the river that flowed by Warchester, and of the stream on the other side of Ben Boldre point—the Boldre itself rising in its own ravine some way below. The Warchester Waterworks Company had—some thirty years before, in the time of Mr. Arrowsmith's father—extended this mere into a great reservoir, about half-a-mile long and a furlong broad, very deep indeed where the original lake had been, and considerably so even where it had been dug out. There was a great embankment all round, with a walk along the top. On the

north side was the whole apparatus for conveying the supply to Warchester; on the east, where Harcombe runs up, a set of hatches regulated the needful watering of the mill and farm below, and were also arranged to drain off any danger of overflow, in case the winter rains made the reservoir too full. Harcombe itself belonged to the family who took their name from it, but their patrimony was so small that they rented the chief part of their farm from the St. Barbe estate, and would have purchased it, if Stephen's extravagant father had lived a little longer. This always made them feel themselves aggrieved, and as the Ryans by no means admitted their claims to equality with them, there was a standing soreness, which rendered it difficult to deal with the various questions that arose between agent and tenant. Whenever anything went wrong about the reservoir, it was customary to charge it on the Harcombes; but Edward exonerated them in the present case. He said that the water was filtering through the side of the reservoir into the top of the cavern, and if not stopped in time would make itself a wider way; but he did not dwell much upon the matter to us, and when we repeated what Lettice had said, and

exhorted him not to provoke Mr. Arrowsmith, he only smiled, so that we thought he had taken our advice.

He seemed to be chiefly taken up in the preparations for the lecture, and, though himself debarred from books and drawing, was superintending most efficiently the great diagrams of the formation of our coast, which Winifred was drawing and colouring, to be hung on the wall, with the sea in brilliant blue, the red sandstone fearfully red, the limestone wondrously marbled, the vein of tin actually touched with silver, and the fossils of gigantic proportions patent to every eye. We also thought he prepared the lecture, but that he indignantly denied.

The lecture was to be given in the school, a conveniently expansive place, built before the prohibition of wooden partitions, so that S. P. G. meetings, magic lantern exhibitions, concerts, and penny readings could take place there without too much crowding.

It had a little class-room, built in the first dawn of such luxuries, and since superseded by much larger ones. It was most incorrectly called the Black Hole, and was used as a cloak-room on great

occasions, and it was now proposed that Emilius and I should be installed there to hear the lecture. It would not have hurt me to sit among the multitude, so long as I had a comfortable chair; but my being there would make it more possible for that poor lad to have his great wish fulfilled of hearing his brother.

Nothing could have been kinder than people were. Two luxurious arm-chairs almost filled the little room, when I came down before dark, and found Emil already installed. The school-mistress kept on coming backwards and forwards, bringing us cups of tea, and instructing us in the ways of the curtain, by which we could be secluded from public gaze. Her chief regret was that there was nowhere to put a candle, but as the outer room would be well lighted, and we had a window behind us, we did not want any such thing.

Emilius was delighted, and not at all nervous about his brother's performance. He said Charles had been in much better spirits ever since his adventure in the cavern, everyone had been so kind to him, especially Miss Ryan. It was so good to be here! They had never guessed that there was anyone so charming outside a book. Did I

think there were many people in the world equal to Miss Ryan? No heroine of fiction came quite up to her in nobleness or kindness. So I concluded that if Penelope's apologies had been overdone, they had healed a wound. Might they only not make another and a deeper one!

There was not much more opening for confidence, for the sight of the people assembling was a comedy in itself, to two such recluses as we were. Emil had never seen anything like it, nor had I for a period longer than that poor boy's life had been.

There was the sound of the gathering crowd without, chiefly of children and lads—some the proud possessors of a ticket, but most merely attracted by the fact of something going on. When the doors were opened, there were plenty of characteristic actions to be watched. There were the two scrambling, trampling herds of boys and girls, whose chief care was to keep together in their own kind, and who seemed to be furtively handing about eatables, till Jane Morland took up a commanding position in their very midst, rendering the exchange of apples such a service of difficulty as only to be attempted by the more daring and hardened of the boys, who most nearly

approached a troop of young fishermen who sauntered in, in an easy-going fashion, as if prepared to patronise the entertainment just so far as it might suit them. Dora and the elder curate were a species of keepers to them.

Then there was the old woman with the green umbrella, who always came to everything, apparently under the impression that it was a Methodist meeting, for she used to sigh and shake her head at intervals in her placid slumber, and always said at the door, even after a rampantly comic penny reading, that the dear gentleman had made a most moving discourse; also spruce maidens, accompanied by their young men, and intelligent-looking fathers of families; and then, with much clatter of heavy feet, Penelope triumphantly marched in with a troop of the mining men and boys, fine-looking fellows, if they had not all put themselves into black garments, as if they would fain imitate Dissenting ministers. These were a picked set, and very decorous, looking with severity on the rollicking fisher lads.

The humours of the occupants of the reserved seats were quite as observable. There was an obvious tendency to sit down in the outermost seat

nearest to the gangway, making oneself as square as possible, so as to add to the difficulty of passing by. Indeed, I have been informed that there is a peculiar sort of nervousness that affects some persons, and makes them unable to occupy any other seat, especially in church. Then there were the people who could not sit near a closed window, and the people who could not sit near an open one; and, as a general rule, those who feared draughts always seemed to be put into them, and those who dreaded suffocation were shoved into the least airy places. Here crouched a gentleman with a pocket handkerchief on the top of his head; there gasped a lady, divested of mantle and scarf! Then there were the meek, who dropped into any sort of place as if on sufferance; and the bold, who marched up as high as they could go, and spied out the best unappropriated seats. Then there were those who snorted at the inner rows of doubly-reserved seats, and questioned the right to shut them off; and there were others who dreaded conspicuous places, and regretted having to sit in front of anyone; while others stood up and gazed round in criticism, or to look out for their friends and acquaintances.

Mr. Morland and Mr. Bennet settled all in their

seats, except those inveterate late-comers, who very often, according to their boast, got the very best places of all, which have been kept for some grandees who have not come. And lastly arrived the dress circle, the half-crown ticket-holders, who might pass the last dividing line. Our hearts exulted to see that it would be nearly full. Everyone had done his or her duty, and brought some guest. Even Lettice had prevailed to bring down her father. There was his crisp white curly head, with his two little girls in front of him, and Susan sitting by his side. Dr. Lacy had promised his presence, but did not appear, and I was sorry for it—partly because his boys, with the Dents and some others unknown, had got together in a herd quite as riotous as, and less easily checked than, the poorer boys; and partly because, all unaware of her proximity to me, Emma was sitting just on the other side of my curtain, her hand tenderly clasped in Alice Parnell's, and a varying glow on her face. Some benches off was a tall, flashy, black-whiskered young man, with a supercilious air; and I needed no one to inform me that this was Philip Harcombe, even without the turning of Emma's head, and the glances that passed between them.

There was a sort of platform, where Mr. Morland always took the chair on these occasions and introduced the lecturer, chiefly, as he said, that he might get a general view of the audience, and repress the unruly, of whom he was more in doubt than usual, as they had, by the course of comic penny readings in the winter, been demoralised into impatience of anything that was not facetious. By way of lending *eclat* to the thing, and commencing squirely duties, Mr. St. Barbe was, however, persuaded to be nominal chairman. He undertook it somewhat in the spirit in which he had drunk coffee with Turkish pashas, or smoked pipes with negro chiefs; but there he was in his proper place, rejoicing Mr. Ryan's heart.

He and Mr. Morland had chairs on either side of the table, with Winifred's great diagram above their heads, and two lesser ones on easels on each flank, in the midst of the table with the inevitable green baize cloth and glass of water. Then the three gentlemen marched up the gangway, and Mr. St. Barbe stood forth, producing a great stamping and clapping by way of welcome. He said a few words, in good taste, of thanks at being thus hailed, and said that Mr. Morland had requested

him to introduce Mr. Sneyd, who would kindly tell them what their dear old home was made of, since, as everyone knew, what ought to be most familiar was often very imperfectly known.

Then the lecture began. He was all the lecturer now. There was no shyness, no hesitation. He went at once to the subject, and told the history of the gradual growth of our rocks and soil in a popular but perfectly accurate manner. Those of us who had read "Madam How and Lady Why" saw the model he had formed himself on, but that did not matter—there could not be a better. We thought Edward must have criticised his style, it was so clear and simple, and free from German involvements; but Emilius told me that he had read the lecture to Mrs. Hales's grandson, a clever, intelligent youth, and altered whatever he saw by the boy's eyes was not comprehensible. The young fellow might be known by his dancing eyes and air of proprietorship. However, the rougher sort no sooner found out that they were hearing information, not drollery, than a murmur of chatter and cracking of knuckles began to be heard. It was checked, then it began again, and this time not with the fisher-boys, but in the gentle-boy quarter,

Another hushing, a moment's calm, but then came a crowing like a cock. Then Mr. St. Barbe rose up from his chair, and his eyes glanced so, that there was a silence of dismay.

"I have been into many countries," he said. "I did not expect to come home and find worse behaviour than I have seen among savages. Let those who cannot sit still to listen to a gentleman who has taken great pains to give them interesting information go out at once, without disturbing others."

A few sulky lads near the door did go out, but there was a fresh whisper and commotion among the "young gentlemen"—something about "a dirty little German." They thought themselves beyond all power, but Mr. St. Barbe's keen eye was upon them, and he still stood up, saying, "I request that Mr. Sneyd does not continue till the chief offenders have left the room. Go, if you please, sir! and you! We expect people here to have good breeding."

They were boys of the *âge sans pitié*—a young Dent and a Lacy, the two whom he had observed as the worst on the picnic day, and to them was added a Harcombe, who had been

making faces all the time, not unmarked by that keen eye. They tried looking up impudently, but it would not do. The boys had been a nuisance so often, that everybody was thankful that somebody had strength of mind to put them down, and the awful silence fairly compelled them to slink away. Then Mr. St. Barbe turned to the lecturer, and with a few kind words of compliment, and apology for the interruption, begged him to proceed. Nothing could be quieter than the whole audience afterwards, and the lecture was concluded with great spirit and prodigious applause, partly arising from relief after the long constraint, but really well deserved. Emil fairly wrung my hand with delight, as one gentleman after another shook hands with his brother and congratulated him.

At that moment, to my no small dismay, Philip Harcombe came striding over benches and putting chairs out of the way to speak to Emma Lacy. "The brute!" he muttered.

"I'm sure poor little Alfie was no worse than the rest," she said.

"Aristocratic insolence! He means to ride it rough-shod over us, but I'll show him that won't do."

"Emma!" I said, feeling very uncomfortable; but I was not heard. She was saying, "Oh, don't," at some unseen endearment. "One moment, my sweet," he answered, and that instant, as one familiar with the place, she took his hand, and drew him, as she thought, into concealment under our curtain. They were almost falling over us, when I grasped her, saying, "I am here, Miss Lacy."

"Listening!" Mr. Harcombe cried, with something like an oath.

"Oh! hush! hush!" she whispered, in terror. "It is Miss Frances Webster! I beg your pardon."

They were both gone the very next moment, leaving Emilius laughing, so that he could hardly keep in the sound, at the looks of utter astonishment which we could see, though ourselves unseen.

"Is that the way people make love?" he asked, poor fellow, in his odd, boyish simplicity.

I could only say, "I am afraid so."

By that time, however, all the strangers were gone, and there were only our own immediate party, so I drew back the curtain and came forward, while Charles Sneyd, brightly blushing

and happy, hastened to see whether his brother was tired.

It had been a very successful evening on the whole, and we were sorry Penny had not stopped to talk it over, but she and her father and brothers had walked home with their escort of miners, for fear they should fall victims to some of the lower delights of Poppleton. She told us afterwards that as soon as they got out of the town they had sung "Hold the Fort" in chorus all the way over the moor under the harvest moon, and it was the most beautiful thing she ever knew.

Still, our enjoyment had its drawbacks. Mr. Arrowsmith had said to Susan, "What absurd nonsense has your nephew got into his head about the reservoir? There's no end to the stuff young men talk now-a-days! I thought better of Webster. As if Whitmarsh and Gardiner did not know their business."

So Edward had been so naughty as to plague Mr. Arrowsmith after all our warnings! Well, it might be his own look-out, but we thought he had cared for Lettice better than to do such a thing as that!

And how about that foolish Emma?



CHAPTER VIII.

CRYING WOLF.

AFTER what I had seen, I made up my mind to write to Emma Lacy and beg her to come and talk to me; but the note was still on my table when her father was ushered into the room in much perturbation. It was not, usually, in his rough and ready nature to make apologies, but he did so now, for he was really a gentleman, and worthy of a better family, if only he would have looked after them more.

The misbehaviour of his son had come to his ears, and when he was preparing to punish him, the youngest girl, who was vehemently fond of her brother, declared that it was not fair that he should be punished when Emma was much worse, letting Phil Harcombe kiss her behind the curtain in the



Black Hole, so that they both tumbled into Miss Frances Webster's lap. Emma had vehemently denied this vulgar accusation, and the poor man, weary of the recrimination, had taken up his hat and come to me to learn the truth. There was enough exaggeration in the mode of telling it to account for Emma's denial; but I could give the poor doctor no comfort, and could not wonder that he was very much disgusted with us for having kept the secret for a fortnight or more.

He knew far worse of Philip Harcombe than we did, scouted the notion of his even thinking of marrying his daughter, and was chiefly disturbed at the duplicity and folly Emma had shown. I implored him not to be too angry with her, and give her cause to feel herself a heroine. To send her away would be best, but he said he did not know where to send her. She would only learn worse mischief among her cousins, and not be out of the fellow's reach either. I thought a good German school might answer, as she was only twenty; but such a matter could not be decided on the instant, and Dr. Lacy had to go home to tell his wife, and speak to his daughter.

He asked leave to send her to talk to me, but

she never came, and I only learnt afterwards, from Edith Parnell, that she would not hear of giving up Philip Harcombe, nor believe a word against him. Edith came alone to her classes, and in rather a quaint voice she said that Emma and Alice had cried, till both had such dreadful headaches, that they could only sit hand-in-hand in Emma's room, smelling each other's salts.

"I think," said little Edith, drily, "I should like to go out as a governess. I don't think there's enough to do here to keep one out of nonsense."

She was not at a sympathising age, and looked on lover's troubles as supreme folly. She had grown immensely in sense in the last year, and was a pupil to whom we could feel that the Blue-bell Society had been really useful.

Philip Harcombe was as good as his word, and put a very disagreeable report of the lecture into the low Warchester paper. At least all supposed that it was his work. Meantime we had our own vexations, for Edward would not let the reservoir alone, but continued to irritate Mr. Arrowsmith, all the more because Mr. St. Barbe was of the same mind. It seemed to be our nephew's one great hobby, in his enforced cessation from work. He

went to Warchester, and tried to work up the other shareholders to attend to it, but they got rid of him by telling him that nothing could be done till their meeting in October.

Mr. Arrowsmith was exceedingly angry at this, and, as report took care to tell us, called our nephew a meddling prig, who came about prying in search of a job. He left off asking him to dinner, as he had been doing about every third day, whisked his daughter off after church too quickly to exchange a word, and even told her he would not have her always running down to Violet Villa while that young Webster was loafing about. He took it very ill, in a lad that he had always been civil to, to try to stir up opposition in a company that had always gone on harmoniously, and to put them to endless expense for some of his fads. It came of the over teaching of these days. Classes! no! He would not have Lettice go on with them. He had allowed far too much of that already! Lettice submitted, and sent Miss Coles down alone, though she spoke as affectionately to us as ever when we did meet her.

It was a great blow to our classes, this defection of Lettice's, and when autumn came round again,

and names were to be sent in as candidates for the local examination in winter, my hopes were less high than they had been last year, before "the disturbing element" had come in. There were Maisie Carstairs, Miss Coles, the two Morlands, and Edith Parnell, all very steady, and unaffected by the confusion, but Alice Parnell had fallen off altogether; and though Emma Lacy's father insisted that she should go on, paid the fee, and sent in her name, she regarded it all as the mistaken tyranny of elders, and ourselves as horrid old maids and informers, well meaning, perhaps, but unable to appreciate, &c., &c., &c. Besides, it was barbarous to make a persecuted broken-hearted creature think of analysis and decimal fractions! So, though she came in the body, because she could not help it, she made it manifest that she had no spirit with us, scarcely prepared anything, committed the most absurd blunders, and was so languid that Mr. Sneyd ceased to think it worth while to scold her, and except that much might happen in three months, it seemed to be a mere mockery to send in her name. As to Penelope, nobody knew what she would do. She showed plenty of zeal, but she was more inaccurate than ever, and sometimes fought battles

royal with her master, to the universal amusement, in defence of some extraordinary statement. Besides, something had come over both her and Winifred, that made the one more excitable (if possible), and the other much less like a machine. Indeed, poor Winifred bemoaned herself that she was getting quite ruined in fines, for she could not keep up with her societies, and found it very expensive. Yet she did not seem much concerned, and a sweet sensitiveness had come over that once stiff formal face, and had changed her so much, that one would hardly have known her. She did go on with her various studies for the examination, and with attention while she was about them, so that she acquitted herself well before Mr. Sneyd; but she no longer seemed to think and care for nothing beyond, and had an appreciation, both of the droll and of the beautiful, such as had always been wanting to her. She was so pleasant and homelike with us, that we were sorry that it had been arranged that, as soon as the holidays were over, she should go to the Morlands'; though the Rectory was so near that she continually dropped in in the morning, because she said it was so much quieter to sit with me, and prepare for her classes.

I am afraid she fled from the strange wrangle in which the Morland sisters, though good girls, and fond of one another, contrived to live. She was too honourable to accuse them, but she used to call our room a haven of peace, and once she said she was cured of wishing to belong to a large family.

Then she was a strong partisan of the reservoir alterations, and used to come down to hear about them. Indeed, she knew much more about them than we did, for Edward avoided the subject, not wishing on the one hand to work up our terrors, and on the other, knowing we were distressed by the Arrowsmith opposition, and not choosing to argue the point. But Winifred and Penelope used to discuss it eagerly together, and seemed to think that all Poppleton would be swept into the sea some fine (or rather some wet) day, owing to Mr. Arrowsmith's pig-headedness, as they did not scruple to call it, and the more offensive obstructiveness of Harcombe the elder. Mr. St. Barbe and Mr. Ryan had both spoken to him about great attention to the hatches which conveyed away the surplus water, and had insisted on their being put in repair, and an efficient person placed to watch them in a cottage near the reservoir, who was to

open them on the least token of unusual pressure. The cottage had been underlet to Harcombe, who had in it his wife's washerwoman, with some sons, on whom he professed to depend, and at any rate no change could be made till after Michaelmas.

Mr. Harcombe was in a state of surly offence and opposition on all accounts. Dr. Lacy had spoken to him about the flirtation between the two young people, and, though far from desiring the affair to go on, he much resented the interference and manifest contempt for his son. Mr. St. Barbe's expulsion of the younger boy from the lecture was another offence. Then the return of the young landlord, and his resumption of preserving, after many years, when the shooting had been in comparatively indifferent hands, led to the aggravation of old disputes about poaching, trespass, and rabbits, and there was much bitterness and hostility.

Mr. St. Barbe had first his architect, and then some sporting friends with him early in September, and we saw rather less of him ; but he was kind in taking Edward out shooting with him, and did many good-natured things by us. Indeed, we

never feasted on so many partridges as we had that autumn.

Mr. Sneyd fulfilled his intention of remaining at Mrs. Hales's after the holidays, as Emilius was so much happier and better there. To that poor youth's great delight, Edward procured for him the copying of some specifications. Soon after this had begun, Edward said he must go to London for a few days. He wanted to consult the oculist who had before looked at his eyes, to know whether he might begin work again; and though he held his tongue about it, we afterwards found that—having found all other means fail—he was going to Whitmarsh and Gardiner, the original makers of the reservoir, a great firm of engineers, some of whom he knew, to represent the state of the embankment, and persuade them to send some one to inspect it.

There came, after a beautiful summer, a tremendous spell of storm and rain. Wet day succeeded wet day. Susan could not get to her district visiting, the Morlands could not walk to school, Winifred came scudding before the wind, and almost drenched, even in hurrying from the Rectory to Violet Villa; Mr. St. Barbe, whose guests were

all gone, found no solace but in strolling in to ask when we expected our nephew to return, and to require sympathy and advice about the plans for his house and grounds. He was in full correspondence with the architect, and, considering how he had gone about alone for the last five or six years of his life, it was wonderful how much he depended on discussion and suggestion. Though, to be sure, as he said, he was a mere savage, more used to wigwams, kraals, and tents, than to civilised drawing-rooms. And certainly Winifred, with all her professed hatred of the prettinesses of social life, showed herself very responsive, and had evidently profited by her training in taste, more than she had thought fit to avow.





CHAPTER IX.

PENNY'S RIDE.

AFTER days of storm came one of bright sunshine and only a few showers. The wind was still very high, and there were splendid white horses out at sea, while the Boldre was rolling full, turbid, and muddy up to the crown of the arches of the bridge. We knew there would be a spring tide, but we had seen such things before, knew its boundary, and were wont to be amused at the alarm it was apt to excite in strangers. Indeed, we said that if it had been to-day instead of to-morrow that Edward was to return, he would certainly have thought us all in the way of being drowned.

How shall I tell of the night that followed? Perhaps I had better begin with what I did not see, but only heard of afterwards. Everyone had hastened out that day. Mr. and Mrs. Morland and

Jane had gone to Warchester early to take the train for an anniversary service at a church where the rector was to preach, and they were to stay all night. They had given a lift to Mr. Sneyd, whose day at Warchester it was, and he was so much occupied there with his various classes as not to set forth on his return till nearly sunset.

The most direct way for a pedestrian lay up a steep hill leading to the moor, then along a bit of old Roman road, from which there diverged a foot-path lying along the top of the embankment of the reservoir, and then leading into a long and fearfully steep rocky lane, descending into our valley almost like a staircase. Mr. Sneyd knew it would very likely be a torrent in parts, but he was anxious to get home to his brother, and he really was much more manly than we had thought him.

He had reached the bank of the reservoir just at twilight, and, to his amazement, heard a call to him to make haste. It was a well-known voice, and he hurried towards that western dangerous end of the lake, which was so full that it was almost over the causeway on which he walked.

Penelope had been one to take advantage of the

fine afternoon, and had ridden to see after a sick woman in a lonely cottage on the moor. She had come home by way of the reservoir, which had begun to have a certain fearful fascination for her, so that she liked to keep a watch upon it. "Look there," she said, and pointed. What had been an almost imperceptible ooze from the bank of the reservoir to the crack above the cavern, was now a thread of water, not large, but very rapid, rushing from between the large stones that built up the rampart of the reservoir, and there was a strange, hollow sound beneath their feet, nay, they thought they felt a trembling of the bank, as the wind, working up for another shower, brought the swelling waters towards them.

"Is it coming?" she asked; and he answered, "I think so."

Then came the counsel what was to be done. To give warning of course, but what would mitigate or avert the catastrophe must be done instantly—*i.e.*, to open the flood-gates, and let off as much as possible towards Harcombe, which might lessen the pressure long enough for the repair of the bank, or, at anyrate, carry off some of the flood by the channels prepared for it. Penny

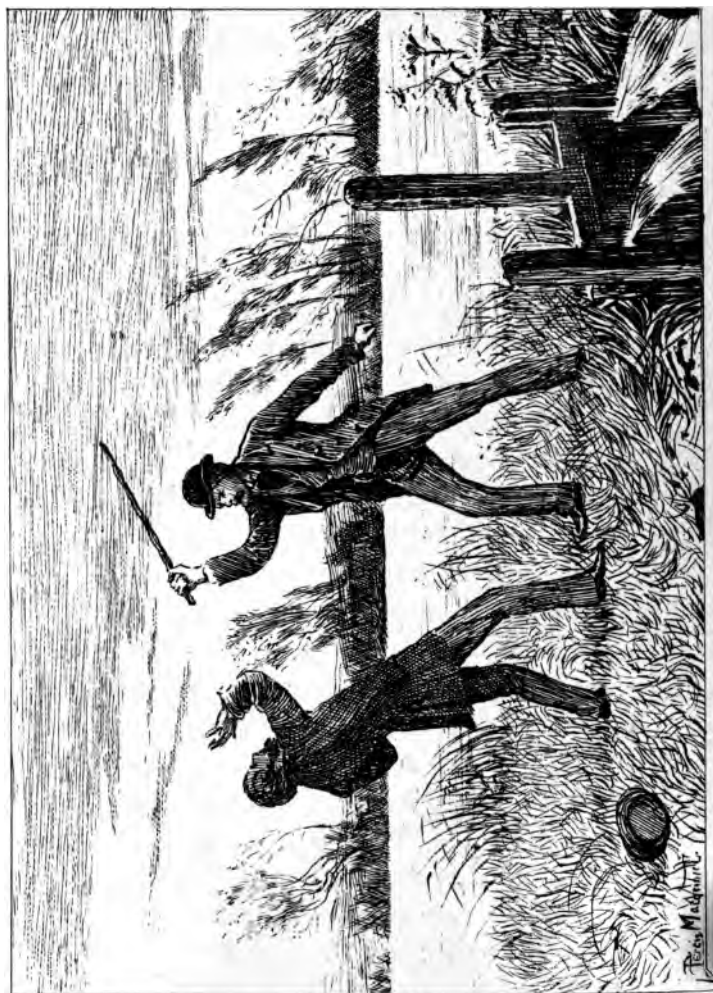
had already been to the cottage and found it empty. The flood-gates were far beyond single-handed strength, but there were hatches in them that were raised by drawing them up by an iron bar inserted in the holes of a sort of long handle projecting above them. The question that brooked no delay was, whether it were better to try with insufficient strength to work at these, or to hurry at the utmost speed to give the inhabitants of the ravine warning of the catastrophe as inevitable. The two made one attempt on the lever of the flood-gates, and found it entirely vain. Then they came both at once to the decision. Mr. Sneyd should stay opening the hatches, which he found he could do, and Penelope should ride as swiftly along the goyle as possible to the nearest cottages and send the men up to his aid, then hasten down, giving everywhere tidings of the danger.

It was all settled in less than a minute, and as Penelope turned her horse's head, she called out, "Ah! there's some one coming. You'll have help in five minutes." Then, slapping up the pony to his utmost, she shot down the hill to the cottages, where three or four of the miners lived, full in the course the flood must take, if it broke loose.

She was out of sight before the new-comer approached. It was no other than Philip Harcombe. About a quarter of an hour before, Dr. Lacy, from the window of a sick-room, had perceived him making extremely evident advances to the smart daughter of a low public-house opposite, and coming down suddenly on him, had given him his opinion of his behaviour in no measured terms.

He was on his way home, furious with the whole Poppleton faction, and with senses just enough obscured by liquor to be incapable of comprehension, and when he found the little German tutor meddling with the hatches, his passion found vent. With savage oaths, he commanded immediate cessation; and when Charles Sneyd pointed to the state of the embankment, and tried to reason, the only effect was to make him wrest the iron bar from his hand, and strike at him furiously.

When the men, at Penny's summons, well knowing the danger, came running up the embankment, they found young Sneyd lying senseless upon it, and Harcombe flourishing the iron bar, and defying them to touch it!



And the leakage which Penny had seen as a thread was now a stream of water, and the quaking and rumbling were far more evident and ominous. A few minutes later, Mr. Ryan, attracted by the thunderous sounds, had met some terrified women and children running from their houses, and, hurrying towards the reservoir, had found a foaming cataract, breaking through the embankment, and rushing headlong down the gorge of the Boldre, while a couple of men were standing near the uninjured part of the bank over Charles Sneyd, who was struggling back into consciousness, with a bleeding head and a broken arm.

As soon as he was aware of Mr. Ryan's presence, he stretched out his other hand, striving hard to speak of something. "She—she—go to her." Then one of the men explained, "It is our young lady, sir, bless her! Her come down on her pony to warn us, or we might have been dead men, with our wives and children, by this time! And she is rid down the gully to let the rest of 'em know. God be with her and save her!"

Then Mr. Ryan knew that his daughter on her little pony was riding a race for life or death with that rushing, swelling, hungry flood! Nothing was

possible to be done. Pursuit would be utterly vain, rescue impossible, and he knew she might be overtaken, carried down to the sea, and nothing more ever be heard of that bright, merry being, the light of his house!

He could only bid the men carry Mr. Sneyd to his own house, while he walked beside, and after telling all to the poor wife, he left her trying to do her best for the patient, and striving to hope for the best, while he—unable to rest—set forth by the longer way round to Poppleton, to see if he could find Dr. Lacy, and to seek for tidings of his daughter; but when, with horror, he remembered that there would be a spring tide, his heart sank, and he had little expectation of any relief to the agonising suspense till morning.

Dear Penny, meanwhile, had been riding—as Dirk rode with the tidings to Ghent—knowing, but not dwelling on, the danger she encountered as she went—not by the path by which we had ascended, for she knew that would be under water, but along a shooting path on the edge of the ravine—on the Ben Boldre side—where, as it became less steep, there were most houses.

Presently, at the point where the rocks so nearly

came together over the river, she heard a gun, quite near at hand on the other side. She drew her rein for a moment, and gave a loud, shrill cry. The bushes crackled, and Mr. St. Barbe appeared in the dim light on the top of the opposite precipice, startled—afraid for the moment he had hit some one. She pointed back to the water, put her hands to her mouth, and shouted, "The reservoir! It is breaking out!"

"It is! Good heavens, so it is!" as a sudden fierce rush of the water between them confirmed her words. "Shall I go up and see what is to be done?"

"I think it is too late! Warn those on your side!" she said.

"And it is the spring tide! You are right!" he cried, and he rushed down as fast on his side as her pony was bearing her on hers.

The thunderous rush warned her to speed on. She knew that there must soon be a crisis, when the incoming spring tide, which she had forgotten till that moment, but which would be aggravated by the strong, stormy south-wester that was bringing up heavy clouds, would meet the torrent rushing down the valley, and raise a wave of

frightful height, probably beyond all experience. She pressed her pony on, as she thought—she owned—above all, of Emilius Sneyd in that house almost on the beach, feeling as if she had cheated him of his natural protector.

As she came out of the woods, she was on the low ground between Ben Boldre and the river, where the cottages clustered thickly, and further on lay Brackenridge House, with only the garden between it and the river, all shut in by the steep planted side of the hill. With some difficulty and loss of time she roused the cottagers to the danger, and bade the woman at the lodge hasten to the House with the tidings that the reservoir was breaking. The water was beginning to tell its own story, and when she had passed the end of the bridge, she already saw, through the wild beating of the rain, that the sea had risen above the usual mark, and that the waves were rushing in, and running up nearly to the houses on the beach. Her pony was happily used to be ridden up to the tide to be washed, so that she was able to force him on through the confusion, while she made a rush, telling to everyone she saw her terrible fact that the reservoir was breaking, and advising them to leave their houses.

It was not yet dark, and she could make out one house from another, but the wind drove the spray wildly against her, and there was a fearful howling as she struggled on, reiterating her warnings as she went, but not half sure whether she was understood or heeded among the throngs of people, who were used to spring tides, and thought themselves secure. So at last she reached Mrs. Hales's, and found Emilius alone. His landlady had gone out to her daughter an hour or two before, and, as we learned, had not been able to get back, and the poor little fellow's face was at the window, already dashed with thickening spray, watching in terror for his brother, and feeling himself utterly deserted, as indeed he was. "She was more like an angel than ever," he said. Penny durst not open the front door, but called to him to go through the window, go round to open the back door, and take hat and cloak by the way. It was well she did so, for the house made a sort of shelter from the furious lashing of rain and wave, though the water was so rapidly deepening that Penny felt a certainty that what she had dreaded had actually taken place. By the time she, without, and Emilius, within, had reached the door, he told her, with teeth chattering with

alarm, that the water was over the floor, and oh ! where, where was Charles?

Charles was all safe, answered the unconscious Penelope. He was doing all he could to stop the flood, and she had come to save Emil. She would take care of him, but he must let her help him on the pony. How she did it she could not tell, for he was not light, but the people around were far too busy saving themselves and their goods to see or aid anyone else. The darkness too, and the storm, and the deepening water, were utterly confusing and bewildering. But, somehow, Emilius was on the pony's back, she holding him on, with an arm round, and bidding him put an arm round her neck. And so they pushed on, the water up to her knees, and everyone in the dark so rushing and pushing, that there was no small danger of being driven down into the deeper water before they could get to the end of the row, and begin to climb the hill into safety. At last the wall of houses came to an end. They could turn upwards, Penny urging her tired pony through the water with her free hand, and often jostled in the throng ; but she saw lights above her, and struggled upwards, feeling at last the water certainly getting shallower,

though she was almost exhausted, with her drenched skirt clinging about her and dragging her back, and she had to lean heavily against the pony for support, as the brave little thing breasted the hill. Endless did the time seem before they were high enough on the hill-side to be really out of the flood. The lights in the house windows were all they saw, for the gasometer was under water, and the supply cut off. Penny had paused for a moment to consider where she should go, or what she could do with her helpless companion. Her longing was to go home, for, though she knew her father's house to be high and dry, out of reach of either the river or the sea flood, she could not bear to think of the anxiety that would be felt for her. However, she did not believe that she could get home in her present condition, and she was exceedingly anxious for all of us.

Just then the lamps of a carriage were seen, and Dr. Lacy came driving home, gathering intelligence as he went. No sooner did she hear his loud, good-natured voice, pitched in accents of dismay and consternation, than she made herself heard. "Oh! Dr Lacy, would you let me leave Emilius Sneyd with you?" In extreme amaze,

the good doctor called out, "Miss Ryan, is it you?" and came to her side. A few minutes more, and the two were in the warm, hospitable, well-lighted hall, high up on the hill, Mrs. Lacy and Emma coming down in eagerness to help and dry them as the doctor carried in Emilius, whose crutches had been lost in the flood, and who looked more dead than alive when brought into the light. There was no doubt that he ought to be in bed, and thither the doctor took him at once, but Penelope resisted Mrs. Lacy's endeavours to consign her to a like fate. It was utterly impossible, when the fitful glances of the moon through the clouds, as they careered wildly past, revealed from the window the whole gully filled up with water, out of which looked lights in a few windows, and there was a certain mellow red and blue light above the lowest depth which was known to come through the stained windows of the church. Cries and shouts mingled with the thundering of the waves and the roar of the wind and rain, and Penelope found herself the first person to bring a clear idea of what was the cause of the inundation, which had been supposed to be only the effect of tide and the storm. Mrs. Lacy and her girls were terribly

frightened, and could only be convinced by the doctor's assurances that they were out of reach of the flood, and they implored him not to leave them when he was about to set off to see whether he could be of use, and what had become of their friends.

Penelope, in Emma's clothes, was just coming downstairs, when she heard her father's voice at the door, and was with him in a bound.

He could hardly believe in his exceeding joy when, in life and limb, she flew into his arms.

"My brave, good girl," he called her. "Thank God! my child, you have saved many lives to-night. Thank God that you are spared to us."

The doctor was ready to go at once to young Sneyd. He said that his time for being of use at Poppleton would not come till morning, and as Emilius was safe in bed, and shut up for the night, there was no need that he should know anything till the morning. So his brougham was brought round, and Penelope went back with him to her mother, through the splashing lanes. One view they had when the moon shone out brightly for a moment as they turned the shoulder of the hill. It was a very awful one. It showed them the whole

space between the hills filled up with tossing, tumbling waters, only the church tower, with its lights, standing up on the island.

"Oh! I did bless God for those lights," said Penny.

Mr. Ryan rode on before, with the tidings that filled his house with thankfulness. Mrs. Ryan was soon hanging round her daughter in tears of joy, and Charles Sneyd, who had refused to leave the sofa for his bed, and had been lying there in an anguish of mind which almost extinguished that of his bodily frame, sprang up as she came into the room. She was at his side in an instant. "He is safe," she said. "Emil is quite safe. But oh! that I should have left you to that wretch."

Charles held out his hand to her, and fainted away.





CHAPTER X.

A MIDNIGHT VESTRY.


SUSAN says I have so arranged this last chapter that anyone would think we had been swept away in the flood. However, that we are here to tell the tale is owing in great measure, under Providence, first, to that dear Penelope's race for life and death, and then to Stephen St. Barbe.

We were taking it all quietly. No spring-tide had ever come above the level of that little terrace of ours, and so we had shut out the wild dreariness of the evening with our shutters, and our tea was on the table, instead of the late dinner we had been having to please our young gentleman. The whole world seemed full of strange howls and noises of waves and winds, which had made us put up a silent prayer for poor creatures in perils of waters,

without guessing how this was already our own case, when we suddenly heard a loud roar, and were debating whether it was thunder, or whether it was not too continuous. Just then our door was opened, and Mr. St. Barbe stood there, having come in from the kitchen, and in three rapid words he bade us lose no time, but take anything warm, or any food we could, with us, for we must spend the night in the church.

Something Susan said of "the others," and "Winifred." "I'm here," answered Winifred, from the passage. "I was getting Rebekah to fetch some blankets and rugs."

I believe Susan asked what it was, and was told reservoir and spring-tide, but all I am sure of was, that I heard a surge of waters against the window, and that we reached the back-door in haste, servants and all, to find the house standing in a sheet of water. It had risen even in the few moments since Mr. St. Barbe and Winifred had come in. They had come dry-shod ; now, the first step was over the ankles—not that I took it, for the next moment I found myself, with the cat in one arm and my bird-cage in the other, raised in Mr. St. Barbe's strong arms, and carried up the hill to the church-



yard. We had only just reached the porch, and he had just set me down, when in a gleam of moon-shine we saw the most awful sight I ever beheld. The Boldre, swelled to a great river, was rushing down, already submerging the bridge, when, meeting it, in there came the full force of the sea. It was half-past seven, the flood-tide—and there rose between river and sea an awful wall-like, foaming, crested thing—a monstrous ridge or wave, higher, higher, higher, seeming to come forward as if it would devour everything. I don't think it exactly *broke* so much as *spread*, but the light was so fitful one could hardly tell. It was a tremendous struggle between the incoming wave and outcoming flood from the moorland, the pent-up waters of the lake rushing down. No wonder our forefathers knew such awful waves as the avenging sea-god's chariot. In one more minute, perhaps, the water had risen almost to its level, and was heaving almost up to the top of the churchyard steps, where Dora and Mary Morland stood with their servants. There were only eight steps uncovered, but Mr. St. Barbe told us that he did not think that the waters could run much higher. The whole gorge around us was choked with rushing, tumbling, struggling waters,

sea-waves being pushed back by the force of the down-coming currents, and both together eddying, swirling, sweeping along. Only the roof and chimneys of our low two-storied cottage appeared below our feet. The churchyard was one island above the two huge rivers that made the quiet cove into a fierce estuary. Fragments of cottage roofs, and of stacks of turf, came rushing, tossing, and eddying in the flood, and some poor drowned sheep and pigs; but Mr. St. Barbe said that, thanks to Penny's warning, he had little fear but that the people had had time to escape. It is odd to remember the first thing people say in "supreme moments." His was, "There! I never saw anything to equal that!" And Susan's, "Then Edward was right after all! He really was the cleverest." While Rebekah wailed aloud, "My carpets, my poor carpets;" and a corresponding moan came from the Waltons' cook, "And Mr. St. Barbe's dinner!" But it was Winifred who cried, "Oh! the Arrowsmiths. Can anyone see their house?"

"Penny was sure to warn them," said Mr. St. Barbe. "They would have time." "I see some lights where their windows are," added Mary. Winifred, meantime, was trying to comfort the

sobbing, frightened maids, and showing them where to put their burdens down.

Then came clouds blotting out the moon ; a roaring wind and spray dashing at the wall. Susan cried that it would be my death of cold, and we all retreated into the church, of which a key had happily been in the Rectory. Mr. St. Barbe assured us that we were safe there. It was at least four feet, he reckoned, above the present level of the water, and, lighting a candle, and comparing his watch with the almanac in the vestry, he assured us that the tide had reached its height, and he thought the reservoir had done its worst. We did feel wonderfully protected by him, and the perfect coolness he displayed, together with his extreme kindness.

“Is everyone here ?” he asked, and candles were lighted that we might count heads. Winifred, the two Morlands, and their four maids ; from Captain Walton’s house, three maids and a rheumatic old butler ; from ours, our two selves, and Rebekah and the cook. The girl under training slept at home. We could only fear for her. All the cats and dogs were safe ; Mr. St. Barbe himself had brought up Winny’s doves, as he dashed through the temporary

abode to the Rectory, calling the servants ; his horses were at his own stables. Every live thing, except perhaps the poor cocks and hens at the Rectory, was in our refuge, and with foundations deep in the rock, we had no fear of being washed away ; only Mary Morland exclaimed, "Old Moddy Harmer !" and then we recollected that on the point of the end of the bridge, between Delta Lodge, there was a cottage, in which dwelt a solitary old pew-opener, by name Modesty Harmer, with no kith or kin likely to come to her rescue.

It was a fantastic Swiss-cottage-looking place, luckily with two stories, but built only of wood, and rough cast, and in great danger of being swept away. "O for a boat !" said the young Squire. He had thought of one, but had rightly feared to take the time necessary for opening the boat-house, and now of course it was swamped. From the north chancel door he satisfied himself that there was a light still burning in that direction, and then said he must make a raft.

There were still half-a-dozen high pews, his own among the number—Mr. Morland's despair ; with a dexterity born of his many adventures, he unshipped their doors. Winifred and Dora brought

forward from under the tower that frame on which coffins are laid over a grave, and the ropes for lowering; for though there is a cemetery on the hill, there are a few occasional funerals in our church.

He lashed all together in true sailor fashion, saying, with a smile, that he had crossed rivers on rafts in Africa, and had been in a wreck. We looked on in something like awe, most of the maids in floods of tears, the three girls excited, and trying to be helpful. Dora and Mary went up to the ringers' chamber and brought down two coils of rope, offering if needful to cut the bell-ropes, while Winifred gave efficient help as a holder.

The handle of the Turk's-head broom, a long pole used for lighting the corona, and the staff of St. Barbara's banner, were brought forward for his choice. None were as strong as could be wished, but he chose the last, unless he could find something better outside. Here Dora recollected that her brothers had stored away some oars in the coach-house, which stood above the Rectory, and could be reached by wading. With a candle in his hand to light when he reached the place, Mr. St. Barbe made the expedition, and brought back two oars and a boat-hook. He was going to fasten

the spare oar as best he could to the raft, when Winifred said, "Let me have that; I know how to punt."

He turned round in amazement, and there was a short colloquy of dissuasion and insistance. She said he could never get the old woman on the raft without help, and he could not deny that it would be difficult; but—how could he think of allowing her to run any risk? Suppose—

"You don't think—you don't think," cried Winifred at last, in an agony, "how much worse it would be to see you and be left behind."

"Do you mean *that*, Winifred?" he said, looking full at her, as the colour mounted in her face. "Then, indeed, we will make our voyage together, and, by God's blessing, it shall be for life."

It was a shame to have heard, but I was sitting by in an open seat, and could not help it. Winifred was already tied up with a hood-like handkerchief over her head, bound tight down to a sleeved waterproof, which she had belted round her waist. Her skirts were tucked up, and she looked thoroughly ready, and there was a wonderful light and resolution in her face, though I don't know whether she realised more than that she was accepted to dare the peril

with him, and not see him set out alone. But when, for one moment, she bent her knee, and put her hands over her face, he did the same—as if it were an after-thought, indeed, but most willingly—and then took her hand.

They had to take the raft out through the great west door. The moon was out again, and it was just striking nine. The two girls and some of the servants went down to see them launch their frail bark, and watch them; but one of the Walton maids was crying so violently and hysterically about her young lady being drowned, and no one stopping her, that we had to hush her by any means we could. Praying for the dear child was, indeed, all that could be done; but, strangely enough, the doing it seemed to fill the poor foolish young thing with despair, and as her sobs and cries broke out afresh, Rebekah pounced on her to come and light the fire in the vestry, and have something warm ready against they came back. This roused Susan to a sense of the need of attending to creature comforts, and they went off to review their stores, leaving me alone in the chancel. How strange it all looked and felt! One candle had been lighted in the choir stalls near me, but it was quite unable to cope with

the darkness, making it, indeed, almost more visible, as one faintly traced the outline of the great chancel arch. One pillar had a strong gleam of light which fell on the floor, the rest of the nave was utterly undiscernible; but from time to time a long ray of moonlight came slanting in from the south corner of the great east window upon the floor, making the contrast the greater, and seeming to be snatched away one moment—then restored, but paled—then bright, then gone. The while came the howling whistling roar of the wind, the thunder and splash of the waves and waters, the shrieking of the storm round the tower. They drowned the sounds from the town, which the girls outside in the churchyard heard plainly enough. Presently, Mary ran in to tell me that the raft was safe over the current that set down the stream, Mr. St. Barbe punting with his oar, Winifred making a helm of hers. Then Mary ran back to her post of observation, but only to be driven in by a gust, with rain on its wings, which had nearly borne away the watchers. The light was out—what did that mean?

They stood at the door watching, and the moment the rain abated, dashed forward again!

Oh, what might not that blast have done? A few minutes more—most terrible ones—and there was a rush to the door. “All right! they are coming in—we are to throw them a rope.” In this they had been instructed, and as the whole native population had somewhat of the needful knowledge and dexterity, the rope was thrown, the raft hauled in, and there appeared in the little doorway Dora and Mary supporting the old woman between them, drenched, poor old thing, and utterly bewildered, mumbling something about the blessed young lady and gentleman. Indeed, I am not sure that she did not think she was dead when she found herself in the church. Behind came Mr. St. Barbe and Winifred, each bearing an oar, dripping wet indeed, but oh! with such radiant faces. They had been really just in time. One side of the flimsy cottage had given way with a crash, just as they were about to steer up to it, the light had been extinguished, and only Moddy’s screams had assured them that she had not gone with it. Without Winifred to help her on board, while Mr. St. Barbe kept the raft steady, Moddy could hardly have been saved, since the plan of mooring the raft to the gallery had failed. There had been a narrow escape, too,

from a floating tree—otherwise all had been, as Winny said, “quite delightful,” and I verily believe it was so. I never saw more joyous eyes return from a voyage on the smoothest sea on the finest day. She was not even wet under her wraps, and Mr. St. Barbe was only looking for some one to whom to describe how brave and dextrous she had been.

Susan and Rebekah here insisted that everyone should come into the vestry. I was glad to leave those two young people lingering in the church for a moment behind the rest. I think there were bended knees there; but in another minute we were all round the vestry table, where, Robinson Crusoe fashion, were the resources of our desert island. The fire was burning, and there was a big scuttle of coal, enough to last till morning. There was a tea-kettle full of water, two teapots full, three loaves, a cold tongue, three parts of a cold leg of mutton, and a decanter of claret; also, one tumbler, and no knives at all. It was nine o'clock, and everybody had missed their evening meal, by whatever name they called it, except indeed old Moddy, who always went to bed with the sun. She had had the first turn of the tumbler with the

hottest claret and water, which, I believe, she thought very nasty. Susan wanted to dose Wini-fred with the like, but she scorned needing anything extra.

Mr. St. Barbe's pocket-knife, which had done good service with the ropes already, came into play. I fancy it was well used to cutting miscellaneous food. He said it was the one thing he had not been able to give up to his good friend the negro chief, with the name of seven syllables beginning with *Ng*, and he rather thought he had been nearly murdered for it by the Arabs of Bashan.

Each had a hunch of bread and some slices of meat, and the tumbler was passed round. Each began with wine, and ended, after the food, with tea; and as we were sure of relief in the morning, we did not put ourselves upon rations. We were in very good spirits on the whole, for we accepted Mr. St. Barbe's assurance that there was no need to fear for life, and as to the state of our houses, we would not think about it. Indeed, there was exhilaration enough in the sight of those two beaming faces to carry us through a great deal, and Mary, as she sat with feet dangling on the end

of the great vestry table, pronounced this "the jolliest fun she had ever had." Her sister was not slow to reprove her, and the dread of a Morland squabble made me propose what I had been thinking of, that Dora should play the organ and let us sing, "Eternal Father, strong to save;" then to beg Mr. St. Barbe to read one or two prayers and thanksgivings for us. He hung back at the notion, more from shyness than anything else; and when he found that Winifred really wished it, he complied.

Then, as nothing more could well be done, Susan insisted on everyone lying down and trying to get some sleep. She was very anxious about me, but this was not the kind of wind that hurt me; so I was really quite well, and was ashamed of being the first object of care—after poor old Moddy. They made me up a sumptuous couch with rugs and cushions in the great St. Barbe pew, and there—little as I expected it—I slept till dawning daylight.



CHAPTER XI.

VERY WATERY.


WHEN I awoke, the first thing I heard was, that Mr. St. Barbe had been out while the tide was at the ebb, had secured the boat, baled her out, and moored her up to the churchyard gate. Storm and darkness had hindered his doing any more then, and he had come in and slept till noon, when he, with the young ladies, had all gone up to the top of the church tower to take a survey, before deciding on what ought to be done.

Presently he came down, declaring that it was the most wonderful sight that had ever been seen, and we must come up and look at it ; yes, even I—it was worth my while, and he undertook—kind man that he was—to get me up.

And he did ! And I am glad of it, for it was

indeed a scene marvellous to remember. The sky had cleared in the last and most furious storm, and, though there was a very high wind, was cloudless. The sun was just rising behind Barbe Torr, bringing out the rocky crest in a hazy glory of purple, against a golden background shading into blue above; and the sea responded, all shimmering, splashing gold to the eastward, then green, then blue, but everywhere rising into white-crested waves, all running and breaking in towards us, for the tide was again coming in, driven rapidly by the wind.

Northward were the purple moors. The ravine was still full of turbid, muddy water. It had indeed sunk a good deal during the night, but there was a broad river still on each side of us, and only the topmost crown of the bridge could be seen. Our poor cottage stood in water up to the door-step, and would soon have another flood in it, and merely the roofs of the lowest row of houses on the beach could be seen. A few men were going about in boats, though with much difficulty, for the strife between the river and the ocean had begun to rage again, though less furiously, and the little boats seemed to dance up and down like cockle-shells—



now rising, now falling, on the great breakers that were rolling in. The rush, dash, and tumble was of course at its worst around this island of ours, and I do not believe anybody could have reached us from the town, as the wave rose higher and higher.

There was a torn, washed, dragged look about the trees, many branches broken, many strange things sticking in them, and stranded on the Rectory garden, whither Dora proposed an expedition, but was advised to the contrary by Mr. St. Barbe, who said no one could guess whether the *bore* might not again rise suddenly and perilously. I have described all this before what we really looked at first of all, and with most anxious eyes, namely, Brackenridge. The house was there, but the water reached even now above the ground floor windows, for the walled garden seemed to have ponded it back upon them. We had trusted that there had been full time for the family to have made their escape, but even as we gazed, we beheld a handkerchief waved from one of the attic windows.

We knew we were visible on the church tower, and waved back again, while Mr. St. Barbe and Winifred both at once exclaimed that they would

take the boat to their help. "But see," cried Dora, "there is a boat going to them—a big one—putting out from Prospect Terrace, where they won't have to cross the current as you would from here. You won't have all the heroism, Winny."

We saw—moreover those in the boat saw us, and waved salutations to us, and as it moved forwards into fuller view, we perceived with sudden joy that it was steered by Mr. Ryan, and that one of the rowers was our nephew Edward. They were trying to shout to us, but the wind carried away their voices, though a mighty cheer and "All's well," from Mr. St. Barbe, and a vivid pantomime, pointing to us, must have set Edward's mind at rest respecting us.

Mr. St. Barbe persisted that he should go across and help, desiring Winifred, however, not to come, as she would only be another person to fill up the boat, and the Arrowsmith household was a large one. "And," said he, as his head vanished through the little door, "I shall try to get them, as well as all of you, to come up to my place."

Indeed he had arranged all this with Susan in the evening. The commencement of the work at his house had been deferred by delays of builders,

and part was still habitable, the furniture not having been as yet removed ; and, as he had earnestly represented to her, it would be much better for the whole island company to take up their abode there, servants and all, while investigating the damage, and getting their houses into order. She had given a sort of consent, chiefly for my sake, I think ; but at this moment we were absorbed in watching the big boat carefully making its way over the curious shoals and snags of out-houses, trees, and bushes up to the windows of the house, while the little boat from our island, under Mr. St. Barbe's vigorous strokes, went up stream a little way, breasting the current, then crossed it, and reached the windows not much later. It was a curious sight to watch, with breathless anxiety, first one little girl, then the other, handed down into Edward's outstretched arms, then maid after maid. Miss Coles and some servants meanwhile were taken in by Mr. St. Barbe, and they moved off, not to us, but towards the town, whence the large boat had started. No doubt it was both safer and better for them, as they needed refreshments we could not give, but it was disappointing.

Before the boats came back, the crisis of the

tidal wave had raised the water to the very verge of the windows, and made our house a sorry spectacle again, but we thought little of anything then but the flutter of a handkerchief from the Brackenedge windows. Here were the boats again, and now at last Lettice was to be seen, then men-servants, and finally, Mr. Arrowsmith. Staunch old man! He had stuck to his ship to the last! We saw him shake hands with Edward, and then all again went through the shoals to their landing-place; but after a brief interval, during which the waters, though very high, were growing calmer every minute, Mr. St. Barbe and Edward came merrily rowing back to us.

We hastened down to meet them at the porch, to which they came laden with such viands as they had been able to procure at the first baker's and grocer's shop.

"Another vestry picnic," Mr. St. Barbe said, "and then I'll take you across, ladies. Ryan will meet us with his carriage at the first place possible in a couple of hours' time."

Then they answered whether everybody was safe. Yes, under Providence, thanks to that brick, Penny! And we heard how she had saved Emilius

Sneyd, and had scattered her warnings far and wide, so that nobody was, as yet, known to be missing.

As to the Arrowsmiths, the woman at the lodge had fulfilled her orders, and had come up to the kitchen with the tidings, and the solemn butler had entered the dining-room, and, as he set down the soup, had gravely said, "Sir, Mrs. Brown has come in with the information that the reservoir is commencing to bust, sir."

"The reservoir! Nonsense! Who said so?" asked Mr. Arrowsmith.

"It was Miss Ryan, sir, who rode down to the lodge with the information."

On which Mr. Arrowsmith set it down as simple nonsense of Penny's, and reproved his daughter for her panic, declaring that, if anything was the matter with the reservoir, it was the fault of those who had not been content to let it alone.

So they went on with their dinner, in spite of gurglings and rushes that made Lettice very uneasy, until the little girls rushed in to say that the water was out all over the garden. Next came the servants, driven up by the flood from the kitchen, and before long the water spoke for itself, and sent them all to the stairs, where that great

Egre, or tidal wave, that we had seen from the churchyard, had been so pent in by the sides of the valley, that it had actually driven them to the roof, where they had spent the first half of the night upon the leads, crouching under blankets and rugs against the chimneys (a very undesirable form of chimney corner), and at times feeling the whole rock ominously. When, at the ebb, they had ventured to the attics, they found them dry enough for the shivering children to be put into their cribs, and some of the nursery appliances revived poor chilled Mr. Arrowsmith, who had groaned many times, "Heaven help me; this is my doing!"

As to Edward's appearance on the scene, it was accounted for by the weather having made him so uneasy that the dear fellow had resolved to come down by the last train to see about us. At Warchester, he met the tidings of the outbreak of the reservoir, and had made his way across to the town with great difficulty, falling in with Mr. Ryan on the way. They found the town in helpless and dire confusion, such that no one had any clear idea of how their neighbours had fared, and Bracken-edge had been absolutely forgotten. So it really

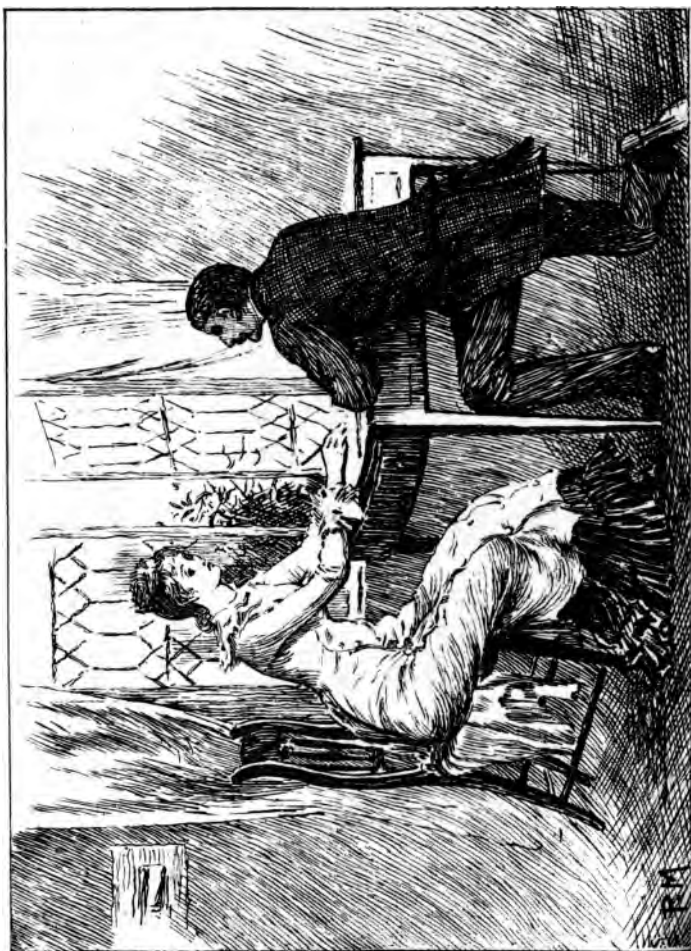
was as a rescuer that Edward appeared to poor Mr. Arrowsmith, who had, like the straightforward old man he was, received him with, "Ah! Webster, if I had heeded you!" Moreover, worn out and spent as Lettice was with attending to the needs of father and sisters through the dreadful night, her bonnie brown eyes seemed to say that the joy of the morning made up for all.

So our vestry breakfast was as cheerful as it was odd, and after it, Mr. St. Barbe ferried us over in divisions, all except the Morlands, who expected soon to have their lower story clear enough to be entered. Nothing could be done in either of the other two till the ebb, so the servants, who were beginning to get very miserable, were put over first, to meet the keeper's wife, and make what preparations they could for us, and then we crossed, and were driven to Barbe Torr House by Mr. Ryan. He said his wife was sorry not to be there to meet us, but poor young Sneyd was very feverish and in a good deal of pain, and she could not leave him wholly to Penny to nurse. Certainly not. But whereas it was the first time we had ever heard of any cautious scruples at all on her part, it rather startled me, as a discovery that she

had suddenly made that her daughter was neither a boy nor a baby.

Under any other circumstances, perhaps, we should have thought Barbe Torr House worthy of being pulled down and refurnished—very fusty and very faded, the ugliest and weakest parts being the most modern, *i.e.*, of George IV.'s time ; but we were too thankful for a return to civilised life at all to be very critical, and everything *did* seem delightful, in the odd freedom of the time. That four-poster, with its white counterpane and dull green and yellow draperies, looked very inviting after a night in a family pew ! And one was too glad to wash one's face at all to be critical about the landscape in the bottom of the basin. My sister wanted me to occupy that same four-poster, when she set off on her return to see after our household goods, but I was far too anxious to put myself out of the reach of intelligence, and came down to the library, which was by far the most habitable room.

Winifred was at the writing table, Mr. St. Barbe kneeling on one knee by her. I believe they had no ink, and only one pencil between them, and an ancient sheet of quarto paper. Perhaps we came



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in too soon, but then we must have come some time or other, and it would have always been too soon! However, we felt frightfully shy, and tried to carry it off by asking Winny if she was sending her parents an account of the catastrophe.

"Ah! poor mamma," she said, blushing, smiling, and trying to look sorry.

"I wonder you don't wait till you can tell her the extent of the damage."

"I shall do that when I have been down to see about it," said Winifred; "but—but we—that is, Mr. St.—Stephen—thought it better to send off a letter by this post, in case it should be mentioned in the *Times*, and we can't telegraph, because I am not sure where they are."

He had got hold of the pencil while she was speaking, as inconsequently as Penny, and in a moment or two had finished. "There," he said, "you'll do it better now alone. Get rested, you know. Miss Frances, make her rest before she comes down. Now, Miss Webster, I am at your service."


So they went, and as soon as the door had shut, Winny looked up at me, and then—just like any girl who was *not* a member of nine societies—

exclaimed, "Oh, Miss Frances, it was just here I saw him first!"

"The literary housemaid, and a very pretty one! How glad he must have been to find it wasn't a *lulus naturæ*!"

I wanted to know what had passed, but of course could not ask, more than whether *that* note which lay on the table was from him to her father. And then it came out that so it was. She had found him searching everywhere for ink and pen, and he had told her at once the cause of his need. He said—oh! he said—he had loved her ever since the literary housemaid day, and "Oh, he need not have told me," said Winny; "I felt something I never felt before, whenever I found his eyes on me, or he spoke to me! Oh! Miss Frances, I had always thought I was too disagreeable and dried-up for any living creature to care one rush for me. Nobody ever did before! And that it should be he! Oh, it is so sweet to know and feel it!"

Yes, indeed. She had been an absolutely different being ever since that sun of love had risen upon her, hungering and withered for the lack of even family love. I asked whether she had guessed




what was coming, and she said, no; she had only felt so very, very happy, like treading upon air, and only fearing something must disturb it—until that answer of his about going on the raft together. Then the whole revelation came in one flash. This was—as I really believe—the only formal offer he ever made, save and except the writing that letter before her eyes. Ah! it was a fine thing to see anything so fearlessly, undoubtingly happy, with no fears of any objection on anyone's side, and all smooth before them—means, connection, and all, as suitable as could possibly be, even if Stephen St. Barbe had had any relations to have been consulted. Captain Walton was the younger son of a family of the same county honours as his own, and his wife was well connected, and had a fair fortune. And as for their unlikeness in a turn for intellectual pursuits, that gave me no uneasiness. Mr. St. Barbe was very far from being a fool. The playtime of his life had been spent blamelessly, and in learning by actual experience much that others learn from books, and he had shown himself ready to take up work and duty when he found it before him. His solid reality was one of the very points that had attracted Winifred, when weary of

shallow glitter, and she would care little if her parents did think him a young barbarian.

By-and-by Mr. St. Barbe gravitated back to his magnet, to tell her that the house was clear of water, and to ask if she could come and tell what was to be done about the locked drawers where the water rattled; and away she went with him, scolding herself for not being able to care more for all the treasures so dear to her parents, leaving me to a little qualm of something like jealousy, as I thought how easy things were to some people and how hard to others, and likewise to a few fears as to how Penny would take it—Penny, the playfellow of his boyhood, and whose familiar manner with him had caused Miss Dove and Co. to say, all these weeks, that she was running after him.

Penelope herself appeared, when, in spite of all the excitement, I had fallen fast asleep over the letter I was trying to write to my brother with *the* pencil. Her looks did not reassure me, for she was pale, tired, and had no rattle about her. Her mother had sent her to see whether we wanted anything that could be supplied from her house, and I fancied she had not come very willingly. She said Mr. Sneyd was suffering a good deal, and



though Dr. Lacy said he would soon be better, Emilius was so wretched about him that they could not keep him in the same room. His crutches had not yet been replaced, and he felt his helplessness exceedingly. Penny did not want to leave him long to himself. Mother was doing everything in the sick-room, but she had the wants of the houseless to provide for, and she had, besides, been shocked by hearing that the flood had not been entirely harmless to human life. Some idle-children who had been trespassing in the ravine had never been seen again, and were thought to have been carried out to sea ; and a poor little boy, a special favourite of Penny's, whom for his health's sake she had rescued from the mine to work in the Brackenridge gardens, had been found drowned in his bed. in a little house attached to the conservatory.

It had grieved Penelope very much, though of all people she was the one who had least to reproach herself with. Her ride had saved many from the like fate, and would have saved this little lad, if Mr. Arrowsmith would have taken the alarm.

She was sobered and toned down altogether, and

I wondered whether she had heard the news; and I knew I ought not to tell before the father or mother had heard it. But I found she was in the same doubt, for when I asked her to take back the letter and bestow on it an envelope and an address in ink, she said, "As I did to Steffie's and Winnie's." That was a feeler, and then the laugh came into her eyes again, and I allowed mine to respond. She said in her own droll way, "Ah, well! The Princess's experiment ended in a drowning scandal. It is the way of such things. Dear Winny. The capital for all of us, isn't it?"

She was hearty about it. Nobody could doubt that she was hearty and affectionate, but I could not make it entirely out, for I was sure she was sad and uneasy, and that was altogether a contrast to the joyous way in which we had all taken the disasters. Did the illness in her house, the sorrow she had heard of and seen, account sufficiently for all? or was her maidenly pride rallying to her disappointment she could not entirely conquer? Yet the simplicity and absence of all flightiness in her demeanour made me hope otherwise, though I never hit on the right explanation, in spite of wondering over it till our own party returned.

with doleful stories of ruined carpets and papers, of soaked cushions and salted stores, but very cheerful over them, considering all things. Susan said she had never realised that a flood would not be a clean one, for our poor rooms were full of a mixture contributed from the kitchen garden above and the beach-refuse below. "But," she resolutely said, "we meant to new-paper next year, and the dear old blue brocade was so shabby, that it is a very good thing that it is done for."

Winifred's chief fear was that her parents would much mourn for their pictures—now water-colours indeed. She had brought up the portfolios with her to spread the contents on the floor in empty rooms, but they were melancholy spectacles. The other curiosities were happily less susceptible of harm. Mr. and Mrs. Morland had come home in exceeding anxiety, and had found that they had suffered comparatively little. They meant to sleep at home, but had consented to come up to dinner at Barbe Torr. This had been procured from Warchester, and was in a style of which our dresses were by no means worthy. Every rag we possessed, except what we had on, was hanging up somewhere to dry!

Nevertheless, there never was a more cheerful dinner party. We were relieved of fears for our friends. Miss Dove had been horribly terrified, though the water had come no higher than her cellars ; and the worst of it was, as she said, that she had been forced to consent to Maisie's offering an asylum to Mrs. Parnell and her daughters, whom she had always treated as mere bowing acquaintances ; but she had been very kind to them, and would have kept them another night, if their relations, the Harcombes of Warchester, had not claimed them.

The loss of property had been considerable, especially Mr. Arrowsmith's, but there had been so many merciful escapes, that Mr. Morland said he should make a special thanksgiving service on the morrow.

And a nice, quiet, calming Sunday it was. The river was only a little fuller than usual, and it was hard to believe how it had raged only two days ago. We resolved not to look at any of our spoilt goods, and kept our resolution, to our own peace and that of others.



CHAPTER XII.

AFTER THE DELUGE.

THE great event of the ensuing day was the inquest on poor little George Thompson. His corpse alone had been found, though there was no doubt of the little idlers having perished. The inquest sat in the largest room of the hotel, and was attended by all our gentlemen, and many besides. Mr. Arrowsmith came over from Warchester, whither he had gone the day after the flood with all his family, but he looked very sad and shaken, hardly fit to come out, and said he had a sick household for that. Lettice alone seemed unhurt by the exposure. There was something very brave and noble in his thus coming, for it was in the determination to confront to the uttermost the consequences of the obstinacy which he so bitterly

rued. The tears came into his eyes when people came and shook hands with him, and he made Edward come and sit by him.

Of course the gist of the matter was the enquiry why the Boldre had overflowed. That the boy had been drowned was certain, but the coroner went back to the original construction and security of the reservoir, and how it had come to communicate with the Boldre. Mr. Arrowsmith then said that his attention had been called by Mr. Webster to the leakage into the cavern.

Edward, who had meant if possible not to come forward, had to describe in detail the appearances he had seen in the cavern, and the conclusion he had formed that the water was eating its way under the embankment, and would soon open a way into Gaffer's Hole, and thence into the gully of the Boldre. Mr. St. Barbe corroborated this, and when the Directors of the Company were asked why they had taken no notice of the warning, Mr. Arrowsmith was the first to express his regret that he had supposed that this leakage was merely the drip so common in limestone caverns. Then as Edward had not said so, the generous old man added that he had pooh-poohed his young friend's

modern science, which had shown that the water of the pool was not impregnated with lime, as such oozings would have been.

The next evidence was that of one of the miners who had been summoned by Miss Ryan, and had come too late to do any good, but had found the young philosopher, as they called him, lying unconscious on the bank, and Mr. Philip Harcombe with the iron bar in his hand, daring anyone to touch the hatches. He should say Mr. Harcombe was not sober.

An attorney who was watching the case for the Harcombes began to be on the alert, and obtained leave to demand whether this evidence were to the point as to how George Thompson came by his death. The coroner decided that it was, since it had already appeared that the danger of excess of water in the reservoir was provided for by the opening of these flood-gates, which let it off towards Harcombe.

Who was in charge of the gates? Mr. Harcombe was responsible, and the person actually in charge was Thomas Wall, who, being called on, said he was coming home from work on Mr. Harcombe's farm-yard at the time, and described the

state in which he had left the gates. Knew the rules were to open them when the water stood at a certain height. Why were they not opened? The master said they were not to be till Combe Meadow was fed off.

Miss Penelope Ryan—with her cheeks dyed to the deepest red—gave a clear account of her finding the water visibly oozing through, as Mr. Webster had foretold, and her immediate endeavour to draw off some of the water, and give warning. She had tried knocking and calling at Wall's cottage in vain. She had then seen Mr. Sneyd coming, had shown him what to do, and then ridden off to give warning.

She sat down, with the thanks and compliments of the coroner, who told her that his melancholy duty would have been far more onerous but for her promptness and courage.

The Harcombes—father and son—appeared in no satisfactory light. They defended their habit of only opening the hatches when it suited their convenience, and maintained that it had done no harm until the cavern was meddled with and openings made, no doubt to the injury of the reservoir, by the curiosity of strangers. Philip

Harcombe knew he had knocked the fellow down who was meddling with the hatches. He did so in anger, since much mischievous and impertinent interference had lately taken place.

In fact he was under a summons for the assault, which Mr. Ryan had caused to be served on him, but the case had been put off from Saturday's petty sessions because Mr. Sneyd was not well enough to appear. The allegation against the alarmists could, however, be easily confuted by the miner and Mr. St. Barbe, as well as Edward, who could prove that not a stone had been loosened, not a sod disturbed, in embankment or in cavern. Indeed, when Mr. St. Barbe would have done so, he had been withheld by the others, lest greater harm than he knew should be done. The discovery of the danger had been entirely based on the testing of the water of the drip, which had been shown to be the same with the spring water of the reservoir, not the lime-impregnated water of the other pools of the cave.

There were two more questions—one, as to the difference that the opening of the flood-gates would have made to the height of the inundation ; and the other, how far the spring tide had swelled the

flood. For on this, the coroner observed when he instructed the jury, depended the actual cause of the boy's death, and it would rest with them whether to bring in such a verdict as would lead to further proceedings against the Harcombes for manslaughter, as well as the damage that had been caused.

The verdict returned was, however, only "accidentally drowned," because it was really uncertain whether the opening of the hatches at the last moment would have done any appreciable good in lessening the mass of water, and likewise whether the tide had not really been what made the overflow fatal in this individual case. Still, strong censure was expressed of the careless management of the reservoir by Mr. Harcombe, and still more of the conduct of his son. Both might be liable to an action for all the injury done to property.

So ended the inquest. Whitmarsh and Gardiner had sent down an important member of their firm to give evidence on the construction, and to watch the proceedings, and the first thing he did when they were over, was to beg for an interview with Edward, and offer him, on behalf of his company,

very handsome terms for the superintendence of the repairs, and of the new arrangements to be made for the water-supply of Warchester. "In fact," he said, "your fortune is as good as made. Such a hit as that is not forgotten."

"There, Aunt Frances," said our boy, "that's what I owe to the Blue-bell Society."

He found us on our island. I could not stay away from the investigation of all our properties. Every drawer had to be turned out. Luckily, it was a fine sunny day, and we could spread things out in the garden. Winifred was superintending the like employment in her own domains, and talking to us over the hedge, when we saw some figures coming over the bridge, which had been too much shaken to be used by wheel-carriages for the present. We called Winifred, who descended by the new-fashioned stile, consisting of a chair on either side of the boundary wall, and, flying forward, was clasped with passionate joy by her parents.

They had been told at the *table d'hôte* on Saturday at Genoa of a telegram that the Warchester reservoir had overflowed, with terrible loss of life. They had been travelling day and night in dread-

ful anxiety. It had been so far mitigated, on their arrival at Warchester, that it was known at the station that only one body had been found, and no one of any name or note had been lost; but a negative was hardly enough to satisfy parents who had left a daughter without any natural protector in what they knew to be the centre of the danger. All the apparent coldness had been swept away by the alarm, and in their joy when Winifred stood between them in life and health, there was a cure for ever for the sense of being unloved. Even when she said, "I am so sorry; there was not one moment to take down the pictures, and the frescoes are almost washed away," the answer was, "Oh, my dear child, I can't think about frescoes or anything else, now I find you safe."

The three sat all together, Winifred in the middle, on my sofa, which was out drying in the garden, and there they were, when again figures were seen on the bridge, and this time the sight brought Winifred's colour into her cheeks, and made her say, "You didn't get our—the letter!"

No. That wonderful pencil letter was *poste restante* still, if, indeed, it had reached its post office. So Mr. St. Barbe had his own tale to tell,

and, in process of time, Captain Walton strolled up to me as I sat busy over some of the scattered fragments of our properties. "Well, Miss Webster," he said, "our island has had its 'Tempest,' and our 'Tempest' its fit conclusion. 'I, too, have lost a daughter.'"

"And to the Prince!" I said. "I congratulate you."

He bowed, and replied with a careless kind of irony, "Well, yes, I suppose so. The native Prince has a certain distinction."

I believe he wanted me to apply "the native Prince" to Caliban, and to protest, but I would not give him that satisfaction. They were always affected people, and both Susan and I thought that they were depreciating their son-in-law to obviate all suspicion of satisfaction in such an advantageous marriage. "Of course, if Winifred likes it, we can have nothing to say," quoth Mrs. Walton in her turn; "but between ourselves, Miss Webster, though Winifred has never had any artistic taste or feeling, I should have expected something more refined and intellectual. Are you quite sure the dear child is not making a mistake—carried along a little by the romance of that night? Will she find

him a companion, after what she has been used to?"

I satisfied her of my opinion on that score, and told her that I was convinced that Mr. St. Barbe's sunburnt neck was the only unrefined thing about him, and that he was an able, clear-headed, sensible man.

"I am delighted to hear you say so. I am an ungrateful mother, am I not? to pour out all these misgivings on you, instead of—as most mammas would—thanking you for this brilliant achievement as a chaperon. But, you see, she is my only child, and I do not look on these things in the ordinary point of view."

I could have shaken her—above all, when presently she observed, "Really, if that good man had had any feeling for art, he might have saved our poor little gem of a Mantegna."

I represented the lack of time.

"Ah! but he did save those stupid doves of Winifred's, and the worthless little miniature of her as a child."

"Did he save that? I did not know that."

"Oh yes, he kept it in his breast pocket, and offered it to me just now as the greatest imaginable

treasure. Poor, dear, good man! I told him he was welcome to keep it, and he went into raptures on the spot."

N.B.—The lamented picture was held by Edward and others only to resemble Mantegna in its utter disregard of anatomy and perspective.

The Captain and his wife were of course quartered at Barbe Torr, but Mrs. Walton refused to let Susan resign to her the *rôle* of lady of the house. She hated being housekeeper, and no doubt she persuaded herself that it would be a great deprivation to Miss Webster to resign the post; and, the ruling passion having resumed its sway, she and her husband spent most of their time in doctoring up and remounting their treasures in the empty billiard-room.





CHAPTER XIII.

A PENELOPE'S WEB.

"**M**ISS WEBSTER," said Mr. St. Barbe, coming on her as she was giving directions to the paper-hanger at our cottage, "can you give me a minute or two? The fact is—is there a room up at the house that would do to put those two poor fellows, the Sneyds, into?"

Susan was considerably amazed, and he went on—"I've just been up at the Ryans', and found there had been a shindy of some sort. I can't make out what it is all about, but the elder one has been insisting that he won't stay there a day longer, and must go back to his old lodgings at Warchester with his brother; and they are no more fit to be alone than a couple of babies. He won't

use his arm for another fortnight, let alone that he nearly fainted while I was there."

"But what's the matter? Have the Ryans done anything that has offended him?"

"I can't think they have. He says not; but nobody can get a word out of him when he is in one of those states of mind. Mrs. Ryan has no notion what is the matter, and is rather hurt about it, and Emil looks like a ghost, and said it was all his fault; but then his brother gave him a look fit to kill him, and that shut him up. Perhaps some servant has made some remark about that poor boy, which his brother can't digest."

"And Penny——?"

"Penny had gone to Warchester, and I did not see her. So I told them I'd send a fly, and have them over to Barbe Torr; and then I recollected that maybe there was not a room ready. Can it be managed? I came to see before going over to order the carriage."

Susan saw at once both what room to use, and the way of managing, and undertook the whole, being very anxious to know what was the matter, and to try to heal the wounds of that pride which might be foolish, but which she pitied. So that evening our

wonderful refuge had two more inmates, but Charles arrived far too much knocked up to do anything but go to bed, and Emilius stayed with him. Mr. Ryan came to dinner, but he could not tell what was the matter, only that lads were very absurd, and did not know when they were well off.

Not one word was extracted from Charles Sneyd by all Susan's kindness, except this, that the Ryans were goodness itself; he had nothing to complain of, but honour demanded his going away. They would have gone to London, and never been heard of more, he said, if he had not had that foolish faintness, and if Dr. Lacy had not forced him to promise to appear against Philip Harcombe for the assault.

Emilius tried to be equally reticent, but he was too miserable not to respond when he was away from his brother. Susan got it out of him at last, in his repentant wretchedness. Only fifteen, and devoted to the brother, about whom he was at first in despair, he had been left to Penelope's care and consolation. What could he do but pour out all his heart, and not only his, but his brother's?

Long before she had saved his life, Penelope had been the dream and heroine of both lads. To

Charles she was the object of a distant worship, which his proud silent nature, and his position with regard to her, would probably have kept hidden for ever, but for his brother, who knew much, and imagined more; and when cut off from Charles, and in utter misery about him, how could he help letting Penny know how intensely she was beloved? The one thing the foolish boy had tried to save was her scratchy old exercise-book, embellished with wild pen-and-ink sketches, because it was Charles's treasure; and with youth's boundless power of romance, the poor little recluse only saw, in their poverty and distress, dragons for his knight errant to conquer in the way of his ladye-love, and let the ladye-love know all the devotion that was hers. Ought Penny to have told her mother? I only know that, when she laughed at and hushed the boy, it was gently. But when he had thought to gratify his brother by telling him how Miss Ryan looked when he talked of him to her, how he had been perfectly furious, had told him it was a betrayal of confidence, a dishonourable act on his part—at least it would have been if he had known better—and it made it dishonourable in Charles to remain a moment longer in the Ryans'

house, or to continue to teach the Blue-bells. There was nothing for it but to go away immediately, and he rose up from the sofa, on which he had been placed on that day for the first time, to intimate his purpose, and in the study he had fortunately encountered Mr. St. Barbe. Susan could not do much to comfort him, for he *had* been very foolish, and the attachment seemed so hopeless that it was a pity it should be known to Penelope. Under the circumstances, too, it might be better that they should go away, though her heart yearned so much over the two friendless boys, that she decided on writing to our brother about some opening in the High Schools in the great northern towns. As to our Blue-bell Society, there would not be much left of it. It had been a clear case of "disturbing element!"

There was Lettice nursing her father in a bad attack of gout, or rather of remorse; and Winifred acceding to Mr. St. Barbe's entreaties that they should be married as soon as the settlements could be made out; and as to Emma Lacy, it was chiefly on her account that her father, whether wisely or unwisely, had made such a point of the prosecution of Philip Harcombe for the assault.

The next day, as I was sitting alone in the library, Penelope dashed into it, evidently looking for some one whom she did not see, and greeting me with rather unflattering disappointment, as she said, "How is he?" And when she had heard that *he* was not up, and that Emilius shared with him a room and dressing-room, whither I showed no intention of chaperoning her, the impetuous girl sat down on the floor beside me, and forth it all came!—how she had gone to Warchester to get things for the houseless families, and had come home to find the Sneyds vanished, and no one would tell her why, saying they would give no reason. Had they given us any?

None that was fair to tell, I answered uneasily, while she devoured me with her eyes. "Then I know!" said Penny, covering her burning face with her hands.

I had feared that this must be. She could not suspect the parents of offending them, the only alternative of my answer. So there was nothing for it but to have it out. She wanted to know whether he had said anything to her parents. I was sure he had not, and that her father, at least, suspected nothing.

"No!" she said, "it is just like him! just like his generous self-restraint! But, dear Miss Frances, you'll take care that he does not go away without my seeing him, or at least Emil."

"My dear, I don't think that is respecting his generous self-restraint." So I said, and oh! what an outbreak I brought! Was she to let him go away thinking her unfeeling, fettered by all these horrid worldly restraints, not able to appreciate grandeur of character, &c., &c. Poor Emilius, he was an awkward-looking Cupid, but he had driven his bolt home effectually, and Penny was unmeasured in her expressions of that admiration, which, if it had a little romantic glow, was so worthily bestowed, that it was impossible not to sympathise with the poor child with my whole heart, even while I tried to persuade her that Charles Sneyd had judged wisely in his honourable behaviour, and that, though he had only thought of her, it was best for him likewise not to blow the flame by outspoken words.

She could not think so; she wanted to comfort him; she wanted to give him hope to sustain him. I asked how much she had allowed Emilius to see. "Oh, I hate to think of it," she said; "I could only

laugh at him, and tell him he was a silly boy ; and he said that when his brother was so much out of spirits, it was because he thought I cared for Stephen. Only fancy——”

Mrs. Walton herself could not have put more odious comparison into the tone of that “only fancy.” All Stephen’s physical heroism, which had so impressed the book-learned girl, was as nothing in comparison with Charles’s moral and intellectual attributes in the esteem of our eager, lively rattle-pate ! It was a sad business for them, poor things, but it seemed to me that the less development of the passion, the better it would be for both ; and so I argued hard with Penelope that the love she had been told he had for her would be a stimulus and help to him, all the more for his not being tempted to transgress the rule of silence he had laid down. I had no doubt she had let Emil guess enough to keep up his brother’s spirits ; and to remain here, or to go elsewhere, as a tutor who had gained the affections of a pupil would be a great disadvantage to him. If things remained as they were, no one need be aware ; but let them go one ace further, and her parents must know. Then even their goodness would not make them recommend

him with a free heart, if they were applied to for testimonials. Penny had another burst of indignation at being supposed to be in any way superior—an agent's daughter, for whom, two years ago, young Sneyd would have been thought all too good—and I could not but agree that it was very hard. Still, I thought the young man's brave, honourable reserve ought to be respected, and that he should not be tempted to break through it, and for the time Penny most unwillingly submitted.

"You may be sure," said I, enthusiastically, and therefore, probably, foolishly, "that there is stuff in him to work his way up, and then there will be full reward for the beautiful silent faithfulness of patience."

"Patience! oh yes, patience is very pretty when it is over, but it is the horriddest thing in the world in the meantime," cried my poor Penny, in a tone that did not give me much hope of the success of my arguments in case opportunity should offer. And at that moment there was a knock at the door, and Dr. Lacy came in. In pity to Penny, I asked at once how he had found his patient, and heard that his arm was going on well, but he was in a feverish nervous state, a good deal resulting

from hard work and low diet, and there was evidently much anxiety and excitement of mind. It was always a sad case when a man felt he could not afford to be ill, and he must be kept as quiet as possible till the Saturday, when he must appear against Harcombe. I thought the Doctor wished Penelope away, and it did occur to her that it might be a professional visit to me, so she retreated, and he was free to say, "I mean to see him again to-morrow, and, Miss Frances, is it too much to ask if you would let me bring you my poor girl? Her mother and I do not quite know what to make of her. Poor child, I am afraid it is as much our fault as hers."

So here was another case of acting Minnetröst to a love with which I had far less sympathy, and I greatly doubted whether the young lady would come. She did appear, however, looking whiter than ever, and with a startled, trembling, shaken air about her, which overcame me so much, that, right or wrong, my impulse, when we were left alone together, was to take her into my arms, kiss her, and say, "My poor child, you have been very unhappy."

She only murmured, "Oh, Miss Frances, I have

been so deceived," and then she burst into a flood of tears and sobs, among which came up broken words. "I would have stood by him through all—ill report, good report—if he only had been true to me. And Alice, too! Everything has failed me!"

No proof had been spared to her of Philip Harcombe's barmaid flirtation, and, the family feelings not being delicate, she was ceaselessly jeered and teased by her pert younger sister and rude brothers, and scolded by her mother.

The cruellest cut of all, however, had come from Alice Parnell, who had been staying with the Warchester Harcombes. They had been trying at one time to make something of Philip, but as they had shares in the reservoir, they were very angry with him, and, moreover, ashamed of his low tastes, which had baffled all their attempts to keep him out of mischief. So he had been abused and censured by the whole family, and Emma's devotion to him heartily laughed at. It appeared that he had boasted of it, half in mockery, half as an importunity, and that she had been known among his cousins as "the Gusher." Her poetry had been a by-word among them, especially some verses

called, "The Tryste by the Sea," beginning "Hush, hush, my beating heart," which had never been confided to anybody but Alice herself, and to Philip—had been handed round and made the family laughing-stock—and not one of all the jests had been spared to the unlucky authoress by Alice, who had really seemed to expect her to be as much amused as herself.

Edith had, it transpired, come out like a little tigress, told her sister she was ashamed of her, and the cousins that they were as horrid and abominable as Philip himself; and this only qualifying drop of comfort in the bitter draught poor Emma had not yet begun to taste.

It was, indeed, wholly owing to Edith that the rude Lacy boys had not discovered this part of the story; and as Emma had been going about the house in sullen wretchedness, wounded on all sides, and pretending indifference, and had thought herself brought to me for another scolding, a little tenderness overcame her in an instant.


She felt like the most miserable being on earth, and sobbed out her grief till—till I began to wonder whether there was any secret pleasure in the fact of being a sufferer from a catastrophe, and began

to observe that, when people wandered out of direct paths, no wonder they came among shoals, and that, after all, a hero was the better and safer when one knew him to be really worthy man.

"Yes, I know; but oh! I was so sick of beaten paths, and worthy men are so utterly without interest; and I thought I was influencing him."

It would be wearisome to tell, even if I could remember, all the reiterations and arguings in a circle we went through, or rather arguings in a spiral, for Emma did not always leave off quite in the same place. She did come a little nearer to owning that she had been erring and straying, and that it was wilful conceit and underhand disobedience that had brought her into this distress and abasement. What was wanted was to clear away the glamour of false sentiment and romance and make her see in herself, not the deceived heroine, but the naughty girl, guilty of deceit and disobedience, and therefore bound to ask pardon of her parents—yes, and of her Heavenly Father.

I found she was much more willing to do th



last than to humiliate herself to father or mother. She was ready to call herself all the hard names in the Christian vocabulary, and to talk of bitter repentance; but the one thing—of telling Dr. and Mrs. Lacy that she was sorry she had behaved so ill—she could not endure.

She would have written scores of verses on her contrition, rather than give this one mark of true repentance to those who, she said, were not capable of understanding her. I told her how kindly and sadly her father had spoken, but I feared it had made no impression, when he came down for her.

However, next day there came a note saying, "Dear Miss Frances, I have taken your advice, and my father is the most generous and tender of men!" The Doctor, who brought us this astonishing testimony, told me that he and her mother were much happier about Emma, she seemed to see things in a right light, and to be heartily sorry for all the past folly, so that he trusted it had been a lesson for life to her, poor child; but he wished he could send her from home, for he was afraid her brothers and sister were not at all inclined to be forbearing.

He even thought he should consent to Charles Sneyd's abandoning the prosecution. He did not care about it, since Emma had come to her senses, and it seemed so to distress and overpower the poor young fellow in his weak state, that he hardly felt justified in driving him on to it, and, after all, it might only lead to further exposure and recrimination.

Moreover, I thought of a plan. Susan was going to London with Edward, in a fortnight or so, to supply some of the furniture damaged by our inundation. The Waltons were likewise going away for Winifred's trousseau, and I was to be left in Barbe Torr. The whole design respecting that mansion had undergone a change. The library had grown so dear to Mr. St. Barbe and Winifred, that it must be retained at any cost. So the place was to be repaired, not pulled down, and this necessitated a fresh drawing of plans, so that the demolition was necessarily delayed. I did not see why I might not have returned to our own abode while Susan was away, but no one else thought so, and she declared that she should be haunted by the idea of my being washed away, or, at the least, catching rheumatism. So I was to stay at the

Torr, and I begged that Emma might be my companion during my sister's absence. To which she assented, because the united force of persuasion was being exerted to keep the Sneyds at Barbe Torr till Charles was really well, and therefore it would not do to have me in any way dependent upon Penelope.





CHAPTER XIV.

PRIZE HYACINTHS.

MY plan took effect. We were left, a very queer quartette, at Barbe Torr, with Emma the only thoroughly able-bodied person amongst us, and very nice, good, and gentle she was. Charles Sneyd was able to come downstairs in the latter part of the day, but he was very languid and silent. Penelope came over the second afternoon, but I felt it my duty not to leave them alone together, and we were all very uncomfortable. Penny had a strong fit of inconsequent gabble, told us a great number of ridiculous parish stories and speeches, and made us feel as if we had had a whirlwind among us.

But I think there was a bit of her heart in the

squeeze she gave Mr. Sneyd's one hand, for the poor fellow's brow lightened considerably, and though he still looked pensive, he was less oppressed.

The next forenoon, Emma and I were reading the produce of the post, which came in late, when we heard the tap of Emil's crutches outside the door. It was wonderful, for he had hitherto stayed with his brother till his down-coming, and still more wonderful was his face of joy.

"Such a letter!" he said, as he sat down breathlessly—"£200 a year for certain! Oh! Miss Frances, it will be all right now!"

Then we arrived at the knowledge that the paper with the right report of Charles's lecture had been sent by Edward to the Principal of a great collegiate school in the north of England, and that it had resulted in the offer of a lectureship, with a house, a salary of £200 per annum, and permission to take pupils' fees for individual instruction in physical science and German. Edward had, we found, been in correspondence about it for some weeks, but had said nothing for fear of disappointment.

Emil's happiness and pride in his brother were beautiful to see! He could hardly sit still in his

delight that Charles's troubles and anxieties should thus be relieved, and he seemed to think the £200 boundless wealth, with an opening to anything! I said presently that I would go and congratulate him, but Emil coloured up, and said he did not wish me to take the trouble of going upstairs, for he thought he had heard Charles coming down and going out. He wanted to consult—and there the boy's endeavour failed him, and, with an indescribable sound between a sob and a chuckle, he hid his crimson face in the sofa cushion.

So that was to be the result! And it was true that a house, £200 a year, and an honourable and improvable position, was more than being a teacher with just nothing at all; and as things stood, no doubt the youth was right to profit by his sudden recovery of vigour. I was almost as restless as Emilius, as hour after hour slipped away, and still we knew nothing. If ever Emma went out of the room, we indulged in a little speculation how Mr. and Mrs. Ryan would take the tidings; but we had to eat our luncheon in ignorance, and then I devised a commission which I begged Emma to execute in the town, hoping she would find plenty to detain her there.

The manœuvre for keeping the coast clear was successful. Not very long after she was gone, Mr. Ryan's dog-cart drove up to the door, and in a minute or two Emilius was on his way to his brother, while Mr. Ryan remained alone with me.

"Well, Miss Frances," he said, in his good-humoured voice, as if he were trying to be angry, "so this comes of classes, and Blue-bells, and societies, and all that progress of women! Progress in having their own way! That's what it is."

"Then is Penny to have her own way?" I asked, anxiously.

"She has always had it before, and she will have it now; and I can't say but that the young fellow has behaved very well in going away without a word to her, and coming to me first, though he let me know he was pretty sure of his ground."

"Then you have consented?"


"I couldn't help myself. The girl's heart was gone, you know. I saw she hadn't been like herself since the flood, and her mother thought the same, and there's nothing against the young man, except what he can't help, poor fellow. Of course, I'd rather he hadn't a weight round his neck like that poor little cripple, and, as I told Penny, it will

be marrying the two of 'em, but she says she is prepared for that. And her mother says, truly enough, that to see what he is to his brother gives one trust in him. He is a good, religious, sound-hearted youth too, and with plenty of brains, and I don't know what more one need look for for one's daughter. And it is not coming yet, either, for you know Penny had £2500 from her great-aunt St. Barbe, and I told him when he could match *that* he should have her."

"How long do you think he will be saving that out of two hundred a-year?"

"He took my bargain gladly enough, and told me he was sure of £5 a month for a translation from a scientific German work he had already begun, that has been hindered by his accident. Then he has had letters asking him to give courses of lectures, all expenses paid, clearing ten or twenty guineas or so. Oh! he'll do, as long as he doesn't overwork himself."

I wondered how Mrs. Ryan took it. I don't think she was so philosophical, and she certainly did not bless literary societies, but she had nursed Charles Sneyd for a week, and that had endeared him to her. Moreover, St. Barbe as she was, she



had married into a class where the faculty of work and success was much more an object than lands and three per cents. So, with slight intervals of sighing and groaning to her cronies, she took both the brothers into her motherly heart, and wanted to have them back again to be nursed ; the very next day, Penelope brought a note insisting on it before her father was well out of the house. Radiant and charming indeed she looked as she fell on me and cried out, "Oh! isn't it! Isn't he— And I don't deserve it! I know I don't, after all the naughty things I said about patience!"

"I am afraid you will have to take patience into your councils still, dear child."

"It won't be such a horrid sort as that was," said Penny. "Besides, to tell the truth, I don't think there will be any at all. No, I don't. They both want me so much to do for them. Don't you see? Papa and mamma will come round. I know mamma will never bear to let them go to that great empty house alone."

"Dear child, do you know what you undertake?"

"Dear Miss Frances, I think I do," she said

very gravely, a strange new beauty coming over her animated face. "You know that I'm not really such a scatterbrain as I seem, just for fun. I've thought a great deal ever since what Emil told me, for I know it is a solemn thing to be liked by a man who has elements of greatness in him. And that was what Mr. Webster said of *him*. I want to be worthy, and I'll take all the pains I can. I know there will be what people call drudgery at first, perhaps always; but if I can keep him at ease and happy about home and Emil, so as to be free to do great things and think great thoughts, it will be very sweet, and I shall thank God for it!"

As she was still speaking, with her eyes moist with feeling, Charles and Emilius came into the room, and I made myself scarce as fast as I could, but not till Charles had nearly crushed my fingers in his grasp, and I had seen the most sisterly of kisses between Penelope and the boy.

I went to take my autumn day's airing in what ought to have been the garden, but really to look out for Emma, and hinder her from falling on the scene unprepared. I was regretting that I had not learnt whether she was to be told or not, when she came hastily up to me, asking, "Is it true?" I had

answered "Yes," before it occurred to me to ask what it was. Yes, of course it was Penelope and Mr. Sneyd. Miss Dove had met her and asked her about it, and declared that Mr. and Mrs. Ryan were crazy to consent, having evidently known it at least a day before it was true.

So I told Emma the whole story, and the contrast between true and false romance seemed to be borne in on her. I was glad to see that she could see the real greatness of character that Charles Sneyd had shown, and she said that Mr. Ryan's words about the lives that Penelope had saved had made her feel for a moment as if the embodiment of one of her visions of nobleness might be before her. Only it did not seem possible in Penny, who was always held rather cheap, for her blundering, heedless ways, and inattention to dress! Happily, instead of taking it as a contrast to pine about, Emma viewed the incident as an instance of romance in real commonplace life, and thought better of life accordingly; while Mr. Sneyd, instead of being her prosy, grinding taskmaster, became invested with a heroic halo.

But she was taken by surprise when that very

evening he asked, "When shall we resume our classes?" I am not sure that we did not both perpetrate a little shriek of surprise, but we found he was in earnest. His new occupation was not to begin till after the Christmas holidays, and he meant to carry on his classes at Warchester as before, expecting to be quite well enough the next week; while as to the Blue-bells, Penelope was hot upon finishing her preparation and going up for the examination. As she said to me, "It would be so much better for Charles, in that society of masters and masters' wives, if he did not bring a wild girl out of the moors, but a graduate who could hold up her head with anybody. So she meant to work like a horse, now she had such a coach."

And, in spite of all auguries to the contrary, she kept her word. After all, decimal fractions and equations served as well for the language of love as hearts, darts, or flames!

Emma looked quite thankful to hear that the work was to be resumed. She said she had been longing for something tough to occupy her mind, and leave no room for the habitual thoughts and fancies. Maisie Carstairs and the Morlands showed that they would have been much annoyed if the classes

had been given up, and Edith Parnell was likewise ready to come and set to work energetically. Her sister lazily returned, but the desolation at Brackenridge had been greater than could be quickly repaired, so that the Arrowsmiths could not return till after the winter, and were going for the present to Brighton. - Lettice came over several times to give directions as to the rearrangement of their unfortunate house and gardens, and committed the care of her poor people to Emma Lacy. Mr. Arrowsmith was too much shocked and broken for her to wish him to come near the place till it looked more like home again, and she was glad to get him away. Dear child, she was as loving as ever, and I don't think we are silly old women in expecting that when they come home, and Edward is at work on the water-supply close at hand, there may be great results. At any rate, she writes to us regularly, and Miss Coles kept up her studies with the class by correspondence.

There was a great outcry the first day we met in the renovated drawing-room, for it was no longer *a salon bleu*. The walls were white, just touched with pink ; the carpet, claret coloured ; the furniture, pink creton, with ferns in shades of grey

and white. Everyone turned on Susan and howled, but she stood her ground, and declared that she had been a victim to the blue brocade all her life, and was resolved, now that was gone, to break out in something fresh.

We did our work as well, or better, on the whole, in the pink as in the blue, though we had the great distraction of our Prince's wedding. Winifred had her own way about it, though her parents wanted it to have been in London. Neither she nor her Stephen would hear of being married anywhere but in the church where they had betrothed themselves over the raft for their perilous voyage, and she likewise carried the point of having the Blue-bells for bridesmaids, with their appropriate flowers in their bonnets, and gentianellas in their favours, also on the enamelled brooches with which the bridegroom presented them. The Parnells were there, though Alice did not deserve it, for she had so outrageously silly a fit about some youth at Warchester as to disgust Emma completely, but then Edith grew nicer and more sensible every day, so Winifred could not mortify her. Lettice came back and spent three happy days with us, and Edward was best man. The whole populace

were feasted, and the rejoicings were the more hearty that the happy pair were to return to the Delta in six weeks to superintend their house-building. Captain Walton had given up his lease to his son-in-law, and Mrs. Walton was henceforth to *live* abroad, not simply to *exist* at home!

The last thing Stephen St. Barbe did was to place an envelope with a cheque for new-seating the church in Mr. Morland's hand, with the words, "Reparation for the pew doors."

The bridesmaids' dresses were soon to serve again, for the infection of marriage had set in, and so had the stream of good fortune. The foreign railway which had been the cause of the great crash of the Sneyd affairs was brought into such use by the Turkish war, that the shares, though two years ago not reckoned into the bankrupt's property, so rose, that when, by Mr. Arrowsmith's counsel, they were sold at the right moment, they cleared off the remainder owing to the creditors, and left enough besides for a life provision for Emilius, as well as to fulfil Mr. Ryan's conditions of settling £5000 on Penelope—half his, and half her own—as well as to furnish the house.

Did she know what she was undertaking? people

asked. Ought she not to wait till Mr. Sneyd had made his way? But her only answer was, "They need me so much."

And as the good Mrs. Ryan had never let the brothers leave her house, they had indeed learned to depend upon Penelope. They both looked infinitely better than when we had first seen them, and Charles had dropped his proud defiant manner, and though essentially a shy man, was very pleasant, agreeable, and affectionate—less prone, too, to attack his pupils furiously. Indeed he confessed to Penny that he had done so from sheer fright, and because he could not have got on at all if he had not tried to forget that they were not boys. So he would not look at their faces in his spectacles, and saw nothing but their mistakes.

Thus, rather quaintly, it came about that the Penny wedding, as Dora called it, was fixed for a fortnight before the examination, and the married pair were to chaperon the others to the hotel at Oxbridge. The St. Barbes came home in time to be present at the marriage. It blended with Christmas festivities, but it was less joyful, for Penelope was a very dear daughter going far away, and the miners' families would miss

her sorely. They gave Mr. Sneyd a cabinet with a charming collection of the mineralogy of the district, and "their young lady" the most fashionable writing-case Warchester could produce.

Mrs. St. Barbe undertook to look after Penny's forsaken people. As Squire's wife, she would do so, according to her organising, methodical nature, much more regularly, and probably less popularly, than "our young lady;" but it was pleasant to see her sensible, thorough ways, now that she had her heart in them.

Alice Parnell did not go up for the examination. She had come less frequently, and was always making excuses for going over to share in the Warchester gaieties. Marjorie had to fight a battle, and show she considered herself independent, before Miss Dove would hear of making the journey to Oxbridge with Mr. and Mrs. Sneyd and the rest; but we heard that, in spite of all the frights and anxieties, the expedition was a very happy one, and that the evenings at Oxbridge were merrily spent in playing the most childish paper games to rest the minds of the candidates.

The result was not known for some weeks. Then we set up our crests on high, for Marjorie

Douglas Carstairs stood fourth of the whole of the ladies who had gone up for extra subjects in logic, classics, and mathematics. With a long interval, Penelope Sneyd came next of our Blue-bells, German and English literature being her strong points. Dorothea Morland had passed well, also Marianne Coles. In the preliminary examination, Edith Parnell's steady work had brought her well through; but Mary Morland was much mortified at having failed, through want of presence of mind to collect her faculties or recollect the right thing at the right moment. It had haunted her ever since, that she had taken the battle of Tewkesbury for the battle of Durham, having been used to think of them both in connection with mustard!

Emma Lacy had likewise failed in French and German, and in arithmetic, but had come home vehemently desirous of repairing lost time, and trying again.

"I have made up my mind," she said. "I shall do all I can to improve myself, and to try to keep other girls from seeking their excitement and interest in the miserable deceptions of common society."

She was in a mood to sing, "Men were deceivers ever." Whether she will do so only till next time, or whether she will turn into a woman of progress, I cannot tell, but, at any rate, she is a very useful, busy, and reasonable creature for the present, and is my excellent secretary to the new Blue-bells.

Edith is preparing for honours next year. I don't know whether she will go out as a governess, for Alice is in so foolish and distressing a mood, that her mother may need her at home; but our Speedwell is an excellent girl, very valuable and useful at home and in the parish, and she tells me that the Blue-bell Society has been the making of her. We have filled up our numbers again with some young girls and governesses, and though we have lost our preceptor, we know better what to do, and shall not waste so much time as we did last year in our ignorance.

Mrs. St. Barbe will now and then give us an examination, and we had hoped for aid from Miss Carstairs.

I was not prepared for Maisie's coming to me with a little blush to ask me to write a recommendation of her as a governess at a recently

established High School. "Perhaps I ought to have told you at first," she said; "but I never *could* tell Aunt Bessie. I came here engaged to Ronald M'Kay. My father knew it, and did not object—but he is second lieutenant of the *Talavera*, and we must wait till he is a commander, and we have so little between us, that I want to bring him something. He is Sir Donald's youngest brother, and there are four more."

"Would Sir Donald's youngest brother like her taking such a post?" I asked.

"Oh! he has far too much sense to object. I told him what I intended, if I passed, and I had an answer yesterday. He is in the Pacific, you know. He knows how much happier I shall be working for him, as he is working for me, and he understands all about it," said Maisie, with a happy smile.

And how would her aunt endure it?

"Poor Aunt Bessie! One great misery will be better for her than continual little ones. I am not at all a comfortable niece to her, and am continually running against her notions, and I should do it worse if I stayed here longer. One can give up to little petty worldly notions for a while, but not so as to let them

eat into one's life. She is not sick, or aged and infirm, and does not need my companionship. If there were no Ronald in the case, I must have done something rather than lead the life she would set before me, with a foot in everybody's house, and an ear for everybody's tale, and a tongue to carry it. Oh, Miss Frances, I was just fit to do something desperate when your Blue-bells began, and made me feel as if the days had some soul in them again."

I thought Maisie right in her decision, and after a while Susan allowed the same, and that there was more sense in working for a Ronald than in living in genteel poverty, sharing in Miss Dove's tittle-tattle. Susan rather enjoyed the fact of my prime scholar having all the time worked for love, not intellect.

"After all," she said, "it is a satisfaction to see that women are women still, whatever you try to make of them. What is that song—

'Love is still the lord of all'?

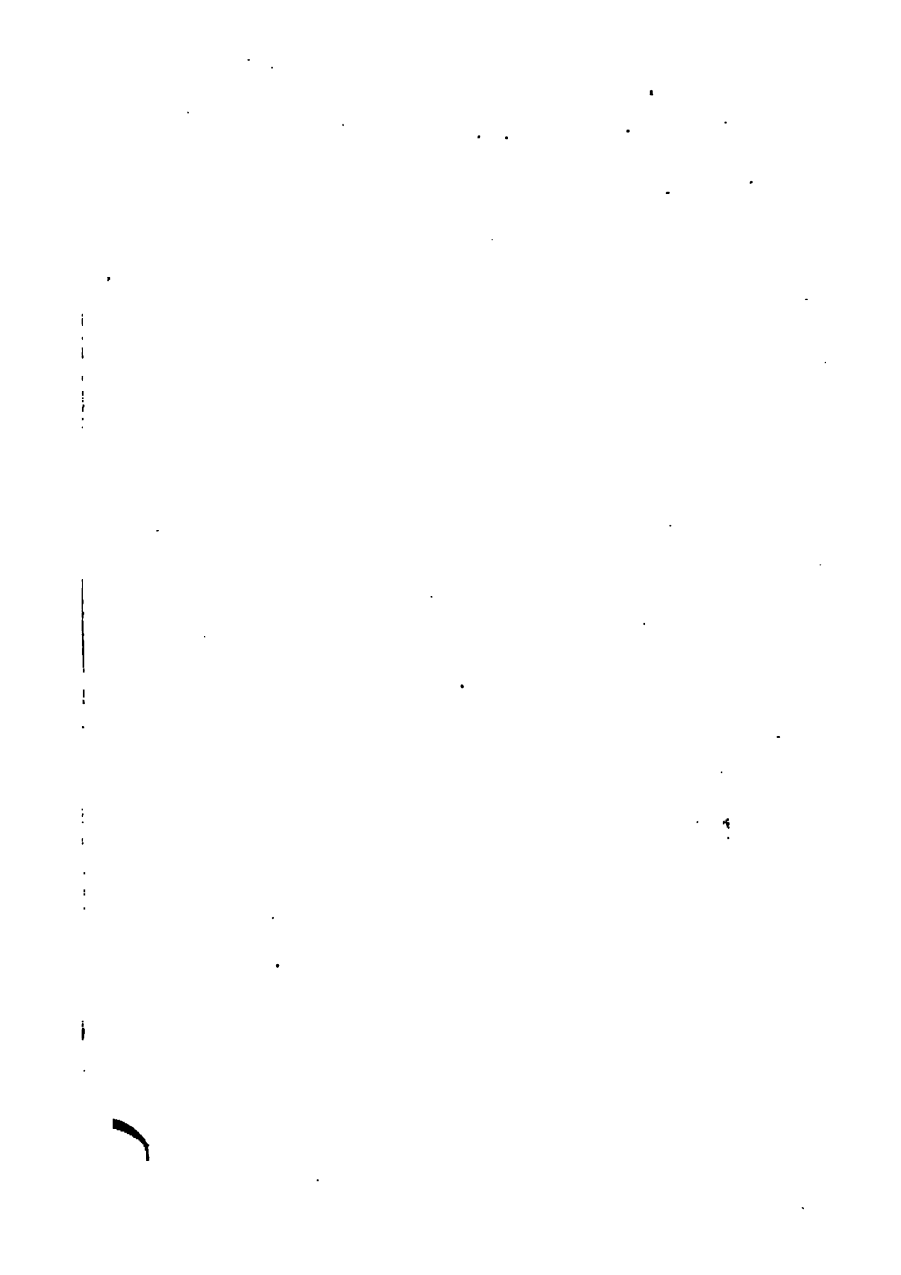
What would you have said a year ago, to hear that Winifred and Lettice would be the defaulters, that Penny would come to distinction, and that

Maisie Carstairs all the time only worked because there was a Ronald on the horizon?"

I should have said the same as I do now, that love is and ought to be lord of all—by which I don't mean merely the love the poet intended, but the real, womanly heart and soul—such love as made Lettice fail us, for instance. It is the duty of a woman to make herself all that she can possibly be, and to work up her capabilities to the utmost that opportunity allows, but only for the sake of that love to God and her neighbour which finds its opportunities and channels in the charities of life.







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