





Mary Queen of Scots

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THE
ESSAYS OF SHIRLEY

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AND OTHER WORKS

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A WORD FOR WINTER.

BEING THE PRELUDE.

A BOSKY dell—a cleft in the hillside, wooded up to the summit either way—a mountain ravine where the walnut and the pine and the beech and the plane, and rich masses of brushwood, and tangled wild brambles and raspberries, and a great army of wild-flowers, have been thrown together by the Maker of us all. . Where the sunshine streams mystically through green leaves, and lights up visionary aisles, or burns at sunset upon the ruddy bark of the pine. Where the burn wimples

through moss and ivy, and sings a song whereof the burden is clear to those who listen through the summer night. Where huge cliffs that might front Ocean itself are hung with festoons of ivy, and fringed with golden furze. Where the spring wild-flowers earliest begin to bloom. Where beneath the solemn branches of the wide-spreading trees the blue hyacinth, and the wood-sorrel, and the sweet violet, and the wild geranium disperse the gloom. Where the owl sweeps softly through the darkness or blinks at the passers-by from her nest high among the bushy ivy on the rocks. Where the thrush discourses exquisite music through the April twilight,—thanking God in her sweet fashion that since He has denied her immortality, her lines upon His earth have fallen in pleasant places. Where in breezy May the roving gipsy of the Spring finds a voice that might suit the dreamiest and most pensive of birds. Where when in June afternoons deep languor falls upon the wood, the inarticulate well-pleased thanksgiving of the cushat rises from far-off woodland depths. Where the thorn is white with blossoms—snow-flakes that do not melt in the sunlight—and the lilac and the laburnum make all the hillside gay. Where the garden is full of old-fashioned roses and old-fashioned herbs, that diffuse a fragrance like that which clings to the brocaded dress of your great-great-grandmother—which has been put away religiously ever since she wore it one memorable night when the Prince danced with her in his palace of Holyrood. Where the dovecot is as old-fashioned as the flowers, and the haunt now only of the light-winged swallow—the odour of grand old pigeon-pasties growing faint, dying away, in the distance.

I am writing in Scotland, but you would hardly believe, if you had come here under cloud of night, that only a few meadows lie between us and a great city with its two

hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. Such utter seclusion as we enjoy within earshot of the roar of a mighty multitude is impossible in any other country. But Scotland has deep ravines and wooded hollows and ivied nooks where you may hide yourself quietly out of the way of the east wind at any moment, and listen to the murmur of the burns and the spring chorus of the woodland. It is no wonder that such a land should abound in botanists and bird-fanciers, that it should turn out poets and poachers, and that "game" should form a standard dish at every general election. Mr Gray's elaborate volume on *The Birds of the West of Scotland* is a very good text for this lay-sermon. Mr Gray lives in Glasgow, which, of all places in the world, is, at first sight, the most unpromising that a naturalist could select; yet one half-hour takes him away on the one hand to the muirland, and on the other to the sea; and in the course of eight-and-forty hours he can rifle the nest of the black guillemot which builds on Ailsa Craig, of the stalwart red-grouse which struts on Goatfell, and of the shy ptarmigan which haunts the comb of the Cobbler.

I wish we could manage to teach our boys Natural History, that is the history of the laws of God as seen in the instinctive ways of beasts, and birds, and fishes—as well as Unnatural History, that is the history of the laws of the devil, as seen in the destructive ways of kings, and priests, and men in general. Years ago Mr Disraeli, with his usual long-sighted temerity, advised us to include music and drawing in our national schools for the people, and was of course ridiculed by Liberal journalists for his pains. Couldn't we have a class for Natural History as well? ¹ The business of a true legislator is to give the

¹ Since the text was written I rejoice to see that the idea has been taken up, with a somewhat different object indeed, by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (that altogether admirable man and divine, Dr Hanna, acting as spokesman), who have resolved to adopt

working classes *interests*; and it is not an exaggeration to say that at the present time the average labouring man, apart from his trade and the public-house, is incapable of rationally occupying, or even irrationally amusing himself, for a single day. If Mr Gray, instead of this stately volume, would prepare a cheap treatise on what a Glasgow working man with eyes in his head may see within half an hour's ride of Glasgow—wild birds, and eggs, and insects, and flowers, and forest-trees—he would earn a debt of gratitude from a community which is beginning to find that no amount of Reform Bills, ballot-boxes, and similar painful contrivances, can teach it the secret of content, far less of happiness. It is wonderful what a deal of unsuspected wild life still lurks about this densely-populated country of ours, known only to gamekeepers, gipsy tramps, and the like. The corn-fields and hedgerows, which during the day appear silent and deserted, are populous at night with strange shy creatures, whose sharp ears and bright eyes are ever on the watch, and who disappear with the morning mists, their places being taken at dawn by others, scarcely less strange, and scarcely less shy, who in turn make themselves more or less invisible before we are out of bed.

measures for the purpose of providing such classes in our public schools. The want of feeling which men, women, and children habitually show to their "poor relations" of the animal world is really unaccountable, except on the plea of ignorance; and the sooner that plea is made untenable the better for us all. One of the very noblest and purest verses written even by Wordsworth occurs in his "Hart-Leap Well:"—

"The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom He loves."

The use of the word "reverential" in this connection is surely very fine; it is not love or pity only which their pathetic innocent helplessness inspires in the heart of the Almighty Power on which they lean; beyond love and pity, there is the tender "reverence" which the strong feel for the weak.

I once knew a man who told me seriously that he considered the country dull, and there are numbers of people who frankly admit that it *is* dull in winter. I do not believe that these persons are positively untruthful, they are simply ignorant. Though many of them live in the country all their lives, they get up a distant bowing acquaintance with Nature, and that is all.

“Red-ploughed lands
O'er which a crow flies heavy in the rain”—

leafless trees, muddy footpaths, a leaden sky, a drooping barometer—what can be more cheerless and uninviting? This is the vague, general, outside aspect of things; but if you will only take the trouble to look a little closer, you will be absolutely astonished by the multiplicity of interests. No wonder that old-fashioned naturalists like ourselves should find the winter day too short! I live, as I have said, within hail of the city, and am only one-half a rustic: but even amid my suburban trees and flowers I can realise the passion of the chase, and understand the absorption of the pursuit. The little family of beggars who assemble each morning at the breakfast-room window—chaffinches, blue and black tits, robins, sparrows, black-birds, thrushes, wrens—are a study in themselves. To say nothing of the sparrows and the blackbirds—both voracious, but voracity assuming in each a distinctive character; in the one perky and impudent, in the other irascible vehement and domineering—the blue tits alone are worth many more crusts than they consume. It is the drollest little creature, a mere joke of a bird. There is one particular tit I know by headmark—he is the very image of the little man who stares solemnly at him through the window. Then there is a mystery about them that I can never quite solve. The thick woods and mossy banks round about us are admirably adapted for nests, and might

coax even a restless nomad of a cuckoo into building, but the tits leave us regularly in spring, and do not show face again till the November days are darkening. What puts it into their heads to leave us? and what brings them back? They are not migratory birds, observe,—there is no general emigration law which applies to them; is it immemorial custom and venerable tradition only that sends them to the shady coverts where they hide themselves through the summer-tide? Of course, the robin is never very far away; and if it were only for the poet's dainty lines—

“ Robin, Robin Red-breast, O Robin dear!

Robin sings so sweetly in the falling of the year ”—

not to speak of innumerable other rhymes and roundelays going far back into the antiquity of childhood, Robin is one of those familiar figures which even a scientific society will not willingly let die. When after breakfast we smoke a meditative pipe among the leafless gooseberry-bushes, he accompanies us in our perambulations, looking at us sagely from the corner of his eye, and wagging his head with the gravity of a Burleigh. Then there are a pair of water-ousels, who fish in the burn below the window, and walk about on the bottom as if they were crabs, or divers searching for pearls or shipwrecked gold. They built their nest last year in the mouth of the waste-water pipe directly under the waterfall, and in this somewhat moist neighbourhood contrived to hatch an incredible number of eggs—not less than ten or a dozen, if I recollect aright. A long-legged, long-necked heron used to stalk down the burnside in the dim winter twilight; but as he has not been seen very lately in his accustomed haunts, I am afraid he must have fallen a victim to one of our amateur naturalists.¹ The gaunt watchfulness of the solitary heron,

¹ He has reappeared, I am glad to say. Since then three water-hens have come to us, a pair and an odd one; and curiously enough, the odd one (a

as he stands up to his knees in some unfrequented pool, might be regarded as an almost maliciously grotesque travesty of certain unlovely human traits—the wary greed and covetousness of the forlorn misers that Rembrandt and Gustave Doré have painted—were it not for a certain dignity and simplicity of carriage which the featherless bipeds do not possess.

The fox, however, is the central figure of our play. He cantered past the house the other morning right under the windows: and I must confess that the rascal was in splendid condition, and looked every inch a gentleman. His condition, no doubt, was easily accounted for—he had been making free with our poultry for the previous fortnight, and a permanent panic had been established in the hen-house. No weak scruples would have prevented us from executing justice upon the robber; but he was as crafty as a weasel, and as difficult to catch asleep; and he has finally left us, I believe, without leaving even the tip of his brush behind him.¹

When you have bagged your fox, and otherwise exhausted the more feverish excitements of rural life, I would advise you to turn to wood-cutting. There is no fire like a wood-fire, and the manufacture of logs may be made vastly entertaining to a man whose tastes have not been entirely corrupted by luxury. We cut our logs in an open glade in the glen, where the rabbits peep out of their holes at us, where the cushat rises with a startled flutter from the wood, and the bushy-tailed squirrel leaps

very odd one) has abandoned the water, and taken to consorting with the poultry, roosting with them in the hen-house at night; an altogether unprecedented arrangement, I should fancy.

¹ It is all over with our sleek friend now. A neighbouring farmer sent word to the Master that he would feel obliged if he would give his pack a cast across the hillside; and poor Reynard (who had somehow lost his head that morning—having been up all night, perhaps) was worried by the hounds in a gorse covert before he had run a dozen yards.

from branch to branch among the trees overhead. The solemn winter stillness would become almost unbearable if we were not hard at work. Behold how the goodly pile rises under our hand! How many "back-log studies" does that stack contain? What a cheerful glow they will shed as the winter days draw in—what grotesque fancies will grow among the embers, what weird figures will flash upon the wall! The snow-drift may rise round the doors; the frost may harden the ponds into granite and fringe the waterfall with icicles; the wind may howl among the chimneys, and tear away the branches as a cannon-ball tears away the limbs of a man; but the cheery blaze and crackle of our gallant logs will lighten the gloom, and drive away the blue-devils which it raises for many a day to come.¹

Though one is always more or less sorry when winter retires, the interests of the spring are so engrossing that there is little leisure for pensive regrets. No spring day passes without an excitement of its own. That wonderful awakening of the earth touches the imagination of the dullest clown, and drives those of us who are more excitable into strange ecstasies of happiness. After all the sleep has not been unto death! The first morning that I hear the cuckoo is, upon the whole, the most memorable day of the year to me. There are some scattered plantations along the base of the Pentlands (above Dreghorn) where this happiness has been more than once vouchsafed to me, and I have come to regard these tangled thickets with a sort of religious reverence as the very temple and sanctuary of the spirit of the spring. Then the spring flowers—violets, celandine, cowslips, periwinkle, campion,

¹ In the hard weather the wood-pigeons invade us in multitudes, and a good bag may be made any day while the frost lasts, as they fly between the turnip-fields and the wood. A woodcock also may be seen at such times among the clumps of holly, or along the burnside.

wood-sorrel, saxifrage, primrose, hyacinth, woodroof, anemone!—this vestal band, this sweet and fair procession of virginal flowers, is invested with a charm of simplicity and sacredness which is peculiar to the dawning year. And there are other young creatures who now begin to open their eyes and look abroad. Tiny rabbits venture out of their burrows. In that overhanging bush of ivy a pair of young cushats have sat as solemn and silent and motionless as sphinxes ever since they were born. Ridiculous little morsels of owls tumble out of their nests, and blink woefully in the unfamiliar sunlight, while their parents scream at them dubiously from neighbouring branches. The starling is a blackbird who lost his tail on some remote Darwinian anniversary; and, as they have come down upon us in great force this year, their stumpy figures are to be seen, and their shrill remonstrances are to be heard, on every hand, to the detriment of the woodland music indeed, but to the multiplication of the woodland gaiety.

Such are the notes that a naturalist may make “within a mile o’ Edinboro’ toun” (as the old ballad says): and they are very pleasant in their way. But every naturalist is instinctively a rover, and ever and again the Bohemian spirit takes possession of him, and carries him off, like John the Baptist, to the wilderness. Society may fancy that he has been reclaimed from his savage ways; he may be made a husband, a father, a ruling elder, a deacon, a bishop (and *our* bishops are most respectable gentlemen—in their broad-brimmed beavers and grandmotherly aprons not a bit like John the Baptist); but the gipsy nature is ineradicable, and breaks out in spite of the strictest environment. Though the *vie de Bohème* may be perilous and unproductive, it has a gay, sportive, unmechanical charm of its own which is terribly seductive. There is all the difference in the world between the sleek decorum of

the domestic pigeon and the joyful freedom of the cushat ; and (according to the poet's judgment at least) the difference is all in favour of the latter.

“ The white domestic pigeon pairs secure ;
 Nay, does mere duty by bestowing eggs
 In authorised compartments, warm and safe,
 Boarding about, and gilded spire above,
 Hoisted on pole, to dogs' and cats' despair ;
 But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs
 On tree-top, every straw a thievery,
 Where the wild-dove—despite the fowler's snare,
 The sportsman's shot, the urchin's stone—crooned gay,
 And solely gave her heart to what she hatched,
 Nor minded a malignant world below.”

The evil spirit asserts itself often at the most unlikely moment. The merest trifle may rouse the dormant craving. Till the other day I had been grinding steadily for months at the work which fate and a certain statute of Victoria have assigned to me without experiencing the least desire to run away. For anything I cared, there might not have been moor, nor mere, nor grouse, nor sea-trout in broad Scotland. But one November evening, returning from the city while the radiance of the winter sunset still lingered in the west, I heard the rapid beat of wings through the clear frosty air overhead, and looking up saw a wedge-like column of wild-fowl bearing down upon the Pentland mosses. It was all over with me from that hour. Alexander Smith's rather fanciful lines—

“ On midnights blue and cold,
 Long strings of geese come clanging from the stars”—

came back upon me with something of the old fascination ; and I knew that there would be no rest for me thereafter until I had stalked a cock-grouse upon the stubbles, or sent a brace of cartridges into a flock of pintails. So I yielded to fate, and here I am in my own particular corner of the wilderness.

A railway passes within a dozen miles; but hardly a passenger, I believe, except myself, alights at the rotten platform and rickety shed where the mail-bags for Waterton are deposited. It is quite dark by the time the train arrives at the wayside station; and I have some difficulty in discovering the musty old omnibus, with its lean and lanky white horse, into which the station-master has already bundled, along with her Majesty's mails, my gun-case and portmanteau. We stagger away at the rate of four miles an hour, Jehu descending occasionally at casual public-houses to "water his horse," as he informs me (he himself takes his tippie undiluted), and to exchange a gruff good-night with the rustics, who still lounge about the doors. The stars are sparkling vigorously, and a faint tinge of aurora suffuses the northern sky. The thermometer being some ten degrees below the freezing-point, a continuous supply of tobacco is required to preserve the circulation; and I am not sorry when, after rattling through the main street of the old-fashioned village, I find myself deposited, in a blaze of warm light, at my landlady's hospitable door. "The Mermaid" is much resorted to by anglers during the season; but rod-fishing ceased a month ago, and there are no guests except myself; and I gladly agree to the good-natured proposal that I should sup in the kitchen along with the mistress and her daughter—the kitchen being the cosiest room in the house, and Alice Ross (who is to be married in May) the prettiest lass in all the country-side.

The next morning is Sunday: the frost is sharp as a diamond; its filigree-work on the window-panes is wonderfully perfect: as I look out the pictures begin to fade, and I see the brown pier, and the white sandhills, and the blue water sparkling in a blaze of winter sunshine. I like to arrive at Waterton on a Saturday night; for one needs a day's rest to steady the hand and to drive away

the cobwebs; and Sandy and Donald and John, and the rest of them, are sure to be at morning service, and after the sermon is concluded the arrangements for the week can be discussed and determined upon. So it is decided that Sandy Steeven and John Park will accompany me in my excursions after sea-fowl; and that Donald Cameron, Alice's smart young lover, will drive me up to the moss which marches with his moorland farm, and help me to circumvent some of the grouse, black-cock, and wild duck which are to be found thereabouts in fair numbers for what is truly a low-country shooting. Then I wander away for a solitary stroll among the great sandhills through which the river winds. Our village, you comprehend, stands, not on the sea-shore, but upon the banks of a tidal river which rises and falls with the tide. The salt sea-water passes by, making a silence in the hills, and covering the whole intervening space with what at high-water might readily be mistaken for a great fresh-water lake. After a pleasant scramble, I reach the top of the highest of the sandhills (a whole village is underneath it, they say), from which a noble view, landward and seaward, is to be had, and seat myself among the prickly grass. The Past renews its visionary life as I sit there in the silence of the winter Sabbath. How many years have come and gone since we first shot rabbits among these bents? O Posthumus, Posthumus, the fleeting years slip noiselessly away, and carry us along with them to oblivion! The men I knew have undergone the earth, have gone down to darkness, down even unto Hades, and the dark dominion of Pluto. If I ask about X or Y or Z, I get the same monotonous reply; yet, perched on this coigne of vantage, I can see as on a map the places where we shot and fished and talked together, and it does not somehow seem credible that they are dead, and quite removed from me for ever. That is the spire of the church where Dr Goodman, who

might have been a bishop had he chosen, preached his harmless old sermons for half a century. The dear old man was not given to millinery, either in his church or out of it—the pastoral simplicity of his dress, indeed, savouring more of the Puritan Methodist than of the High Church Doctor. Yet he looked the gentleman through it all, and, better still, the kindly, abstruse, big-hearted enthusiast that he was. He was succeeded by Dean Gommerill, a foreign dandified ecclesiastic with silver buckles in his shoes, and a silk apron (I won't swear to the apron); but the church does not flourish now as it did in old Goodman's day. Dr Goodman was the lineal legitimate representative of the Episcopalian divines who had suffered along with their flocks for what they held to be the truth of God. Thus he knew all the traditions of the countryside. He was the local historian. His rusty, threadbare black suit was to be seen in the peasant's cottage and in the peer's castle, and in both its owner was equally at home and equally welcome. He was too poor to keep a horse (they gave him £50 a-year, I think, which for his fifty years' service would amount altogether to £2500—his total money value in this world), but he was a sturdy walker, who could manage his ten miles before breakfast; and the spare but stalwart figure of the stout old man was familiar on every road and by-road in the country. There is no doubt that, in spite of poverty and hard trials, his simple, homely, unostentatious, innocent life was a happy one; and when it was over, and he had finished his own and his Master's work, he fell asleep like a little child.¹ I

¹ North-countrymen may perhaps recognise in "Dr Goodman" some of the characteristics which made the late Dr John Pratt of Cruden so generally beloved. Dr Pratt was the historian of Buchan; and all his spare hours were devoted to the archæology of his native district. His volume is well worth reading, as is also another little volume which, as a chap-book, used to be found in every farm-house in Buchan—*Jamie Fleeman, the Laird of Udny's Fool*, of which Dr Pratt was the reputed author.

don't believe that many tears are shed by grown-up men ; but when I think to-day of all the grotesque goodness in my old friend's heart, I am vastly more inclined, I confess, to weep than to laugh.

Dr Macalister was a man of an entirely different stamp. He was a ferocious Calvinist, a bitter controversialist, a Presbyterian ultramontane ; and yet a grand fellow in his way. A great natural humorist had been taken possession of by the spirit of the missionary apostle ; and a consuming zeal for the salvation of souls did not prevent him from being the intellectual life and the social light of his secluded muirland parish. Seventy summers had passed over his head, yet his eye was not dimmed, nor his natural force abated ; and though somewhat addicted to long sermons and whisky-punch (after the fashion of his countrymen), he was loved by high and low, by rich and poor, by gentle and simple, with an even warmer love than Dr Goodman had earned. There was something intense—nay, I had almost said bitter—in his devotion to his people. No day passed which did not see him in some distant sequestered valley. Up in the loneliest hamlets his face was known. His voice was often the only link between the solitary mountain shepherd and the throng of life below. The griefs and joys of every dweller among these sad corries and tarns had been told to him. He cared little for what we call the picturesque ; but there was no glen which was not associated in his mind with the grandest lights and shadows. In that one died old Lucky Macgregor—the witch of the country-side : he was with her alone when her poor old bewildered soul made its escape at last. To this he came through the blinding wreaths of a December night to aid Black Angus in his strife with the devil. Little bodily help could he give the unhappy maniac, it is true, but the paroxysm of madness wore off when the well-known voice was heard at the bed-

side, and the visionary fiends relented. And so on; in each of a hundred glens there was to him some record of a story ever old and ever new—the story of sin and death, and of a love greater than death—phantom-like memories of lonely human souls who had gone away from their misty moorlands to meet the King and Judge.

Do you see that ring of yellow sand to the south which encloses the blue bay of Ury? I have good reason to remember it, I can assure you. We went down to bathe there one stormy autumn afternoon—my friend Alexander and myself. He was the prince of swimmers, and I was fairly good. The waves were breaking in long lines along the beach, while the centre of the bay was white with driven foam. It was not exactly the sea which a great gale brings in, but it was a highly respectable storm. We ran down the sloping beach into the waves, and were off our legs in a moment. It was great fun at first, though the necessity of diving like ducks into the waves that had burst before they reached us, and which came rushing at us like cavalry at the gallop, soon rendered us breathless. We had no time to recover before the next breaker was upon us. And so it went on till we found ourselves beside an old mast (it is still standing I can see) which had been driven into a rock some thirty or forty yards from the shore. The fishermen moor their boats to it in calm weather. We threw our arms round it, and tried to steady ourselves against it. Then we learned the truth. We were dragged from it instantaneously as by a mighty arm, but not towards the land. *The back run of the tide was taking us out to sea.* Then we turned our faces, and swam with all the strength of desperation towards the shore. But we made no way—we were powerless to return—the waves broke over us and choked and blinded us as we struggled. Still we struggled on; and at length, of a sudden, we discovered that there was after all a chance of escape. It was no use

trying to regain the shore by the line we had come, but we found that the tide was running to the north, and it seemed just possible, if our strength held out, that by making a sort of sidelong advance with the current, we might gain the beach before we were carried past the northern headland of the bay. Our spirits revived, and after ten minutes of steady, silent, intense exertion, our feet touched the bottom, and we were safe again on *terra firma*.

Mine old companion in many a pleasant ramble, how fares it with thee on that wider sea on which thou hast adventured? Hast thou rejoined that bright and pure intelligence whose loss we together deplored, or, in the dim and shoreless immensity that stretches away into remotest night, does no favouring gale waft the wandering souls together? ¹

So the hours of the brief winter day wore noiselessly away, and when I reached the ferry on my way back the tide had risen, and I was obliged to have recourse to the ferryman—another weather-beaten old friend—who paddled me across. Duncan assured me that the sea-trout fishing is not what it used to be. It used to be very good certainly; one was fairly certain of filling one's basket with white salmon-trout, running from half a pound to four or five—comely creatures in their gleaming silver armour, racy with the raciness of the sea from which they had newly come. It was necessary to wade, as the river was wide, and even at ebb-tide the choice spots could not be otherwise reached. The water in the bigger pools, before the tide was fairly out, often reached our armpits; and I recollect how on one occasion, in very wantonness of enjoyment, we all took to swimming—rod in hand and baskets floating behind us. No wonder that some of us who remain (“the gleanings of hostile spears”) have grown rheumatic in old age, and that a twinge in the back as I

¹ J. H. C., *ob.* 24th April 1867. A. H. C., *ob.* 3d Nov. 1871.

write reminds me that youthful folly (if it was folly—perhaps the neuralgia would have come all the same) must be paid for sooner or later.

There is a noble fire burning in the parlour when I return; it sparkles bravely on the warm curtain that shuts out the night: the table-cloth and napkins are snowy and aromatic; the fish is fried to a turn; the pancake might have been made by a Frenchwoman; the whisky is “undeniable,” as they say hereabouts—meaning, I suppose, “not to be denied;” the arm-chair is wheeled close to the hearth-rug; my half-dozen books are piled on the table beside me. Gray’s book of birds, the laborious and faithful record of a life devoted to the pursuit; that last and greatest of the funny little volumes which are occupied with the fortunes of Middlemarch; Mrs Oliphant’s charming *Curate in Charge*; and one of those extraordinary jumbles of sense and nonsense, philosophy and fiddling, Shakespeare and the musical glasses, through which the fire of an incomparable imagination still burns with virgin force:—

“The Idalian shape,
The undeposed, erectly Victrix still!”

The stars were still shining next morning when I sallied out of the inn, and found Cameron’s Whitechapel cart in readiness at the door. We had a stiff eight or ten miles to cover, and it was necessary to start with the first glimpse of dawn. The tide was out, and we were able to cross at the ford. The spaces of yellow sand and brown sea-weed and tangle on either side of the channel were populous with birds, whose wild cries sounded with piercing shrillness through the keen morning air. We could only dimly discern them in the twilight as they stalked about the sand, or wheeled in troops along the bends of the river. There were one or two great black-backed

gulls, a whole flock of herons, a few magnificent shel-drakes, multitudes of sandpipers, curlew, and oyster-catchers—a dish for a king. On leaving the river-side the road lies through the bents, and then again by the sea, near which it is carried for many miles. The rabbits were scurrying about the sandhills; but there is always a great silence in these great solitudes, which is never broken at this season, save by the melancholy wail of the curlew. It is a positive relief to us when we once more reach the sea, on whose gently rippled surface the first beams of sunlight are just breaking. We skirt two or three sleepy-looking, secluded fishing villages, the ruins of an old keep crowning a precipitous bluff, and see far off on the opposite side of the bay a long line of towers and turrets—the modern mansion which fills the place of the grand old castle which was wrecked by King Robert when he “harried” the country of the Comyns. You will hardly find a Comyn in this country now—such of them as escaped dropped the famous and fatal patronymic, and became obscure Browns and Smiths (or whatever was the commonest surname in those days) to avoid recognition. That pretty mansion-house among the trees yonder belongs to a pleasant, kindly, elderly gentleman, whose charters take him and his kin back, without a break in the descent, to the days of the great king who planted the first of them on this Northern seaboard.¹ The long stretch of sand is succeeded by a noble range of rocks—the breeding-place of innumerable razor-bills, and marrots, and sea-parrots, and cormorants, and hawks, and hooded crows, and ravens. I knew every foot of these rocks once on a time, having scrambled and sketched and shot among them ever since I can remember. A grand school in which to be bred! How solemn is the life of Nature in these her sanctuaries!—

¹ James Buchan of Auchmacoy—a man of a fine, sweet, simple, loyal nature—died 28th Nov. 1874.

only the dirge of the wave or the complaint of the sea-mew disturbing the tremendous solitariness. On the dizzy ledge at the mouth of the Bloody Hole, a pair of peregrines have built since (let us say) the invasion of the Danes. The oldest inhabitant, at least, can only affirm that they were there when he was a boy, and that they were as fiercely petulant, when driven from their nest, then as now. So likewise with these ancient ravens, who have croaked at all intruders year after year, from that smooth inaccessible pinnacle of granite, which has never been scaled by mortal man or boy or anything heavier than a bird. But we must not linger by the way; for the days are short at this season, and we have a long tramp before us.

The farm-house where we stable our steed is built on the edge of the muirland, and may be looked upon as one of the outposts of that agricultural army which is gradually taking possession of the wilderness. Donald's father was a simple crofter, who sat rent free for many years, on condition that he would devote his spare hours to clearing away the heather round his cottage, and bringing the land into some sort of cultivation. The oats were terribly scrubby at first, and the turnips were hardly bigger than indifferent potatoes. How these crofters, living on the borders of agricultural civilisation, contrive to keep body and soul together on their patches of oats and turnips, has often been to me a matter for wonderment. Yet they struggle on in an obstinate tenacious way—the bare stony patches being gradually transformed into rich fields and smiling pastures; the sons go out into the world, and grow into lawyers, doctors, and merchants, Australian sheep-farmers and Presbyterian ministers—Robertson of Ellon, for instance, one of the most massive and robust intellectual forces in the Church of Scotland in our time, coming, I think, of such parentage; and the old people stick like

limpets to the land which they have reclaimed, and dis-course largely of the patriarchal times, when the heather came down to the sea, and it was possible any day to stalk a black-cock on the very spot where Peelboro' town-house stands.

Shouldering the game-bag, I leave Donald to attend to certain farming operations which demand attention, and start over ground well known to myself. Even here, close to the sea-shore, the frost has lasted for some days, and the open ditches are swarming with snipe which have been driven down from the interior. I bag one or two couple as they rise at my feet—Oscar, who has a taste for snipe unusual in a pointer, always giving me fair warning of their proximity. Then a covey or two of partridges make off the moment I reach the bare stubble where they are feeding, wild as hawks. As I enter the moor, a couple of splendid old cocks, who have been sunning themselves on the gravelly hillside, give me a chance, and I am lucky enough to secure one. He won't need his wraps any more, poor fellow!—but see how provident he has been, how thick and warm his socks are, and how he is furred and feathered up to the eyes! The *whaups*, whose wail is heard from the other side of the moss, are sure to keep at a respectful distance; yet we may, perhaps, stalk one or two before the day is over. That is the teal-moss which lies between us—a sure find for wild ducks of various kinds. It is nasty walking—only one or two slippery paths, known to poachers and ourselves, running through it. If you miss one or other of these narrow little “dykes,” the chance is that you find yourself up to the shoulders in bog and water, with no very firm footing even at that depth. You must make up your mind to fire neither at snipe, nor teal, nor grouse, although they should rise under your nose; for, if you have patience, you are sure, among the warm springs about the

centre, to surprise a flock of wild duck. On the present occasion I follow a well-known path, and, at the very place where I look for them, half-a-dozen noble birds rise out of the bog, and a brace of glossy purple-brown mallards are added to the contents of the bag. Farther up I come upon some pretty little teal that are sporting innocently in a piece of open water; then I get a long cartridge-shot at another old cock grouse; and finally, in the little glen fringed with alder and birch that runs from the moss up the hillside, first a woodcock, and then a black-cock, are knocked over upon the heather. The black-cock mounts higher and higher after the shot is fired, until suddenly his flight is arrested in mid-air, and he falls like an arrow to the ground. What a fall was there! There is no worthier bird in this world than an old black-cock early in December; and the ecstasy one experiences over one's first black-cock is never forgotten. One forgets much in this world—early friends, first love, the Greek and Latin grammars, and many other good things; but the remembrance of that moment of pure enjoyment never quits us.

And now I have reached at last the highest comb of the low ridge of mainland hill (a notable landmark to sailors at sea), beside the sparkling spring where, in the old days, we invariably ate our frugal lunch and smoked our meditative pipe—a custom which this day shall be religiously observed by Oscar and myself. There is a wide bird's-eye view of blue sea and white sail, and the long line of coast indented with sunny bays. Yonder to the right is Peelboro', a port renowned for its fresh herrings and kippered salmon; the light veil of smoke along the southern horizon hangs over Aberhaddy, the grey capital of the northern counties. Ai! ai! (After all that has been said against it, "Alas!" remains a convenient interjection.) How many a time have I sat here with other

companions than Oscar! Does Frank, I wonder, yet remember, as he listens to the long wash of Australasian seas, and breathes in converse seasons, how we parted beside this very stone (enormous boulder deposited by the Deluge or other primeval force), and how he repeated to me the words of St John (*Jane Eyre* had been newly published), in which an austere patriot's passion for his fatherland finds memorable utterance? "And I shall see it again," he said, aloud, "in dreams, when I sleep by the Ganges; and again, in a more remote hour, when another slumber overcomes me, on the shore of a darker stream." But with even more tragic directness is thine honest, kindly, sagacious face—trustiest of servants, and steadiest of friends—revived by the associations of the spot.¹ In all my wanderings in this world I have never met a man so finely simple, so utterly unselfish, so unostentatious in the manifestation, yet so constant in the fidelity, of his friendship. The old family servant is now rarely met with; the nervous anxiety to "move on" has affected those who serve as well as those they serve, and the old feudal relationship, with its kindly pieties, has given place to the fierce jealousies between employers and employed, which are growing every day more bitter and less capable of peaceful appeasement. Charles came to us when a boy, and left us only when death took him away. During these thirty years he had passed into our life and grown one of ourselves. He had taught us lads to ride and shoot and tell the truth; he had helped to send us away into the great world that lay behind his peaceful hills; he had been the first to welcome us back when we returned in triumph or defeat, as the case might be; and he was always the same—homely, upright, ingenuous, candid, incorruptible. When I think of him now I involuntarily recall some antique heroic model; the petty tumults of

¹ C. S., *ob.* 21st May 1870.

modern life, the complex passions of modern civilisation, had not affected the large simplicity of his nature. There was that lofty repose about this plain, honest, homely, awkward, parish-bred man which makes statues of the Apollo and Antinous inimitable. He was one of Nature's noblemen—one of the men in whom she has secretly implanted the fine instinct of good-breeding, and the native sweetness and gentleness, which cannot be bought with money, and which even culture does not always secure. For it is an art beyond art—

“The art itself is nature.”

The winter sun had set before my last shot was fired, and by the time I reached my friend's farm the crescent moon was up, and the stars were strewn thickly across the blue-black vault. I have ever prized that walk home through the winter twilight. Shooting, as presently pursued, is, it must be confessed, a somewhat barbarous sport, though to say gravely that all who practise it are vile as the vilest of Roman emperors is a little bit of an exaggeration. To assist at a battue of pheasants is hardly so criminal as to assist at a battue of Christians: but, even when practised moderately and wisely, the excitement of the chase is apt to render one insensible for the time being to the finer influences of nature. The walk home puts all this right. As you stroll quietly back, you have leisure to note whatever is going on around you, at an hour well suited for observation. Though it is too dark to shoot, the frosty brightness of the air reflects itself upon the heather. A hare starts from a furrow over which you had walked in the morning. The partridges you had scattered are calling to each other before they settle to roost. A pack of grouse whirr past on their way from the stubbles, and numberless ducks whistle overhead. In the frosty stillness the faintest sound be-

comes distinct, so that you can hear the voices of the fishermen among the cottages at the foot of the rocks, and even of sailors out at sea. And as in your lonely walk you look up at those mighty constellations which march across the heaven, thoughts of a wider compass cannot fail to visit you. Whither are they, whither are we, bound? Who has sent us out upon this unknown tract? What does it all mean? Is it indeed true that incalculable myriads of men similar to ourselves have already passed out of this life in which we find ourselves, and that we are destined to follow them?—But the stars will not answer our bewildered “whithers” and “wherefores”—their steely diamond-like glitter only mocking our curiosity. Lucretius surely could not have been in earnest when he expressed a nervous apprehension that they might lead men back to the gods. To me at least that sharp cold light discloses no sympathy and discovers no compassion; and the cheerful sights and sounds of this eligible piece of solid land on which we have been cast by Supreme Wisdom or Supreme Caprice are far more reassuring than any amount of star-gazing. We may trust ourselves—may we not?—with reasonable confidence to the Power which has taught children to laugh and prattle and win their way to the flintiest hearts among us?

As next day was market-day at Peelboro', Donald proposed that I should accompany him to that odoriferous burgh, which was then—to add to its other attractions—vehemently engaged in selecting a Member to represent it in the Parliament of the country. Good old Sir Andrew, whose convivial qualities had recommended him for half a century to the continued confidence of the electors, had gone over to a majority greater even than that which supports Mr Disraeli. Young Sir Andrew was in the field; but he was not to be allowed to walk the course; a middle-aged Radical Professor, addicted to snuff and

spectacles, had come down from the Metropolis, and gone to the front in really gallant style. He was ready to introduce any number of Bills into the House: a Bill to promote or to proscribe the consumption of excisable liquors; a Bill to permit the tenant of land to break any contract into which he might have entered, if he found it convenient or profitable to do so; a Bill for the abolition of the game-laws and the extinction of game; a Bill to compel landlords to turn sheep-runs into arable farms, and deer-forests into parks for the people; and so on. These revolutionary propositions had excited much enthusiasm in the community, and Donald informed me that his brother farmers had actually adopted the Professor as an eminently eligible candidate before it was accidentally discovered that he had never heard of "hypothec." The fall of an explosive rocket could not have caused more panic among his supporters than when, in answer to Dirty Davie's familiar inquiry (Dirty Davie was a local politician of note), "Fat think ye of h̄ypōthēc, man?" the candidate incautiously admitted that he had no thoughts whatever. An effort was made to silence Davie, who was advised to "go to bed," "to wash his face," and to undertake various other unusual and unpalatable operations; but Davie stuck to his text, and by-and-by the meeting came round to Davie's stand-point, and then adjourned amid profound agitation, as they do in France.

But on all that happened at Peelboro' on that day, and on many other days before the election came off, this is not the place to enlarge. Suffice it to say that we witnessed some very lively scenes, that we dined with my evergreen friend the Provost, who had with characteristic impartiality presided at the meetings of both candidates with the electors, and candidly admitted that a great deal could be said for either; and that on our way home we arrived at the opinion that it was unnecessary to encour-

age by artificial means the consumption of excisable liquors in Peelboro' and its vicinity.

Donald was anxious that I should stay another day with him. There was a hill-loch haunted by wild geese and swans, where a shot might be got of a moonlight night; but my fisher-friends had engaged to meet me on the Thursday, and I had undertaken to secure some skins of sea-birds for old Tom Purdie, the taxidermist, so I drove back to my comfortable quarters at "The Mermaid," where I was welcomed by my comely landlady and her comelier daughter. John and Peter came up to the inn in the course of the evening to tell me that the boat was in readiness for our expedition, and to get some charges of powder and shot for Peter's old duck-gun, a tremendously "hard hitter," as I once learned from painful experience. It nearly knocked me down, and my shoulder was blue for a month. But Peter knows how to humour the monster, and in his hands it has killed its bird at a hundred yards.

Peter and John are waiting for me at the pier, and we push off, and row leisurely down the middle channel of the stream. Nothing can rival the clear, crisp, transparent charm of the atmosphere on such a morning. The thermometer was a great many degrees below the freezing-point during the night, and even now it marks two or three degrees of frost. But there is not the faintest breath of wind; every twig, every blade of grass, might have been cut out of stone; they are all as statuesque as the inmates of the enchanted palace before the prince came. That speechless, motionless, spell-bound creation, lighted up with such a flood of winter sunshine, might become really "uncanny" to us, were it not for the birds, who, in spite of the cold, are as lively as ever. As we drift down the stream we hear the sparrows chirping boisterously in the leafless hedges along the banks; and,

quietly as we move, immense flocks of ducks are constantly rising ahead of us, out of shot; rising and circling overhead, and making the upper air vocal with their wings. Now we reach the bar of the river, where even on this preternaturally calm morning there is a line of white breakers, among which black scoters are diving with a zest which makes us (or at least one of us, for my fisher-friends, though sea-bred and seafaring people, curiously enough cannot swim) jealous of their thick feathers and waterproof coats, and we have to steer the boat with some caution through the surf. This noble bay, whose grand curve, like a bent bow at its utmost tension, attracts the admiration of the dullest, is the hunting-ground for which we are bound. The day is too still to enable us to do much among the ducks; the numerous parties of mallards, widgeon, teal, and long-tailed ducks, which are scattered about in every direction, invariably rising before we are within shot. The prime weather for duck-shooting is the weather when, with a good stiff frost, such as we have to-day, a strong breeze blows from the land, rippling the surface of the water, and whitening the ridges of the swell. Then running back and forward along the coast, under a mere scrap of brown sail, we fall upon the ducks unexpectedly, and as they commonly rise *into* the wind (that is, in the direction of the boat, which of course has the wind more or less behind it), there is leisure for a deliberate shot; and I have often seen a great number of various kinds killed on such a morning. But it is no use to complain; and for most of the birds I want (and no sportsman will kill birds that he does not want) this is as good a day as any.

The birds that I am seeking for my taxidermist friend belong to the noble and ancient family of *divers*. The Great Auk, I presume, has been finally hunted out of this evil world. Nothing is left of him except his skin,

and of skins it appears that only about seventy in all have been preserved. The extermination of the Red Indian of the sea, as we may call him, is certainly a curious fact, and one that perhaps justifies the almost excessive interest that has been felt in the fortunes and misfortunes of this ungainly bird by naturalists and others. But the Black-throated, the Great Northern, and the Red-throated Divers are still common on our coasts, although their numbers of late years have shown a sensible diminution. The loon is beyond question a noble bird. There is a magnificent energy and force of movement about him which impress the imagination. He moves through the water as the eagle moves through the air. I never tried to eat one, but I fancy that he must be nearly all muscle. There is not an ounce of superfluous fat upon him. He is an athlete who is always in training. His speed under water is almost incredible. He sinks quite leisurely as you approach within shot; a minute elapses, and then he reappears at the other side of the bay, having changed his course, moreover, when out of sight, with the view of putting you off the scent. This is true more particularly of the Great Northern Diver; the Red-throated is a less powerful bird, and is more easily circumvented.

The bay of Ury is a favourite resort of the loon; but to-day it does not seem at first as if we were to succeed in sighting him. As we row leisurely along the coast, I scan the whole breadth of the bay with my glass. That is a brown skua in the midst of a shrieking assemblage of gulls; that is a cormorant hard at work among the whiting; that is a black guillemot in its winter plumage; these are parties of the graceful Northern hareld who are feeding greedily upon the tiny bivalves at the bottom; and that is—why, that is an Eider drake, and one of the birds that Tom has specially commissioned me to secure. He is floating calmly and majestically on

the surface; there are one or two attendant grey-brown eider ducks beside him; he has come from the far North, where it is high treason to molest him, and it goes against the grain to shoot the great, handsome, simple bird now, when he has trusted himself to our hospitality. So I hand him over to Peter, who has no scruples on the subject, and who quickly gets him on board. Just as we are examining his plumage (lying quietly on our oars), a long shapely neck rises out of the water beside the boat, and a grave, steady eye is fixed inquiringly upon us. Before the guns can be pointed at him, he has disappeared as silently as he had risen, and then John and Peter set themselves to their oars, for they know that they have work enough cut out for them. It is the Great Northern Diver himself, and it takes us wellnigh an hour before we again succeed in getting him within shot. Later on, we are fortunate enough to secure another Great Northern, besides two or three of the Red-throated variety; and then we hoist our sail, and, running rapidly home before the evening breeze which is rippling the water, reach the pier from which we had started in the morning, just in time to see the stars come out. Our bag is not a large one; it might indeed have been indefinitely increased, had we chosen to slaughter useless, innocent birds, as I have known Christian gentlemen do; but a bag which contains a Northern Diver and an Eider drake will not be sneered at by any honest naturalist.

I have still one other day to spend at Waterton, and this I propose to devote to my old college chum—Ambrose Trotter—who has been “settled” in this remote district as a country parson, some ten miles off across the moor.

Ambrose was a great dandy at the University—it was about the only thing he was good for there—and his

exasperating neatness and tidiness, as well as his Dutch-like deliberation, had the same effect upon some of his more brilliant but more slovenly contemporaries that a red rag has upon a bull. He was not unduly burdened with brains; and though he got through his final examinations without positive discredit, his friends had some difficulty in selecting a career for him. They saw that he was not the man to set the Thames on fire. He had no chance of ascending the woolsack, nor even of making a decent living at the bar. The arithmetic of the Stock Exchange or of the Money-market was a mystery which he could not fathom; and his guardians were not unreasonably afraid that in any worldly business, where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal, he might muddle away the modest patrimony which a larger head had left him. Nor was it probable that his shrewd Lancashire countrymen would be willing to intrust him with the cure of their bodies—that vital matter could be intrusted to a thoroughly competent physician only. But what about a “cure of souls”? In short, to keep him out of harm’s way, they put him into the Church.

To my mind the Church is, or might be, the most noble of all institutions. The idea of a truly spiritual priesthood, planted in every nation of the earth, proclaiming that there is a divine invisible bond which connects them all, offering up the sacrifice of willing obedience on one altar and in one name, is a fine and great idea. And the message which it undertakes to convey ought surely to be supremely acceptable,—that we have a Father in heaven—that behind the fever of time there is an abiding rest—that in spite of the tragic frailty and perishableness of human ties there is a Love which does not wax old.

This is the conception; what have the Doctors made of it?

They have clothed it in the guise of two different theories—one of which is repugnant to common morality, the other to common sense. The one faction represents the Almighty Father as a pedantic despot—arbitrary, unreasonable, and ruthless; the other prefers to believe that Infinite Mercy is to be bought only by means of certain charms and exorcisms which a select and privileged caste are authorised to sell.

My friend, as was to be expected, adopted the latter of these theories. But no sphere of usefulness, as it is called, being found for him in the land of his nativity, his Bishop (“the comity of law” not extending, it would seem, to the Churches) sent him, to reclaim the barbarous people north of the Tweed, as he might have sent a missionary to convert the Yahoos. Hence it is, that in this outlandish district they have obtained the unspeakable benefit of his society.

Before starting on his mission, however, Ambrose was ordained. A very gentlemanly old gentleman in a round hat and a black silk apron laid his hands upon him. The secular eye could not perceive that any radical change in Ambrose’s intellect or moral character had been thereby worked. But there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the philosophy of the unregenerate. To the eye of faith Ambrose had been translated into a successor of the apostles who ministered to our Lord. He had power to bind and to loose. He was the only medium through which Infinite Pity could reach the world which Infinite Wisdom had designed,—at least *in partibus infidelium*—that is, in our part of it north of the Tweed. So he came among us, prepared, I am bound to say, to do honestly and to the best of his ability, what he had been instructed to do. The instruments by which he meant to reclaim us, and which he brought with him, were as follows :—

1. The above-named theory that he, as the successor of the apostles, was the sole channel through which the grace of God could be conveyed to us.

2. A set of curious ecclesiastical toys, which he distributed about the little chapel of St Dunstable where he officiates—gilt crosses, candlesticks, and the like.

3. A pot of incense and a censer (suggesting, somehow, to the carnal mind, the fumigation and disinfection of the Deity).

4. Certain postures and gestures,—such as turning his back upon his hearers and looking out at the window.

5. A portable press, in which he is enclosed when confessing a penitent, and which is set up in the vestry.

6. An embroidered apron, a muslin wrapper, a pair of petticoats, and other “vestments” designed by the ecclesiastical milliner.

I missed Ambrose. It was the feast of St Dunstable, and the Father was engaged to the Saint. So after a brief rest I left the parsonage, and started on my homeward road across the muir.

This is my favourite walk.

There has been a heavy fall of snow during the night, and the whole country is white and spectral. Across it at intervals the farm-houses rise up black and well defined, like islands in a sleeping and spell-bound sea. But across the muirland for miles no human dwelling is visible, nor as I plod on do I meet a single human being, or traces of one; for the muirland tracks are no longer distinguishable from the muir. Wild flocks of plover whistle shrilly as they skim past. A gorcock crows at times, in a sharp, injured tone, to warn his mate, for he and his friends have already begun to pair. Among the pools and springs in the black moss which never freeze wild duck and snipe have gathered thickly. This is one of their winter haunts, for now the moss is wellnigh impassable, except to the poacher who

knows each track by heart, and even the wariest sportsman can hardly hope to surprise these vigilant watchers.

Just as we quit the muir, on a little furzy knoll above the morass, stands a solitary cottage, where a lonely old woman has resided ever since I can remember. We used to think her a witch in my young days, and even when I came to know her better I never could quite overcome the *eerie* feeling with which she inspired me. Elspet Gibson had met with a great sorrow before she was out of her teens, and it had cast its gloom over the whole of her subsequent life. She was a strong, stern woman, sharp and cutting as the east wind; remarkable, her neighbours said, for an uncommon understanding, but hard of heart. So it seemed to her neighbours, for the springs of secret pity and forlorn tenderness in her soul had never been opened to them; but I knew better. *That*, however, is a long story, which cannot be now dwelt upon; and there was much to justify the general opinion. Her manner was repellent; her contempt was pitiless. Neither High Churchman nor Low Churchman nor Broad Churchman would have fared well in her hands, I suspect.

For many years she had been bedridden, and she lay beside the little window that looked across the muir. As she lay there in her loneliness, watching the twilight gloom settle down upon the waste, or the first faint watery light of the winter day spread across the black moss and touch the desolate tarns, many strange thoughts must have passed over that strong, solitary, self-reliant soul. It was a place to test the real worth of beliefs—to learn which of them would hold water, so to speak—and I fancy that she had tried most of those current with but indifferent success.

“It is to be a hard winter,” she said, when I parted with her last; “for the wild geese have been steadily flying south across the moss. A hard winter, and there’s little

life left in some of us," she repeated, looking at her own thin wasted hands. And now, as I pass the cottage, her little granddaughter Elsie, returning from the heather spring, leaves her pails to bring me the news. "Granny dee'd this morning, sir; wad you please come ben and see her?"

So I went in.

She lies beside the accustomed window; the body is already decently composed for the grave; the light of the winter afternoon falls coldly upon the worn face, into which a touch of the early sweetness has returned. How tranquil! how distant from us! how grandly and terribly indifferent! The stern sorrow has relaxed; the gloom of doubt is resolved. To her the noisy controversies of the Churches have grown suddenly silent. She has learned without an effort the secret which eludes the quest of science, which the plummet of all the Doctors cannot sound. From her desolate moorland home, from her fifty years of lonely widowhood, of solitary watching, of hard wrestling with adverse fate, she has passed—

"To where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

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In this bleak North Countrie most of the stories which I have collected in this volume were written. The bundle of old magazines in which they appeared (the youngest of them, I am sorry to see, being nearly ten years old) had fallen aside, and it was only the other day, when searching through a moth-eaten trunk which had been thrust into one of Mrs Ross's garrets when I was last her guest, that I accidentally recovered it. In the earlier collections of these Essays, I had discoursed of Literature and Criticism, of Politics and Theology, of History and

Biography: it occurred to me that a final volume might be devoted to Romance.

To the late Mr Cosmo Innes I am indebted for some of the reminiscences which have been worked into *Nancy's Tryste*. Mr Innes was a most charming letter-writer—I hope a selection from his correspondence may one day be made (his distinguished son-in-law, the historian of Scotland, should see to it)—and his store of anecdote and tradition was ever at the service of his friends. As a boy, he had rambled all over the Deeside mountains (he was bred at Durris on the Dee) before the passion for mountain glory and mountain gloom had become fashionable, and when their valleys were mainly peopled by shepherds and smugglers, and wandering pedlars and tinkers of gipsy extraction. Mr Innes sent me a packet of letters from one of these early associates—letters written with remarkable animation and picturesqueness of style—enclosed in one of his own, which I venture to reprint as a fair specimen of his written talk:—

“Don't be alarmed at the appearance of this packet. It is none of the compliments of the season, nor even a demand on your generosity or benevolence.

“Seeking through some old letters—not a lively occupation—I lighted on these three, which I thought might interest you, and might afford you an outline that you could fill in. The writer was one of two brothers, natives of Crathy at the head of Dee, and both leaders of smuggling bands for carrying whisky from the hills to the low country—long ago.

“When that occupation failed, Sandy, the elder, broke off and lived a wild life among the high glens—poaching and selling game—the terror of keepers, for he was a powerful, reckless fellow; and after many years of that life died in his vocation, and was found *dead* on the side of a hill in Glen Awn, with his loaded gun by his side, and his bag full of grouse.

“John, the younger brother, was less of the savage—more of the *poet*, too; and attached himself in succession to a few sportsmen who knew and trusted him. We (my family, I mean) were not in a condition to have paid keepers, but we had plenty of ground and game; and the run of the kitchen and a few clothes were all John needed. In other places—as at Lord Kennedy's and Finzean—he got wages; but he liked the free life at Durris, and attached himself mostly to me. His company was a great

shortener of many a weary walk and watch; for he was full of Highland traditions, and joined on Ossianic myths (of wonderful *Smith's*, I remember, in particular) to tales of fairies and kelpies; and then told with glee and no remorse chivalrous adventures in battle against the gaugers.

"When I finally left the roving life, and married, and turned respectable, I lost sight of John, who lost also, one after another, all his old friends and links to Deeside. Then I heard of him on some rail, and wrote to him, which produced these letters.

"If you can make nothing out of them, pray return them."

Most of the enclosures must have been returned; for I can lay my hand on one only of the old smuggler's epistles, written in 1845, when he had finally quitted the Highlands. The letter is charmingly bright and hearty. There is in it, however, under all its pleasant cheerfulness, an under-tone of longing for the unforgotten mountains of the Dee, which reminds one of Byron,—

"The infant rapture still survived the boy,
And Lochnagar with Ida looked o'er Troy."

A word now about my old friend's characteristics as a writer of history.

Scotland, which has few antiquities, is peculiarly the land of antiquarians. We all remember how delightfully Sir Walter Scott has portrayed in *The Antiquary* the character and pursuits of Mr Jonathan Oldbuck. I fancy sometimes that *Tristram Shandy* and *The Antiquary* are the two most perfect romances in the language. Scarcely ever before at least has man been more faithfully or more lovingly portrayed than the Laird of Monkbarns. The irritable goodness of heart, the quaint and unavailable erudition, the mingled parsimony and generosity, the characteristic combination of enthusiasm and credulity with shrewd and caustic sense, the hearty contempt for "womankind," and the buried vein of romantic passion which the bundle of faded letters and the *Eheu Evelina!* disclose, constitute a delightful character. Nor is the race of local antiquarians, one is glad to know, by any means extinct.¹ Here, for instance, is a pro-

¹ The local antiquarian and naturalist of our boyhood is indeed long since under the turf. "Sandy Scott" was as welcome as a divine visitant to

vincial bookseller, living (as I hear) in a small town of the west, who, out of pure love and unselfish devotion, has written an elaborate history of his native county. Mr Irving's *History of Dumbartonshire* is the work of a man whose general reading is extensive and exact, and who knows the pedigree of every gentleman in the shire. So we get from him a complete picture of that strong and picturesque royal fortress which played so important a part in the stormy politics of Scotland, and of the men who lived and died for five hundred years beneath its ramparts. Mr Innes's literary work was first-rate of its kind. The historical theorist is the nuisance of the age. A plain and unvarnished narrative of facts, clearly arranged and skilfully digested, is worth a hundred unsubstantial theories; and the books Mr Innes wrote belong to this class. They were undertaken in the true spirit of historical inquiry. Nothing can be fairer, more honest, or more impartial, than his record of the old Scottish life. He had no prejudices and no partialities; no pet systems which he held it a religious duty to defend; no favourite doctrines to which the narrative of history must be accommodated: but he plainly, patiently, and unostentatiously set the facts which he had accumulated before his readers, and left them to draw their own conclusions. Sir Arthur Wardour did not relish the style in which Monkbarne conducted an argument. "You may observe that he never has any advantage of me, unless when he avails himself of a sort of pettifogging intimacy with dates, names, and trifling matters of fact, a tiresome and frivolous accuracy of memory which is entirely owing to his mechanical descent." Mr Innes possessed Mr Oldbuck's "tiresome and frivolous accuracy of memory;" but his fairness and judiciousness kept him out of the scrapes into which Monkbarne used to get, and we may be sure he never exposed himself to Edie's

people buried in the country; for he was the local postman as well as the local gossip. Sandy was a rampant High Churchman and a valiant Tory. Such Churchmen and Tories are not now to be met with. He believed in the right divine of the House of Stuart, and of the Scotch Episcopal Church. But, after all, snuff was the central idea of Sandy. It is as impossible to conceive him existing in a world where snuff is not, as to conceive Sidney Smith existing in a world from which "wit" is excluded. The mind, indeed, could as little apprehend Sandy apart from snuff as apart from the snuff-coloured surtout, with its faded scraps of red cloth about the neck and the wristbands, which indicated the wearer's official position.

killing retort—"Prætorian here, prætorian there, I mind the biggin' o't."

The last letter written by Mr Innes which I have seen exhibits all the freshness and heartiness of feeling which he retained to the end. Anything like narrowness or intolerance was hateful to one who had ever been loyal to the principles of religious freedom. When denouncing oppression, the old gentleman of seventy-six was fired with the enthusiasm of seventeen. A friend of mine had taken up the cudgels on behalf of a "broad-church" parson who was being worried by a "hard-church" presbytery; and having incautiously appended name or initials to the defence, had found forthwith a whole swarm of hornets about his ears.¹ It was then—a few months before his death—that Mr Innes wrote,—

"I congratulate you on your trenchant letter. It seems to me to settle the matter. I always have a leaning towards a persecuted man. That is a weakness of Whigs, since the heavy Dutchman who, at his coronation, "would not swear to persecute."

"But if I were not every inch a Whig, I would be a "Tory" and fight under your banner.

"In the same manner, if I were not of the decent church which bids us kneel when we say our prayers, I would seek a place in a congregation that does so voluntarily.

"On the whole, I agree with your principles in that matter, and admire your reasoning. Also, I approve of your signing your letter—a good mark of courage."

¹ The scene in the Presbytery, when a worthy doctor of divinity, whose name had been incidentally included, denounced his assailant, was ridiculed by the late Alexander Russel of *The Scotsman* in one of those ecclesiastical articles which, for uncommon common-sense and incisive argumentative sarcasm, (only he was so good-humoured all the time!) have hardly been rivalled since Swift wrote the *Tale of a Tub*. The reply to the accusation that *The Scotsman* "considered it a part of its business to keep a regular staff of malignant stabbers in its pay" (namely, "we really cannot afford to keep a regular staff of malignant stabbers in our pay,—we have to do all that part of the work with our own ensanguined hands"), is conceived in that spirit of almost riotous abandon and enjoyment which was so characteristic of the writer. (Could a selection from these articles not even yet be made?)

At the time (eight or ten years ago) when *A Passage in the Ministry of Stephen Holdfast* was written, the heresy-hunting, of which we have lately seen so much, had not begun. It was already clear, however, that the inevitable collision between the new ideas and the old traditions could not be delayed much longer; and intimate as the writer was with the men who represented the party of ritual and doctrinal revision, he had sometimes pictured to himself in what manner and with what weapons the assault would be undertaken. Stephen Holdfast was thus a fancy sketch,—although the legal procedure under old indictments, and the general characteristics of an ecclesiastical tribunal, and of ecclesiastical judges, had been carefully studied. During the past five years the Stephen Holdfasts of the Scotch Churches have been in a chronic state of “libel,” and the writer has enjoyed abundant opportunities of comparing his fancy-sketch with the actual proceedings that have been instituted in prosecutions for heresy.

The sketch entitled *Catarina in Venice* was made among the Lagoons five-and-twenty years ago (1854). It is now reprinted, not because I am blind to the improbabilities of the narrative, but because it recalls some dim and faint reflection of a life that has passed away,—the life of Venice before the cobwebs of antiquity had been brushed off, before its palaces had been restored or rebuilt, and its churches whitewashed. (The injury that has been done to Venice during the last quarter of a century is almost incredible.) There is a certain audacity in its treatment of solemn personages and difficult questions which is characteristic of three-and-twenty. We cease to be confident before we reach middle life, and the convictions of our declining years are strictly tentative and provisional. Yet it must be admitted that one or two of the anticipations have proved prophetic,—have been realised, indeed, with surprising exactitude.

A tiny volume of *Spring Songs by a West Highlander* was published in 1865 by Mr Macmillan. It was a joint composition; and Mr Evergreen, the artist, was one of the contributors. Half-a-dozen of these lyrics will be found further on, along with some others which are now brought together for the first time. I do not think that the Songs, although commended and recommended by some good judges of poetry, attained any consider-

able popularity. It is to this little waif of a volume that Canon Kingsley alludes in a letter which is published in the admirable *Letters and Memories* prepared by his widow,—“The little poetry book with the Bull on it, which was Mrs Kingsley’s delight last year.”¹

“The Bull”—one of Mr Gourlay Steell’s most pugnacious West Highlanders—is as lively as ever; (here he is);—



HOS EGO VERSICULOS FECI.

And these are the lines which he inspired:—

¹ *Charles Kingsley: Letters and Memories of his Life.* Vol. II., p. 250.

A WEST HIGHLANDER.

HE stands among the fields of corn,
Beside the reapers and the stooks,
And, through the breezy autumn, looks
Towards the Morn.

His watchful eyes are fierce and soft,
As falcon's o'er her harried nest ;
The branching horns and shaggy crest
Are swept aloft.

Slowly the heaped wain drags along ;
The reapers move with even feet ;
Sweet is the breath of morn, and sweet
The gleaner's song.

But not the song of lowland bards,
Nor morning light thro' autumn leaves,
Nor hoarded wealth of yellow sheaves,
His soul regards.

Where the stag looks across the walls
That gird the west, and with the dawn
The plover wakes, and the wild swan
At midnight calls,—

Beyond the corries of the snow,
He sees upon the mountain's face,
The birthplace of his hardy race,
His own Glencoe.

A volume of *Essays in Romance* may fitly close with a memorial of the Romance writer who, for pure passionate power, as it appears to me, occupies a unique position in the modern literature of England. I am glad to have an opportunity of reprinting a paper which, on its publication in 1857, was the occasion of some controversy. John William Parker, a dear friend of many dear friends, and whose death in 1860 "unsoldered all that good-

liest fellowship of famous knights" (how many of the best men of the day used to meet in that pleasant upper room in the Strand!)¹ was the then editor of *Fraser's Magazine*. I remember he was very fierce against Mrs Gaskell. Though one of the mildest and most patient of men and editors, he could be finely indignant at times, especially at any word or deed which to him seemed to involve unfairness or injustice. "He was a great soul in a pigmy body," Charles Kingsley wrote to me; "and those who know how I loved him know what a calumny it is to say that I preach 'Muscular Christianity.'"² Many things in Miss Brontë's life made Parker very wroth, and he sent me, I find, an urgent letter on the subject. His letter is interesting, as showing what was felt at the time about a work which has taken a permanent place in our literature,—interesting also as a proof of the thorough manner in which he did his work as editor:—

" WEST STRAND, LONDON, *April 20, 1857.*

"MY DEAR SIR,—You have, I hope, received the proof of Miss Brontë's *Life*. We think it would have been better had you said more about Miss Brontë and less about her works, respecting which people have by this time pretty well made up their minds. However, it is too late to alter that now.

"There is one point on which we think a paragraph should be added by you—if you agree with our views. I allude to the reckless manner in which Mrs Gaskell has spoken of living people, and dragged in the story of Miss Brontë's brother, as well as another story, very unnecessarily. There is a great deal in the book which, we believe, ought not to have been printed, on account of the pain it will unnecessarily give to people still living.

"Mrs Gaskell, I believe, too, writes with very little accuracy. She has given an account in this book of Paternoster Row, which she says she lately visited, and which account is inaccurate in almost every particular. If her description of a locality known to every one cannot be relied on, how can we trust her in more important and more delicate matters?

¹ "Poor John Parker! Your letter naturally reminds me of him,—not that I need to be reminded, for who that rejoiced in his friendship can ever forget him? . . . How many good fellows used to meet at his table who will now perhaps never see each other again."—*Sir Arthur Helps, Feb. 6, 1862.*

² *Charles Kingsley: Letters and Memories of his Life.* Vol. II., p. 105.

“We shall be glad if you will think of this. If you, on consideration, do not agree with us, it may be advisable for the Editor to add a note. This sort of patchwork addition is, however, better, if possible, avoided.—Yours truly, J. W. PARKER.”

The objection that the article was devoted mainly to a criticism, not of Miss Brontë's *Life*, but of Miss Brontë's prose and poetry, was perfectly just, although its treatment of the subject was the occasion, I see, of sending Charles Kingsley (and possibly others) to study the wonderful songs contributed by Emily (Emily's extraordinary powers received, I think, almost their first recognition in *Fraser's Magazine*) to that little volume of poems to which, in “A Note on Charlotte Brontë,” full justice has quite recently been done by a great if somewhat vehement and wayward critic.¹ An interest, moreover, attaches to the critical portion of the article quite apart from any merit or demerit of its own,—that portion having been mainly an expansion of an earlier paper—a paper which Miss Brontë had read, and which had been provoked by the unmannerly assault in the *Quarterly*. I think she may be held to have acquiesced in the critical estimate of her works which I had there expressed—at least the letter of thanks to the unknown writer was very direct and cordial. This is the brief note, which has, of course, been religiously preserved,—its Lilliputian characters growing, I am sorry to see, yearly more faint and undecipherable; the ink of the Haworth stationer of the day, I presume, not having been of the best:—

“HAWORTH, nr. KEIGHLEY, YORK,
December 9.

“SIR,—If you know the writer of the article on “Villette,” in the *Edinburgh Guardian* for December 3, will you offer to my kind critic the grateful thanks of Curren Bell.

“A few words, at once so friendly and so discriminating, refresh and cheer inexpressibly.—Believe me, yours sincerely,

“C. BRONTË.”

Mr Reid's *Monograph* is an invaluable addition to our knowledge of Charlotte Brontë; and I take this opportunity of

¹ *Charles Kingsley: Letters and Memories of his Life.* Vol. II., p. 24.

thanking him for his cordial reference to the *Fraser* article,¹ which, for various reasons, is very pleasant to me. There are, I may add, some pages of delightful sketching of Miss Brontë in one of Thackeray's earliest *Cornhills*. She has told us what she thought of him;—the thoughts of the great, tender-hearted giant about his ardent little worshipper—“this austere little Joan of Arc, with her great and holy reverence of right and truth”—should be included in any complete edition of his works.²

It was my desire to have inscribed the final volume of these *Essays* to Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, Bart., of Keir. I asked permission to do so; and this permission—the last of many kind offices—was readily accorded. He wrote to me from the Athenæum Club on December 5, 1877: “I have been moving about during the last few days, and not getting my letters regularly, or yours of the 29th ult. would have been sooner received and answered. It will give me great pleasure to have my name connected with any work of yours. I thank you very much for the high compliment you are good enough to propose.” But my small tribute of gratitude had been delayed too long. Six weeks after this note was written—15th January 1877—Sir William died at Venice of typhoid fever. He was a scholar, a statesman, and a Scotchman of whom we were all proud; and to Scotland, overrun by Philistines, his loss is irreparable.

¹ “Death, the great touchstone of humanity, revealed her true position to the world, and to her surviving relations and friends. Copies of the newspapers of that sad March week in 1855 lie before me, carefully treasured up by loving hands. They speak with an eloquence which is not always that of mere words of a nation's mourning for a great soul gone prematurely to its account. Of all these tributes of loving admiration, there are two which must be singled out for special mention. One is Miss Martineau's generous though not wholly satisfactory notice of “Curren Bell” in *The Daily News*; and the other, the far more sympathetic article, by “Shirley,” which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* a few months later.” *Charlotte Brontë: A Monograph*, by T. Wemyss Reid, 1877.

² *Cornhill Magazine*, April 1860. Should the present volume, in spite of diligent revision and compression, become unmanageable before the sketch of Miss Brontë is reached, that paper will be included in the new edition of *Essays in Biography*—to which, indeed, it more properly belongs.

THE
PASSION OF MARTIN HOLDFAST

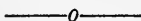
Dixit ; et avertens rosea cervice refulsit,
Ambrosiæque comæ divinum vertice odorem,
Spiravere ; pedes vestis defluxit ad imos,
Et vera incessu patuit dea. Ille ubi matrem
Agnovit, tali fugientem est voce secutus :
Quid natum toties crudelis tu quoque falsis
Ludis imaginibus ? Cur dextræ jungere dextram
Non datur, ac veras audire et reddere voces ?

* * * *

Ipsa Paphum sublimis abit, sedesque revisit
Læta suas, ubi templum illi, centumque Sabæo
Thure calent aræ, sertisque recentibus halant.

—ÆN., I. 402-417.

THE
PASSION OF MARTIN HOLDFAST.



THERE were ten of us; but four brothers and five sisters had died ere I reached manhood. So, too, had my father and mother. I was left quite alone in the old house—half manor-house, half farm-house—before I was five-and-twenty.

Half manor-house and half farm-house,—for I was one of a race that had thought it no shame to farm the scanty acres that many generations had tenaciously clung to. We had come of gentle blood,—a stream seldom warmed by genius or struck by the imagination, but unstained by baseness and untainted by vice or disease; a simple family, discharging simple duties, and satisfied by simple pleasures. The Norwoods were a many-acred house; but in ours there had been none such as Gerald Norwood, who had been the shameless paramour of a graceless queen. The Savilles held a greater place in the county, but the Holdfasts had been honest God-fearing gentlemen and modest women who stayed at home, while Kate Saville's trim ankles and short petticoats were piquant toasts at Whitehall; while Frank Saville was selling his fickle faith as his sister Kate

had sold her blushes and her smiles. We had no eminent historical names on a roll that yet went back—son succeeding father in unbroken line—to a time when the craft of Danish freebooters still prowled round the stormy headland or entered the river mouth,—ere yet the Stuarts were knighted; no famous ancestors who had shot their countrymen like crows, who had harried their neighbours' kine, who had soiled their hands with French or English gold.

I know not on God's earth a more abandoned and desolate spot than that on which the original Holdfast had chosen to establish his house. He must have been a blinded heathen; no member, certainly, of any of those Christian societies which built their fanes on the pleasant strath of Moray, or in the fertile valley of the Tweed.

Along the north-eastern seaboard of Bentshire runs a long range of sandy hillocks. They are as deserted as the desert. A few conies burrow in their sides, and when spring returns the shy curlew lays her eggs among the bent. They were built up centuries ago by the terrible blasts that blew from the Northern Sea, and the roots of coarse, scrubby, scanty herbs, such as grow in the desert, bind them together. When the sand first began to advance upon the solid land, the people thought that God's judgment had at length come upon them in visible form. They were driven out of their farm-houses and out of their villages: the silent, impalpable foe rose over their fields and their cattle-sheds, over church and steeple, as the snow rises. At length the plague abated; at length it was stayed. The enemy halted; but except these desolate mounds nothing remains of what was once a fertile and densely-populated Hundred. He halted, and as the scanty vegetation took root and bound the loose sand together, a great outwork between the sea-wind and the rich inland straths was formed. So imminent had been the danger, and so merciful the deliverance, that old Parliaments en-

joined that no man should pull the bent for any purpose whatever, and visited offenders with heavy penalties. The place is not comely—not desirable. What brought the conies there, Heaven knows. As the scape-goat was sent into the wilderness, a scape-coney may have been sent among the sandhills. These desert Bedouin-conies do not resemble their sleek cousins of the plains. A ragged, disreputable, starved, Arab-like race, as tough as a Russian hide, and as stringy as an Irish harper.

But at one point the foe has marched well into the interior, and left between the sandy rampart and the sea a slice of navigable country, perhaps a mile in breadth. This narrow strip runs from the mouth of the Blackwater a dozen miles to the north. The population is thin and scattered. There are some half-dozen farm-houses; the cottages of a few fishermen under the lee of the Mussel Crag (which forms and protects a miniature harbour); Marvell Park, upon a bend of the Blackwater; and in its near neighbourhood the Heughs. And the Heughs is the farm manor-house of which I have spoken, where the Holdfasts had lived and died, and where I—Martin Holdfast—was born.

Yes, the house is gaunt,—not grim with a venerable antiquity, but simply gaunt. There is no other word that expresses its anomalous character so well. It was of great length and great height—the roof, however, adding little to the height; for in this class of building the roof (of which Flemish and Norman builders have made so much) always seems to be an afterthought. The builders built the walls up till they could build no longer (as if to make full use of their title, *a cælo usque ad centrum*), and then recollected by chance that it was necessary to roof them in. Windows, all of a precisely identical pattern, and placed at equal distances from each other, strove to break the monotony of the flat walls—in vain. I never counted them, but

there must have been at least thirty in the front wall alone; in the days of the war window-tax we had been forced to brick a full half of them up, else they would have ruined my thrifty grandfather. The house had been white-washed once by some enterprising proprietor, with the result only of making its ugliness and its gauntness more visible. It was a landmark for sailors. Italian and Spanish sailors, coming from Genoese palace and Venetian dome, must have regarded it and its builders dubiously. It had no shadows; no phantoms lurking in retired recesses ministered to the imagination. It stared the whole countryside in the face—it was naked, and not ashamed.

Yet I loved the place. My own rooms were near the roof (I hate the ground-floor of a house), and commanded a wide sweep of sandhill and sea. I was little of a bookman; a few volumes of ballad poetry and Calvinistic theology lay on one of the shelves; but guns, and fishing-rods and tackle, and the skins of curious birds and animals that I had shot, hung about the walls, and gave an air of rustic cheerfulness to the rooms. On the one hand stretched the sea; on the other the sandy bents; while round the house lay deep, dark pools of fresh water, where, during the day, black-coated coots dived among the long reeds and bulrushes that fringed the banks,—where, during the long moonlight nights of winter, wild duck and wild geese swarmed. At such times, as I lay a-bed, I could hear through the open window (I have a passion for cold water and fresh air) the swift beat of wings through the silent night, and the clamour of widgeon and mallard and teal and barnacle as they splashed in the *hags*,—once or twice, in the dead of winter, the trumpet-like challenge of the hooper.

The gaunt old house had once been gay enough; but its cheerfulness had died out as the unnoted years went by. My father, who held some small office in the Civil Service

of the Crown, was one of the truest gentlemen I ever knew—doing his work quietly, simply, unostentatiously; and hating with a perfect hatred whatever savoured of noisy display or vulgar charlatanism. The constancy, the thoughtfulness, the piety of a mother's love surpass all other love (for other love is hard to earn, and seldom repays the spendthrift who squanders his own to win it); and though mine went away before I had learnt to value rightly that unspeakable tenderness, I think we shall meet in heaven—if I get there. Yet, long after many of us had been taken, the Heughs, spite of its gauntness, was a merry house. There was always a pleasant clatter in the farm-yard. Dandy barks distractedly at the geese, who hiss at his performances: Nell, with her two chubby hands in the pockets of her jacket, looks on admiringly: the black cat on the top of the water-butt has his tail in the air: Jess, the pretty maid-of-all-work, is up to her armpits in soap-suds, to which she occasionally treats Jim when his attentions become embarrassing: shrill cocks and hens and a perennially-indignant turkey-cock add to the clatter. But the court-yard has grown silent. Poor little Nell—"sair hauden doun by the bubbly-jock"—has escaped from her persecutor; and Jess, grown old and crusty, does not splash her swain with soap-suds any more. She still keeps the Heughs, it is true—she and I and Donald being all that remain of a score or so—but her face is not so pleasant to look upon as in the old days; and Donald has been heard to swear, when hard pressed at times, that Jim's once blooming mistress is "a thrawn deevil." O pallid ghosts of rosy loves, where be your golden nets in which the fowler was snared—your kisses and smiles?

Our post-town is Middleton, and Middleton lies six miles up the country across the sand-hills, on a broad sweep of the Blackwater. I think the exquisite authoress of *Cranford* could have told a pleasant story about the

people that dwell there ; but they are not in my way at present. You know Dr Stickleback, the clergyman, by reputation at least, — his treatise *On the Eternity of Future Punishments* is a standard work. I think his views on the eternal torments of the wicked have grown more decided since the growth of dissent in his parish. These old-fashioned prejudices are, however, entirely acquiesced in by the Baron-Bailie, the Apothecary, the two Bank agents, and the Misses Peterson, who form the aristocracy of town and church. Here, at least, the Broad Church, one is glad to know, has no footing ; for the Broad Church has grown fashionable, and is rapidly becoming a nuisance. Yet these Low Church people—our Sticklebacks and Petersons—are not rendered actively unhappy by their religious convictions. There is a gloomy tinge in their lives, it is true ; they talk scandal, they buy and they sell, they eat and they drink “ sadly after the manner of their people ; ” but then the east wind and a clouded heaven are enough to account for and to justify the absence of boisterous enjoyment. A dyspeptic people usually accept the Calvinistic theory of the Fall, and the east wind is a minister of dyspepsia.

Thus both our outer and inner horizons are gloomy,—we have none of the gaiety of more favoured nations. I don't think that the fishers and the farmers who dwell outside the sand-hills are looked upon with much favour by Dr Stickleback, for they are Dissenters to a man. I am his sole adherent on this side Sahara—if, indeed, he look upon me as an adherent, and not as one likely to share the doom of those who are neither cold nor hot. But somehow the religion of these fishers and farmers appears to do them more good, to afford them more comfort, to stick closer to them, than the religion of the upper classes in Middleton. Why it should be so I do not know. Mr Barebones, our Methodist revivalist, is not a reformed

drunkard, or adulterer, or prize-fighter (as some of our revivalists are), but he is certainly a less accomplished man than the rival doctor; he has a permanent cold in his nose, and his throat is as rough as a saw, so that his voice is not pleasant to the carnal sense. Nor is his creed, to the minds of unregenerate laymen, in any the smallest point different from that which is taught in the parish church. If he differ in any respect, it is that his prospect of hell-fire is even clearer and more direct than Dr Stickleback's. Yet these shrewd simple fishers love him, and are comforted by the fire out of heaven—the fire and brimstone—which he rains down upon them. How is this?

I had been brought up in this gloomy creed. Hell was to me a tremendous reality before I had cut my first teeth. I was taught in the nursery that God was a terrible tyrant, who delighted in taking vengeance and in shedding blood. As I grew up, the scheme was explained to me with amazing distinctness. We had it all laid down for us at school, in the form of question and answer; and even to-day I cannot look at the old text-book, over whose awful and wicked riddles teacher and pupil—the pupil being ten years old—puzzled themselves daily, without feelings of indignation, horror, and astonishment. Listen to the lesson which we were taught:—

Teacher.—What hath God specially decreed concerning angels and men?

Pupil.—God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his holy grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory, and in Christ hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means thereof; and also according to his sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsel of his own will (whereby he extendeth or withholdeth favour as he pleaseth), hath passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonour and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of his justice.

Teacher.—Did man continue in that estate where God at first created him?

Pupil.—Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will.

through the temptation of Satan transgressed the commandment of God in eating the forbidden fruit, and thereby fell from the estate of innocence wherein they were created.

Teacher.—Did all mankind fall in that first transgression ?

Pupil.—The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him, and fell with him, in that first transgression.

Teacher.—Into what estate did the fall bring mankind ?

Pupil.—The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

Teacher.—What are the punishments of sin in the world to come ?

Pupil.—The punishments of sin in the world to come are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire, for ever."

Other lads could repeat this by rote, without appearing to attach any weight to the words ; but I could not. I was tormented by this vision which the gloomy logic of a theologian had conjured up—this vision of a race which a jealous God had created for eternal torment. I reflected and I rebelled. To hold to such a faith would, I felt, drive me into the direst unbelief. I did not know who God might be ; but I was determined, at all hazards, to deny that he looked with cruel complacency upon the agony of his creatures. On this ground I might find rest for the sole of my foot—for a time at least.

But Stickleback and Barebones did not stop here. I knew that the doctor was at the dinner-table very much like other men—that he played a respectable rubber, and was particular about his port. Yet when he mounted the pulpit he told us that the world and the things of the world were accursed ; that our bodies were the servants of Satan ; that we were to flee not merely from the wrath to come, but from all that seemed to make life beautiful and desirable—the lusts of the flesh, as he called them. Mr Barebones was by nature ascetical, and I believe that, more or less, he practised what he preached. But my whole

soul revolted against the doctrine. Was not the world—even our barren corner of the world—good and fair, and the handiwork of a Divine builder? These sunrisings, these sunsettings, the blue water, the blue heaven, were made by his hand, and yet we were to turn away from them as from evil delusions! This sense of beauty which had been born with us; this capacity for intellectual enjoyment; the sweet dominion of the senses; this body and mind so wondrously framed, were the lures with which the Devil angled for our souls. And the world was not the solemn theatre for heroic action which wise statesmen, and sweet poets, and meditative philosophers had esteemed it, but a place of evil spirits, a high-road to hell, a sinful City of the Plain, from which the remnant that God would save must instantly separate themselves. “Arise, and flee to the mountains.”

“No,” I said, “God has made the world, and the people who are in it; he has made the senses and the imagination and the intellect as well as the soul; and I will curse nothing that he has made.”

I had been designed for “the ministry;” but my teachers found that I was possessed by an evil spirit of unbelief, and they let me go. And then, gun in hand, I wandered across desolate moorlands or by the sleepless sea, day after day, and left the theologians to carry on their windy war. The old place was very lonely by this time; but when a man is hardy in body and soul; loving the open air, his gun, his horses, his dogs; when he is five-and-twenty years old, and six feet two in his stockings, he has no right to be permanently unhappy.

Nor was I—only I felt that the colour of the life which I had inherited was somewhat grey. It wanted colour and brilliancy. I was passingly happy in the excitement of the chase; but our rustic merrymakings were not lively. Phillis had soft pensive eyes, not averse to love; but then,

her hands were red and lumpy, and the old farmer's views about the weather were as tedious as a sermon by Dr Stickleback. The fishers' life did not lack adventure; how could it, when their field of battle and glory was the sea? yet on land, though good fellows in the main, they were sadly prosy; and their serious talk had a flavour of Barebones which was not seductive. "I will die of *tedium vitæ*," I said.

There was one house, indeed, which was not utterly hard and prosaic and unlovely, like the rest. An air of romance—the only romance I thought that lingered anywhere about—blew through Marvell Park. But Marvell Park was empty, and had been empty for many years.

The chief approach to the park was distant about a mile from the gaunt old house that I have been describing. The gates were massive, yet the iron-work was of a quaint, delicate pattern, the work of foreign artists. But it had grown green and mildewed by long neglect. A stone pillar stood on either hand; on the top of each a strange cat-like creature, in act to spring, grinned at the passer-by. A scroll ran round the capitals: "SWIFT AND SURE." Our seaboard is very bare; but what wood we have lies within the walls of Marvell Park. I am not persuaded that it adds, except in winter, to the cheerfulness of the place; for it consists almost exclusively of evergreens, worn by the east wind into ghastly and grotesque figures; until, as one nears the house, a sombre avenue of yew and cypress shuts out the sunshine. On a neighbouring knoll stands a group of Scotch firs, rent by lightning and storm—a group of ragged Titans. The house itself belongs to the latter half of the seventeenth century, and consists mainly of chimneys. Little, quaint, comical turrets have broken out all over it, like the small-pox. The rain is carried away in pipes that are extremely visible, and falls from the mouths of singularly droll

demons into an ancient moat that is now turned into a flower-garden. The narrow windows are filled with stained glass, figured over with roses and lily-flowers and the arms of the House of Marvell. And the arms of the House of Marvell are chiselled in full above the doorway—three cat-like creatures, in act to spring, and the motto “SWIFT AND SURE.”

The house looks down upon the Blackwater—here half-sea, half-river. Twice a day

“The salt-sea water passes by,
And makes a silence in the hills.”

It makes a silence, not by staying the murmur of the river—which among these levels flows too sluggishly to attract the ear—but by driving away the multitudes of wading birds which gather upon the shore when the tide has ebbed. For these wide, uncovered spaces of sand and mud are loved by all birds with long legs and long bills—heron, curlew, snipe, and the like. When the tide is out of an autumn night, the clatter is prodigious. Seated on the balustrade in front of the house, I have heard hoarse murmurs and shrill complaints, not of heron and curlew alone, but of strange foreign birds, brilliant in purple and gold, who have summered among the icebergs of Spitzbergen, and who will winter in the Mediterranean. To listen to their cries is to listen to the stories of great travellers, who have talked to niggers in Central Africa, or sailed across the Lagoons where the golden domes of St Mark are earliest kissed by the sunrise.

So from the entrance-gate to the river mouth this was my land of fairie—my shore of old romance. But no Queen of Fairie beckoned to me at sunset. The house was kept by an old woman—I might call her an old hag without impropriety, for Madge Carmichael was as tough and yellow and hard-favoured as any hag in fiction. But

she let me wander through the place at will—through hall and boudoir and gallery. And these rambles were full of delight; for the hall was stored with trophies of the hunt; and old-fashioned feminine nick-nacks, of delicate and cunning work, lay in boudoir and drawing-room; and the gallery was crowded with the portraits of the Marvells—portraits which each bore the sign-manual of some famous painter. For the Marvells had always been munificent patrons of the Muses, and the art of Rubens and Vandyke and Reynolds and Gainsborough had been wooed, not in vain.

Loitering in this dimly-lighted gallery, I came at length to know those old Marvells, and what kind of men and women they had been while in the flesh. Let us pause for a moment among the pictures, and I will act as cicero. That is the first Sir Hugh, who hit the unbelievers hard at Ascalon, who was knighted by Cœur de Lion. He it was, I fancy, who first introduced these spotted pards into the scutcheon of the house—the leopard-cat of the East. The story goes, at least, that he brought one of these fierce playthings with him from the Syrian desert, though a later annalist declares that the words of the old chronicle, rightly translated, simply mean that he found a wife or mistress in the land of Islam. Sir Reginald was the chief of the house during the reign of Mary, and the Queen's portrait hangs beside his own. It is the picture of a girl in her first youth, attired in a demure conventual habit. The heavy sombre dress *emphasises* the gay and delicate beauty of the face, the peach-like bloom on the white cheek, the covert smile that lurks between the tinted lips. The picture alone is enough to craze a man; and Sir Reginald was all his life madly in love with the original. He went in Melville's suite to the English Court, and wrote home, in his pleasant courtly Scotch, some very pleasant letters about the Virgin Queen: how she danced, how she played the

virginals, how she had red curly hair, how she “kittled” the Earl of Leicester; whereat poor Mary laughed very heartily when they were read to her, and cleverly mimicked “our august Sister.” Vandyke painted Sir Philip, who fought against the Roundheads with Montrose—a quick-spirited, passionate man, who swore at their “d—d covenant” in an awful way, I have heard. When the Scots had disposed of their king at an unprecedentedly ruinous sacrifice, Sir Philip went abroad, and roamed up and down the Low Countries during the best years of his life, often starving, his gay suit sadly the worse for wear, but keeping up his heart withal, and cursing Cromwell and the Commonwealth heartily in great round Cavalier oaths. The second Sir Philip was intimate with Claverhouse, and was commonly called “Sawtan” by the west-country Whigs. When Dundee’s stormy spirit was fairly under the turf, he was reconciled to the new government; but he never loved William, and used in his latter years to laugh heartily at the great Dean’s commentary on the King’s motto, *Recepit, non rapuit*—“The receiver is as bad as the thief.” Young Sir David—the handsomest of a handsome race—left his young wife to share a mad frolic with Prince Charlie, and went to his doom at Carlisle one raw winter morning as blithely as to his bridal. His lady’s portrait hangs beside him. May Sybil Marvell was the prettiest heiress in Bentshire, and the soft, languid eyes of the widowed bride on Gainsborough’s canvas have not yet forgotten how to love. And here at last is Lawrence’s portrait of the late lord (for Pitt made him a peer when he ratted) in his Star and Garter, who gambled with Fox and jested with Sheridan, and went a-roving with the Heir-Apparent, and enjoyed other elegant amusements of the metropolis when George the Third was king. He died the other day—suavely, decorously—going to the tribunal of his Maker as he would have gone to a levee at St James’s.

But at heart he was an unconverted heathen, and the courtly epitaph to the courtier's memory inscribed upon the Greek mausoleum which he built in the Chase, is rounded with a verse from Juvenal.

Such were the Marvells—so far as the flesh went, undoubtedly a fine race—the men handsome and gallant, the women of a most delicate and piquant type of beauty. Yet, as one studied them closely, it was impossible to escape a feeling of discomfort, nay, even of pain. The beauty was undeniable; but there was a stealthiness in its lithe grace. I felt at times that there was neither man nor woman upon the walls who might not rise up, dagger in hand, and crawl noiselessly upon the victim who had wounded the pride or crossed the ambition of the race. The bluffest soldier had a crafty smile; in the soft eye of pure maiden, round the ripe lips of voluptuous dame, one started to find a lurking menace—the menace of cruel hate and swift revenge. Such were the fancies that I conjured up; but though there were suspicious *lacunæ* in the social annals of the house, I found nothing to verify my conjectures. I found, on the contrary, that they had ever been well esteemed by their fellows and contemporaries. Spenser had given his dear friend "Will Marvelle" a copy of *The Fairie Queen*; Sir Philip had been the chosen comrade of Colonel Richard Lovelace; in the dedication of a volume of poems by a famous poet and diplomatist who poetised and diplomatised under Queen Anne (the volume bears date 1709, and was published by Jacob Tonson), the writer declared that Sir Hugh was the finest gentleman of his age; letters from the most eminent scholars and artists of England and France, which spoke of a more than imperial munificence, were thrust into odd volumes of *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Annual Register* which rotted in the library.

Of the present Marvells I knew little or nothing. I

knew, indeed, that the old lord, who had lived, not at Marvell Park, but at some princely palace in a remote Highland county, had recently died, and that the quotation from Juvenal had been duly inscribed upon the headstone; I knew that he had, perforce, left the title and the bulk of his estates to a son whom he had driven from the castle, because he (the son) had unfilially persisted in attending the parish church of a Sunday when he was needed to cut into a rubber; I knew that he had left Marvell Park to a distant cousin—a plain Henry Marvell, who had long held a high diplomatic post at a Continental Court. More than this I did not know, and my ignorance was shared by all my neighbours; and if Mr Jobson the factor or Madge Carmichael were better informed, they kept their knowledge to themselves.

Opposite the point where, at low-water, the Blackwater joins the sea, a dyke or embankment has been formed. The land lies low, and, until this dyke was raised, had been frequently flooded. I sat here, gun in hand, one afternoon about the middle of the month of February. The tide was full, and washed the pebbles on the other side of the dyke. It was a true February day—cold, cheerless, inhospitable. The evening shadows were already gathering into the sky while I sat and watched the ducks as they flew up and down the bends of the river, and an old seal which thrust its bullet-head occasionally above water to squint at the salmon-nets. Alister, the tacksman, had urgently implored me to free him from the depredations of this wily old rascal. He declared, with tears in his eyes, that it had made his life a burden to him. It had had a bite out of every large salmon he had caught this year, and once or twice when entangled among the nets it had viciously smashed them right and left. The old thief was keeping his distance just now, but a bright-eyed vigilant northern diver was sailing within shot. He had come up

with the tide, and, having finished his afternoon meal, was looking about him before going off to sea. I had raised my gun, half-minded to give him the benefit of a cartridge, when the sound of skates on the frozen canal at my back—shrill in the frosty stillness—caught my ear, and I turned round.

Artemis and her train! one of her nymphs at least. On she came, with the swift, lithe, indolent ease of an accomplished skater—hissing through the keen February air—her cheeks rosy with the cold and the fleetness of her flying feet. *She* came; who I knew not; I knew only that a lovely apparition had rushed swiftly out of the February gloom, and had steadied herself at my side. Colour enough for you, my pre-Raphaelite masters! A dark purple jacket, a skirt of the same colour, only a shade lighter, looped up above an orange petticoat; a wide-awake, covered with the skin of some strange animal—a leopard or panther—with a black-cock's feather stuck coquettishly at the side. I could not tell whether her face was pretty or the reverse; but I felt at least that she was supremely graceful, that every movement betrayed an exquisite *abandon*, that each supple limb was soft and pliant and obedient to the lightest behest of the soul. I thought, somehow, of the glorious riot of the tiger-cubs in Rubens' famous pictures,—perhaps the panther's skin suggested the association. Beautiful as a wild animal—it might be as fierce and cruel.

She had stopped at my side, but she did not notice me at first. "How beautiful!" she whispered to herself, as she looked across the embankment. A wintry gleam of sunshine had struck the sand-hills, making them all golden, and lighted up for a passing moment the sullen sea. "How beautiful!" and then suddenly, with a little cry of pain, "Ah! my foot!"

She stooped to undo her skate, and then she saw me.

She took me, perhaps, for a poacher or vagrant, for she gave a sharp, hurried glance backward along the canal; but her alarm, if she felt any, lasted but a moment. "I am afraid I must trouble you," she said, turning her eyes full upon me. "I must ask you, Mr ——, Mr ——?"

"Holdfast," I answered, for her voice interrogated.

She smiled; then I saw rightly how beautiful she was. Her smile lighted up her face as the sunrise lights up the sea.

"I am so glad. You are our neighbour, you know—or rather you don't know. Could you undo my skate? It hurts my ankle. I am May Marvell."

She held out her foot—a small, clean-cut, shapely foot, cased in a matchless little boot. A Middleton artiste might have seen such a boot in his dreams, but certainly no such boot had he actually handled. A few inches of mauve stocking, tight and taut, were visible above the boot; for her petticoat, without being exactly scrimp, like those which Swiss maidens wear in the Oberland, was obviously a very serviceable article, not by any means designed to restrict the free use of the limbs. I loosened her skate, and she thanked me with easy composure.

"I have lost John, our fat coachman, to whose care I was made over. The ice must have given way with him. But, though it gets dark at mid-day here, I cannot lose my way, can I?"

I explained to her as well as I could (for I was dazed by her beauty and the unexpectedness of her descent: had Aphrodite, as of yore, suddenly manifested herself out of the mist, I could not have been more so) that there was a short cut across the bents to Marvell, and offering to show her the way to the Park-gate, advised her to quit the ice and her skates. She did so at once—with perfect docility, and without a shadow of distrust, accepting the guidance of a stranger.

I was shy and awkward, I dare say, but, with the tact of perfect breeding, she showed no consciousness of my blunders. That February walk through the gathering gloom decided the course of my life. Her manner was frank and unreserved. She talked rapidly—at least, words came rapidly to her, and she flung them from her—clear, bright ripples of talk, dashing ever into a spray of mockery. Yet her grey eyes dreamt as freely as they mocked; they were soft, and when at rest, rested upon you with adorable pensiveness. In her eyes, indolent yet restless; in the gliding and swimming grace of her gait; in her talk, passionate yet ironical; in her easy goodness and transient flashes of fierceness, one had glimpses of a nature that might perhaps have scared away a wiser man than I was.

We met Mr Marvell at the Park-gate, anxious about his daughter. She introduced me at once. "This is Mr Holdfast, papa, our neighbour at the Heughs"—for she had learned all about me already—"he has been so good as to bring me home, when I lost my way." His manner was simple and courteous, and as I left he promised to call for me on an early day, and hoped that we might meet often, now they had come home. "The Holdfasts and the Marvells must have known each other of old."

I did not go home at once. I slowly retraced my steps to the point where we had met—very slowly. Yet I seemed to tread on air. A sudden rosy rapture had entered into my life. The old landmarks were transfigured; I hardly recognised them. I had taken a first deep draught of the wine of Love. The moon had already risen, and a sea of silver light quivered and pulsed at my feet. But I saw her face only—the pure ample brows; the full lips, red and curled; the great grey thoughtful eyes, with their long lashes; heard only the quick bird-like twitter of her laugh; felt only the pressure of her hand, which had pressed mine at parting. An hour ago, wintry shadows

brooded upon the sea ; but these had been lifted up like a curtain, and the Queen of Love had come forth from her chamber, and with breathless ardour, with tumultuous joy, I had kissed the hem of her robe.

Our intimacy quickly ripened. The Marvells had come down to take possession at a season when the great county families were in town. Thus they had no neighbours of their own set, and they gladly welcomed me. Miss Marvell was as active as a squirrel, and needed an active cicerone among the sand-hills and along the shore. Her father was indolently urbane—indolently urbane as a man who, having seen many cities and many men, takes momentarily a deep draught of repose ; and he liked a rustic listener who did not waken him into keen intellectual strife. Bright fire lay not far below the surface, I could believe ; but I never penetrated, never cared to penetrate, behind the crust of his bland cynicism. Rival diplomatists said that on occasion his fangs were sharp ; but they were kept while I knew him well under the fur.

I struggled from the first in a blind, ineffectual way against the fascination of this girl. But she took me captive as a snake takes captive a bird. Before many days had passed I gave up the contest, and passively submitted to be carried whithersoever my good or evil fate might lead.

It was a pleasant house ; but nowhere so pleasant as in May's boudoir. Her room was like a wild-bird's nest, from which soft mosses and clustered branches shut out the faintest breeze. The girl was hardy out of doors, but inside she basked in the heat. Thick curtains hung in ample folds about the windows ; soft furs were thrown over easy-chair and sofa ; a tiger's skin lay on the hearthrug. The walls were hung with clever satirical sketches, drawn by men who knew more of society than of art : a group of girls and horses from Rotten Row, a Parisian exquisite from the

Bois, an actress pressing a shower of bouquets to her breast, the Treasury Bench in the House of Commons with the Minister asleep under his hat—the trifles of a courtly and brilliant leisure. Half the poetry and fiction of the day might be found in the handy book-shelves which were built into odd corners; and on the table the last volume of the latest French novelette. And, in a low easy-chair beside the fire, as a spider in the midst of its web, my mistress sat, the red light touching the gold in her tawny hair, and tinting with a warmer blush the delicate bloom of her cheek. At such times she looked superb; the cat ^{*} dreaming on the hearthrug was not more naturally graceful or more indolently happy. Yet it was the body only that reposed; her mind expanded like a flower in the warm light, her imagination grew vivid, her perception became keen and vigilant and sensitive. I thought sometimes that there must be a piece of ice in her nature which needed to be thawed to make her perfectly happy. She would have rejoiced, as the wild creature on whose lustrous fur her dainty satin-slippers rested had rejoiced, in the fierce sun of the tropics.

“Do you know, papa,” she said one day, while we were seated together in the afternoon twilight, “that I sometimes fancy I have got no soul?”

“You have got a temper, at least, my dear,” said her father, blandly; “the feminine equivalent.”

“Don’t chaff me, papa—that is one of those modern habits that don’t sit well on old-fashioned gentlemen of the grand school. But I really fancy sometimes that a good hard frost would freeze me into a lump of ice.”

She turned away from her father with a little impatient shrug, and addressed herself to me.

“That church of yours is quite to my taste; Dr Stickleback is such a ridiculous old dear. We must have him here, papa. And the Peterson maidens! I could study their

bonnets for ever. A man must have made them ; no such hideous deformities ever entered into the heart of woman."

Mr Marvell shook his head at her. But May went on, "I am sure that their opinions are evangelical — such bonnets!—and you know I belong to the Broad Church, Mr Holdfast."

"I fancy Mr Holdfast is not much interested in your theological experiences, May, dear. My daughter is very tenacious, Mr Holdfast. Ten days ago she wanted to be a Sister, and asked me for ever so much to buy a veil."

"Don't tell tales, papa. You know it was a Brussels one I wanted. But I belong permanently to the Broad Church."

"Well, I never heard of a Broad Churchman being made a bishop ; so don't go and marry the curate, May."

"Why, St Paul himself was our first Bishop," May said.

"St Paul could make himself very disagreeable when he liked—especially if there was a lady in the case—whereas your friends make things pleasant all round."

"And why shouldn't things be pleasant?" May retorted. "I am a coward at heart, and the dreadful stories these Low Church people tell, and the way they swear at you, frightens me out of my wits."

Mr Holdfast thought that pleasant things were very nice in their way, but that things in this world had a constant tendency to make themselves unpleasant. Nor was it possible to shut them entirely out from us, however much it was to be desired. We ourselves could not be depended on. Frightfully unpleasant things haunted the heart and imagination. That abject capacity for fear—what does it mean? Does it mean that there is something outside of us which corresponds to the faculty within us—which rouses the spasms of dread that shoot across the soul—which wakens the sleeping Horror? Old divines, in their figurative way, called it "the wrath of God."

Such was my view, expressed more or less clearly. Mr Marvell, on the contrary, was disposed to believe that horror was a creation of our own weakness. "It is a matter of the nerves," he declared.

May certainly liked things to be pleasant. I think she was naturally of a brave spirit; but she shrank from whatever was disagreeable. She wrapt herself in soft furs; she made herself a warm nest; she strove in every way to shut out from her the ugly things of this world—want, pain, disease, sin, death. And thus they became more terrible to her imagination, for they are things that require to be looked in the face, and that grow full of menace to the half-averted eye. She lived in the senses; and like all who do so habitually, she had become timid and easily scared in the presence of the supernatural.

In one of our scampers across the sand-hills, I brought her to the old churchyard of the district. On a bright green margin of turf that overhangs the sea, bounded by a low wall through which our mountain-ponies easily made their way, half-a-dozen old headstones, telling how Alexander Davidson, Elspit Bell, and suchlike, had died in the odour of sanctity, and "a broken chancel with a broken cross," where venerable Culdees had worshipped God after their fashion,—such was the place. Railed off from the common earth, but rank with coarse grass and nettles, was the burial-ground of the Marvells—unopened now for many years, for, as we know, the late head of the house had chosen another resting-place. Peering through the railings we could read how "May Sybil Marvell" had been laid there a century before, and how some semi-pagan mourner had, in the classical anti-scriptural view of the time, compared her to *that* Lesbia—

"Illa Lesbia quam Catullus unam
Plus quam se, atque suos amavit omnes."

"She was my great-grandmother," said May, after a long pause.

Then we turned our horses, and rode silently along the bushless downs.

She had been in gay spirits during our ride, but now she spoke not a word. Then turning upon me she said almost fiercely—

"Why did you bring me *there*? It makes me shudder to think that we must come to that. How I hate death! Were we made only to be put away in such places, to rot beneath those loathsome nettles? Martin, this is cruel of you."

I would have excused myself, but she would not listen.

"Let us gallop along the shore," she said; "the sweet salt air will drive such fancies away. Thank God, there is life in me yet awhile."

She urged her pony with bridle and whip, and we galloped for a while along the firm shore. Soon the roses came back to her cheek; her eye flashed as the pace grew fleet; the blood danced merrily in her veins.

"I beg your pardon, Martin,"—she called me Martin now, as if I was a cousin or a servant (in fact, she had discovered some old cousinship, as she said: the only indication of kinship *I* could find—and this was later—was in a clause of my grandfather's last will and testament, where he warned his sons to beware of friendship or alliance with "the treacherous and fickle Marvells"),—"but the world is so lovely, and life is so sweet, and then it is all so dark and dreary outside. Let us banish these evil fancies, and say good-bye to the King of Horrors."

We had come to the fishers' village, and I dismounted for a moment to tighten a girth. As we paused a sweet voice rose from a group of women who were seated on low three-legged stools in front of the cottages, baiting the

lines for the morrow's fishing. The song began thus, I think,—

*“Elsie, the lass with the golden curls,
Sings like the thrushes and climbs with the squirrels:
All night long she sleeps in her nest,
And dreams of her fisher-boy out in the West.*

*All night long he rocks in his boat,
And hums a song as he lies afloat—
A song about Elsie, the rosiest rose
That blooms on the cliff where the night wind blows.”*

May listened with delight. “It is Maggie Beaton, the cripple,” I whispered.

“What a musical voice! I must get the air and the words. Let us speak to them. You know them, I suppose?”

We rode forward, and they greeted us with natural courtesy. May took possession of one of the three-legged stools, and sitting down beside the crippled child, fondled and caressed her. The child gazed admiringly upon the glorious beauty of the face, and was easily induced to repeat the simple air. May had a retentive memory, and in a wonderfully short space had made the air and the words her own. Then with a compassionate caress to the child, and a kindly greeting to the older women, she mounted again, and we rode home.

That night we loitered together over a bundle of new books that had just arrived. She was keen and bright, piquantly provoking, as was her way. She always dressed splendidly for dinner, and when she came in, brilliant as a leopard, she shook her head at me with a defiant smile. May was or could affect to be serious at times (not when her father was present—father and daughter treated each other with habitual badinage), but Mr Marvell made no pretence to more than tentative convictions at any time. “We cannot afford to have convictions in my profession,”

he said. "My chief insists that we should believe in the Turkish Empire (which, between ourselves, is dead and buried); but we are expected in other respects to keep our eyes open. A man with convictions is commonly as blind as a beetle."

They knew everybody and everything. The great names in art and literature and politics, which to me were remote abstractions, represented to them familiar intimacies. They had dwelt long in the most brilliant capital of Europe, and had mixed in its most brilliant society. Such talk as theirs was (and Mr Marvell was really a fine if indolent critic) could not fail to fascinate a man who had passed his days among the sand-hills, and who had contemplated the great excitements of life from afar. Everything about them bore the impress of habitual intercourse with poets and artists and statesmen. Verdi had given Miss Marvell a song which was part of the opera on which he was at work, and which was to be his *chef-d'œuvre*; Thackeray had drawn a comical picture of himself and his spectacles at her feet, on the last page of her volume of Tennyson; a noble historian had written some pretty jingle about her eyes and the skies, and the leas and the seas, in an album which the Empress had sent her on Christmas morning. So our talk over the bundle of new books was very lively—horribly unjust often, I daresay; but then this gave it its piquancy, and nobody was hurt.

"*Dead people that I have met,*" said Mr Marvell, as we sat in the drawing-room, into which the moonlight streamed, turning the books over one by one. "I wonder how he liked it—these are precisely the people I don't wish to meet. *Physics in Nubibus*—that means philosophy out of its senses, my dear. Are you aware that the mystery of the Trinity can be explained by electricity, and that the everlasting damnation of the wicked is somehow con-

nected with gravitation? I don't see how he accounts for the devil."

"Pray don't be flippant, papa,—Mr Holdfast is shocked by our impertinence."

Of course I disclaimed any special interest in the Enemy. He was quite able, I suggested, to fight his own battles.

There was, I recollect, an assault in the number of the *Review*, which had arrived, on the new poet of the day in respect that he was not original. Mr Marvell undertook his defence, and proceeded to show us that it was the *mannerism* only of any poet in which there was any copyright; that every poet as a matter of course pillaged his predecessors; and that the most charming Ode in the language belonged to Homer and Callimachus, to Ovid and Virgil, as much as to Gray.

"Slow melting strains their Queen's approach declare;
Where'er she turns the Graces homage pay;
With arms sublime that float upon the air
In gliding state she wins her easy way;
O'er her warm cheek and rising bosom move
The bloom of young Desire and purple light of Love."

I looked at his daughter as he repeated the almost perfect lines. My direct interest in the discussion indeed was somewhat languid. What did it matter to me in what tongue or by what hand the *words* were written? Why, the Queen herself was here. *O dea certe!*

Then we tired of criticism, and May went to the piano. "What do you think of this, papa?" she inquired, and then she sang the little air which she had got from the fisher-girl. Her voice was sweet as heaven; I never heard the same bird-like, bell-like notes in any other voice, save one. Then again, she discoursed soft, sad music, and anon dashed into the riot of a wild Hungarian waltz.

"You recollect how they danced it at Pesth, papa? It

was the wildest, most picturesque thing imaginable. Do you know the step, Mr Holdfast?"

"No, I don't dance."

"I can teach you it in a minute; like all these national dances, it looks intricate, but is in reality perfectly simple: see, this is the step."

And then bringing her feet out of her ample skirts—clean-cut, serviceable, matchless little feet—she showed me how it was done.

"You are not so clumsy as I expected. Now give me your hand and put the other round my waist. So—so. Oh, you ungrateful bear, you have torn my dress," she exclaimed with a little shriek of affected dismay, as she jumped from my arm.

As I walked home that night I understood how men and women had died for love. I had caught glimpses of a passionate rapture which might kill like *angina pectoris*. I had held her in my arms, she had leant against my heart, her hair had fanned my cheek. I did not sleep all night; I was sick with love; with love from which, as the Athenian poet said, none escape, neither mortal man nor the Undying Ones,—

"And who has thee is MAD."

The truth is that, both morally and intellectually, I was taken captive. So long as I could look into her eyes, I cared not down what abysses we were falling. At first, the freedom with which father and daughter treated whatever I had been taught to venerate somewhat troubled me. I too had revolted against august authority; but my revolt had been stern and earnest and unwillingly compelled. May's exquisite tact and sensitiveness warned her directly whenever she had thus offended; and she quickly repaired the blunder. But the extreme levity of sentiment which they had acquired during long habitual contact with

many of the most trenchant intellects of the time soon ceased to startle me.

"The Old Testament is a collection of Jewish records," said Mr Marvell on one occasion, with calm scorn; "*that*, both of us believe; but it does sometimes seem strange to me that the savage maxims of a Bedouin Sheik—and the Bedouins, we all know, are the greatest liars in the world—should rule our modern life."

Well, it might or might not be so; but I knew at least that a pair of incomparable grey eyes, full of subtle magic, were fixed upon my face.

"His conscience would not suffer him to do so," Dr Stickleback said one day, in a particularly long sermon on tithes.

"His conscience!" said Mr Marvell, contemptuously, as we walked home; "that is ever the *ultima ratio* of the quack. Conscience has nothing to do with it, for conscience is only a keen, perhaps morbid, sense of the ridiculous in our own conduct."

I walked on and made no sign. What was conscience to me? Did not her hand lie on my arm?

I knew all along that I was nothing to her; yet I do not believe that she meant to break my heart. She liked to breathe the incense of admiration, of love; my love gratified her senses as did fresh flowers and dainty colours; she could not, at the risk of losing a useful devotee, make it quite plain to him that he was to expect no love in return; and besides—a lover's temper should be unselfish. Why, Antony had thrown away the whole round earth for Cleopatra's lips.

Fawning, caressing, fierce, supple; yes, surely, the wild creature's blood was in her veins. Even while she *purred*, the claws were never very far under the fur—were drawn out and in often in the very wantonness of pleasure. Yet

she could relent at times to true pity and a natural tenderness—as it seemed.

April that year was provokingly fickle. Sunny showers and rain-touched sunbeams chased each other the livelong day. The spring was born amid laughter and frequent tears.

On one of these days we were surprised by sudden storm. We were not far from the Heughs at the time when the rain began, and we made at once for the gaunt old house. Somehow it did not look quite so gaunt with the rain-clouds driving across the roof—it looked gauntest always in the quietude of summer days. Ere we reached the door we were drenched to the skin, for the water came down in torrents. It was one of those storms when the heaven abandons itself to the luxury of tears, and weeps without restraint.

For the first time my mistress stood beneath my roof-tree, her gay plumes sadly dragged. Jess, however, though grim, was fertile in expedients, and she took Miss Marvell under her wing. In a little while May returned, so disguised that I hardly knew her, to the little parlour where I waited. She had donned an old-fashioned silk dress, that had been intended originally for a much larger woman, and her exquisite rosy smile flashed out from below an enormous hood that my grandmother or my great-grandmother had worn.

“I am the ghost of your grandmother come to rebuke you for your sins,” said May. “My beloved grandchild,” she continued, with charming mock gravity, “I have returned from the next world, where I am comparatively comfortable, entirely on your account. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and I do not like the company you keep. These English people at the Park are ruining your principles. Already you have begun the downward

career. You walked in the fields last Sabbath; next Sabbath you will do the same; then you will take to drinking and smoking and playing whist; then you will run away with old Goody; then you will snore when Dr Stickleback is preaching. Ichabod! Ichabod! the glory is departed," and the anxious representative of the Holdfasts drew the cloak round her face, and groaned over the backslidings of the house.

Her mimetic power was perfect. She would have made a great actress.

"That queer old duck, Goody," she continued, in her own voice, "is a perfect treasure. She allowed me to ransack your grandmother's wardrobe. I hope you like the result"—and she made me a stately curtsey, such as old Mrs Julian Holdfast may have made about the beginning of the last century.

I admitted that it did credit to her taste.

"I've a great mind to keep it for our theatricals in summer—it *does* become me, I think. Martin, what a lovely face!"

As she spoke, she pointed to a picture on the wall—a bright, true face, on which all the charities that make life sweet were written.

"My mother's portrait."

"Your mother," she said, in an altered tone. "It is a face one might trust for ever. Martin, you are happier than I. You had a mother; I never knew mine. Perhaps——" here she paused.

A softer mood than I had ever known in her succeeded. I looked away; for there was a trouble in her voice. I looked away; had I not done so, I must have fallen at her feet, and kissed the hem of her robe. I never loved her so wildly, so passionately, either before or after, as I did at that moment. Her eyes, travelling round slowly and dreamily, rested on me; she recovered herself directly; her

exquisite sensitiveness warned her of what was coming—told her of the words that quivered upon my lips.

A keen, defiant light came into her face. It said as plainly as words, "No—I shall not and cannot hear you. I do not love you. Speak a word, and I leave you for ever." But aloud she only said, coldly, "I think the carriage must have come."

We had despatched Donald to the Lodge to bring it on, and Goody presently appeared to announce that it was at the door.

"Good-bye, Goody," she said, as she tripped down the narrow stair. Then turning to me with a malicious twinkle in her eye, "Have you any message for your grandmamma?"

I resolved that I should go no more to the Park. It was clear, lure me on as she might at times, that she did not love me. And I—this poisonous joy which had crept into my blood was eating up my life. But I would cast it out; and so for a week, gun in hand, I tramped over the sand-hills, returning at night weary and fagged and wretched.

At the end of the week came a note from May—

"Dear Mr Holdfast,—I have been in bed a week, but am better. Kate Saville comes next month, and we must begin our rehearsals. But I cannot make up my mind what play to choose. Will you come and help me to-day? Pray do. You know we dine at seven.—M. S. M."

Of course I did not go: of course you would not have gone? Perhaps not: if you and I were wiser than Solomon, and older than Methuselah. Otherwise I think I know what road we would take, and where it would lead us.

I had resolved to keep myself well in hand, but my passion was visible in my face. I think that even Mr Marvell must have noticed it; for after dinner, as we sat

for a moment over the wine, he led the conversation to his daughter. He probably knew more of her experiences than I did, and good-naturedly desired to warn me.

"She is a clever little witch, is May, but as untamable as a fly. It is a pity she is such a tremendous coquette—only all women are coquettes. The sweet unreasonableness of woman, as her friend Mat Arnold says. Fill your glass, Mr Holdfast; I got that wine from Metternich."

He held up his own against the light, as he continued—

"I think a taste for sound old claret is about the soundest taste we can cultivate. And it is a duty to single out sound enjoyments: for the zests of life are easily exhausted. The horizon grows grey; enjoyment flags; the senses fail us. We close up all the avenues to pleasure before we know that they are so few. And when they come, the supreme rewards of success are poor and valueless. Your mistress's kiss does not burn as it used to burn; the truth is, she bores you. You don't relish the wit and the *entrées* as of yore; your stomach is not what it was, and you weary of Sydney's old jokes. You remember how your pulse beat when the Premier praised that speech, and Lady Ida's curls touched your cheek in the waltz; or rather, you don't recollect a bit—you have forgotten all about both: poor Sir Robert has been dead for a year, and Lady Ida is as fat as her mother. My good sir, a woman is only—a woman; and when you once get behind the scenes, you learn how you have been imposed upon, and swear never again to find a world of romance in a sheet of pasteboard and a pot of paint."

This was the philosophy that ushered me into the drawing-room, where the witch sat dreaming in the fire-light.

A witch indeed, as you would have confessed had you heard her sing that night to an arch, saucy air, half

passionate, half mocking, that suited the words well,
Lodge's delightful song,—

“ Love in my bosom, like a bee,
Doth suck his sweet ;
Now with his wings he plays with me,
Now with his feet ;
Within mine eyes he makes his nest,
His bed, amidst my tender breast ;
My kisses are his daily feast,
And yet he robs me of my rest :
Ah ! wanton, will you ?

And if I sleep, then pierceth he
With pretty slight,
And makes his pillow of my knee
The livelong night ;
Strike I the lute, he tunes the string ;
He music plays, if I but sing ;
He lends me every lovely thing,
Yet cruel he my heart doth sting :
Ah ! wanton, will you ? ”

Rosalind can mock a little at love even while she complains, but I had taken the disease in its worst shape, and was past jesting. A physician—could we physic Love!—would have said from the beginning that my malady was mortal.

Our theatrical projects, however, kept us in the meantime constantly employed. But although we ransacked the library, we could not agree upon a piece. This play was too warm, that was too cold ; we could not muster performers for one, nor properties for another.

“ I wish we had a poet among us,” said May ; “ only poets are such dull people to have in a country-house. I knew a poet once. I was left to amuse him, and he nearly bored me to death. He told me that he had lost his heart to a particular friend of mine, but I didn't believe him ; he had written so many rubbishy poems about the affections, that he had no heart left to lose. Do

you recollect the song he wrote for me, papa, and which you said he had stolen from Mr Lovelace? It went somehow thus, I think,—

With jeers and tears and smiles,
And fitful wilful wiles,
The May her groom beguiles;
But *my* May keeps the grace
Of true love in her face.

Sweet is May's hawthorn hedge,
And by the water edge
The murmur of the sedge;
But *my* May's sweeter far
Than hawthorn hedges are.

The thrush repeats her tale,
And the sad nightingale
With passion floods the vale;
But *my* May's whisper thrills
My soul among the hills.

The kisses of the May
Are scattered every day
On all who come this way;
But *my* May's lips are kept
Like chastest violet.

And so the foolish fellow ran on, with much more on the same key. But he might help us now, could we lay hands on him. Do you recollect what he was called, papa?"

But Mr Marvell had entirely forgotten.

"We couldn't well advertise for him, I suppose; so we must do without him, and take one of these two. Which is it to be?"

The first was a little gay French vaudeville—artless as the best art is, but exquisitely graceful and petulant. There was absolutely nothing in the story, but the people in it talked about nothing in the most charming way. The hero and his mistress made desperate love; but they clearly didn't care a copper for each other, and their passion ran off in epigrams. "My beautiful lady," said the lover on

his knees at last (he went down quite leisurely), "My beautiful lady, have pity on me." And the lady answered, "No, I have no pity. *Je suis la belle dame sans merci.*" And so the play ended.

No, that would not do. May felt perhaps that it was overlike the play she had on hand; so we chose the other. It was Goethe's *Egmont*.

When I think of May now, I strive to think of her as "Clara." She was essentially an actress; if she could not be true and brave and honest and loving, she knew that truth and honesty and love were excellent things, and on the stage at least she could rise to the heroic mood. Hers was not the martyr-spirit which can go

"Through the brief minute's fierce annoy
To God's eternity of joy."

She would have shrunk from "the fierce annoy" as she shrank from whatever displeased her senses; yet as she read of hero and martyr, her grey eye kindled and flashed and moistened. And May Marvell, when she clutched her bosom with her hands to stay the beating of her heart, because at midnight she hears the tread of armed men, and Egmont comes not, was, I believe, not less great than Rachel, or Ristori, or Helen Faucit.

Kate Saville had not yet appeared, and Miss Marvell and I read the great play together. There was something in it—in Clara's unreflective rapture, in Egmont's heroic recklessness—that fascinated her imagination.

I was but a sorry Egmont, I fear,—so poor a performer that Miss Marvell sometimes snatched the part out of my hand, and swore (as ladies swear) that she would be the Count herself. And then, muffling herself in some coverlet or shawl that lay at hand, she would show me with adorable petulance how it was done; how Egmont, bending over his mistress, had unclasped his cloak, and disclosed

the jewelled collar of the Golden Fleece. "But this is not *thy* Egmont."

I wonder sometimes that I lived through it all. I was like a man in strong fever, now on fire, anon my teeth chattering with cold. I was in rapture and in agony. This witch had poisoned my blood. As she bent over me that night, as I felt her breath touch my cheek, I was as jealously mad, as fiercely miserable as Othello. I knew that my senses were deserting me: this potent enchantress had changed me into some wild animal that I did not recognise; and I fled affrighted from her spells. What if I should smother her in my blind rage as the Moor smothered his bride? As I looked out on the black pools of water on which the moonlight lay, I swore that, come what might, I should not go to her again.

I kept my word. I did not approach the Park. But Fate was stronger than my will. I was to see her once more beside the sea.

She had been walking, and she came up to me with a beautiful flush on her face.

"Kate Saville has come," she said, "and we are ready for a rehearsal. Where have you been for ever so long?" Then, without waiting for my answer, "I hope you are perfect in your Egmont?"

"I do not mean to be Egmont," I answered, gloomily.

"You are not going to desert us, surely?"

"I shall not act."

"Mr Holdfast, this is too bad. Kate will be inconsolable."

But I would not. She never asked my reason; she knew by instinct what I meant. She should have gone then; but she still waited.

"Will nothing tempt you? Come up to-night. Kate shall give you a song, her voice is superb; and I—I—I will give you a smile," the coquette added, while

a lovely one crossed her eyes and lighted up her mouth.

“Temptress!” I muttered, eyeing her almost savagely.

“My dear Martin,” she said all at once, quite seriously, “what ails you? One would fancy that you took me for a witch. I suppose the best that you expect is to see me ride away on a broomstick,”—and she affected to pout like a spoilt child that has been crossed.

But I looked her full in the face (for I had ceased to fear her—I was reckless and desperate), and I saw that her eyes did not defy me.

Then came the end.

I took hold of her hand as we stood together, and clasped it in mine. She was not offended; she did not resist; I fancied there was an answering pressure. Her touch kindled all the blood in my body into a blaze. I turned and looked her full in the face. The smile had faded off the upturned mouth and cheeks, which were pale with fear or passion or love, but it still lingered in her eyes, and I felt that her eyes consented. I stooped down and kissed her on the lips. I was mad with love, and her lips did not resist. For a moment they clung to mine, or seemed to cling. Had Heaven been in the other scale, I could not have foregone that kiss. Then the softness died out of her eyes; her face grew set and hard and cruel; she curled herself out of my arms, and retreating swiftly and stealthily, gained a little knoll, from which she turned and faced me. Her eyes were full of menace; she crouched a little, as if with angry shame; at the very moment I thought of a panther-cat in act to spring.

“Sir!” she said, flashing out magnificently, “have you forgotten who you are?”

The voice rang with mockery and bitter pride; yet, turning suddenly, she bowed her face into her hands, and sobbed convulsively. Her being shook beneath the storm.

It was not a summer shower; it was a convulsion of nature. I was by her side in a moment: my arm was round her waist; she was tugging at the strings of her hat. "Loose them!" she said; "they are choking me." She sat down on the bank, but for many minutes could not control her hysterical sobs. Her whole nature was moved,—perhaps it needed such a convulsion, to teach her that she had a heart.

"May," I asked, penitently, "what have I done?"

"Martin, you have humbled me bitterly. It is my fault; I know that I led you on. I have been false, light, unmaidenly."

"You are the delight of my eyes," I murmured, passionately.

"No, no," she replied, piteously; "do not speak so. You cannot be so sorely hurt; it would make me miserable to think that you were hurt."

"Hurt!" I exclaimed; "it is a hurt I shall carry with me to the grave—gladly." Then such a look of pained entreaty crossed her face, that I stopped abruptly. For a moment there was silence; but she did not speak.

"May," I whispered, "you know how I love you; cannot you love me a little?"

"No," she said, steadily, through her sobs; "I have no love in my heart. I am too hard to love. I do not love you." I turned very pale; and her eyes sought mine pitifully. "Martin, how have I deceived you? You must have known how cold my heart was. Why have you been so blind?"

"May—May!—might you not learn to love me?"

"It is impossible," she said. Her tears were dried, and she had gathered herself up to go. Her face was hardening again. Her mood had changed—as I pressed her. I felt the chill coming. "It is impossible. It cannot be."

Yet I persevered ; what will not a man do for dear life when he is drowning ? “ Do not shut hope out from me,” I said.

“ It is best to speak plainly at once,” she replied—and her voice had recovered its clear, musical, mocking ring ; “ I cannot give you my love, for—among other reasons—it is pledged to another. Lord Audley——”

“ Audley ! ” I echoed, mechanically.

“ Yes, Audley—the House of Commons man. Audley is my betrothed ; ” and then added, God knows with what bitterness, “ My lord, my lover, my hero, my Egmont.”

It was not the fact which froze me ; it was her tone, in which, as it seemed to me, there was no love, no compassion, no mercy, either for me or for that other.

“ Are you a woman ? ” I said, moodily, yet with unnatural calmness—for I was dazed by her cruel beauty—“ are you a woman or a tiger’s cub ? ”

Then I turned upon my heel, and left her where she stood. She did not call me back ; yet I fancy sometimes in my dreams (it is fancy only) that I heard her say “ Martin ” softly, amid a low burst of weeping. I never saw her again.

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Her words had angered me. Day by day I had felt the fever growing in my blood. My heart was dry as dust. My mouth was parched with heat. I had said to myself, She is the desire of my eyes : this good thing sufficeth me. Give it me, O God, and I care not for heaven or for hell. All other beauty had become stale for me ; the beauty of gentle morning, of lustrous eve,—the beauty of sea and stars, of heroic action, of sweetest song. I had lusted after her with my eyes, and this was my reward.

Her lips, her level brows, her lily-like neck, her supple waist, her tender bird-like laugh, her words that mocked while they caressed — each was burned into my heart. It was as if this deadly love had consumed every faculty of my nature save that which ministered in its temple. That alone was quickened into painful, vigilant life,— into sleepless, destructive activity. The senses are cruel taskmasters when we let them rule us. They promise us unlimited grace and joy; and, if we believe them, all grace and joy are marred, are made impossible for us, are snatched from our eager grasp. He who trusts them not finds joy in the simplest pleasures—the wide world to him is a garden of delight. But *our* pampered palate rejects delicacy after delicacy, until the keenest condiment has no relish. So it was with me. I had surrendered myself to the exclusive dominion of the senses; I had set up an idol of clay; I had ceased to care for the invisible and the incorruptible. I was mad with wicked love; for even in my infatuation I knew, or fancied I knew, that the idol was cruel and selfish and base; and now heaven and earth might cast their choicest treasures at my feet, and I could find in them nothing comely or desirable.

Her words had angered me. Had I cast away the cool and simple joys of life for this feverish pain? and had I found that the apples of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah are bitter in the mouth? I left her abruptly, and wandered for hours I knew not and cared not where. At length, as the darkness deepened, I found myself among the fishers' cottages beneath the Mussel Crag. I knew that the men were at sea, for the beach was empty; but through the open door of the cottage nearest to me I heard a soft voice reading, sweet, distinct, and measured in its tone, as if the hearing of the one who listened had failed. It was the cottage where Nelly

Beaton and her aged grandfather lived together, and the voice which I heard was that of the sick child. Nelly, as you know, was born a cripple ; since her birth she had never moved without her crutch. Her grandfather was a hale old man—a man who, through all his hard fourscore years, had barely been ill for a day. But now he had grown too feeble for the sea, and could only tend his grandchild's bed. To them the day was over, and this was their evening service. She had a sweet voice, and the beautiful words blended with the solemn night as it gathered. "For the which cause I also suffer these things ; nevertheless I am not ashamed ; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able, to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

Was this indeed so ? Was it true that to her, as to that dim old apostle, He had been revealed ? That she believed and was persuaded, her voice unmistakably asserted ; but how had she gained this persuasion ? And even if her conviction was true, was there any comfort in being persuaded that the Being to whom Barebones and Stickleback appealed did in point of fact exist ?

She turned the page after a momentary pause, and the voice went on : "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day ; and not to me only, but to all those also that love his appearing."

Well, this surely was not the Being whose coming Barebones had announced. Not certainly in that triumphant pæan had he found his gloomy and despairing creed. And as she read, conviction flashed upon me. I became conscious that though Barebones had mutilated the truth, yet that even his defaced image of an Eternal Justice and

Righteousness was better than a creed in which the Invisible had no place. He who believes, however feebly and imperfectly, on an Eternal Spirit, may live for ever; but he who surrenders himself to the dominion of the flesh must perish with the flesh. The carnal mind dies with carnal things; nay, I had found that whenever man abdicates his spiritual prerogative, the carnal things cease to satisfy the carnal mind—that the bondage of sin is a bitter visible bondage, and the flesh a tyrant who scorns to hide his lash. Barebones had denounced the world and all the beauty of the world—wrongly, foolishly, impiously, if you like; but at least the fruit which he had plucked had not turned to dust and ashes, to utter corruption, in his mouth. Even his God was better than none: how much better than his this conception of St Paul, this conception of an ever-merciful God, who through sin and sorrow, through afflictions, necessities, distresses, is leading us to Himself; leading us to acknowledge and to adore the Father of our spirits!

I looked in at the open door, through which the light streamed into the darkness, a beacon to those upon the sea. The girl lay in a low bed in the corner of the room; the rushlight hung above her head; the Book lay upon the coarse coverlet before her. Very sweet and peaceful was the upturned face; very different from that other, richer in subtler intelligence, in finer moods of feeling, which had troubled my rest and driven sleep from my eyes. Here was no disquiet, no torturing rapture, no consuming fire of passion. The upturned eyes rested lovingly on the face of the old man, who, with a large-lettered hymn-book on his knee, was adjusting his spectacles to his nose. She read the Bible, he selected the hymn; for his old eyes, aided by memory, perhaps, could decipher the clearer type of the psalms. She saw that he was getting restless, and

shutting the book, said, "That will do for to-night, Daddy!"

And then he gave out the verses of the psalm, very carefully and correctly; and as I turned away I could hear the plaintive voices of old man and cripple child mingled in praise together,—

*"He from his holy place look'd down,
The earth he view'd from heav'n on high,
To hear the pris'ner's mourning groan,
And free them that are doom'd to die."*

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* * * * *

I never saw her again. My heart was still hard against her when I heard one say, "She is dead." Even in death I did not forgive her. Had she not burned up my heart; had she not lured me to the very gates of hell; had she not left me with a slight, dainty, scornful, mocking adieu? But one day (when my fever was over,—for I had been stricken by the plague of which she died) I wandered listlessly, mechanically, along the shore till I reached the churchyard among the sand-hills. A new name I noticed was carved upon the wall. Another "May Sybil Marvell" had been laid out of the sunshine, under where the rank nettles grow. Then—remembering who had last stood by my side on this turf, remembering that April evening—my heart forgave her, and all my fierce love turned into tender pity. She might have been fickle and treacherous; but at least she had had my whole heart; and she had been to me what no other woman could be again.

And it may be (I say sometimes to myself, as the old bitterness returns for a moment) that I am her debtor. She taught me in a few days the lesson which old men,

even in their fourscore years, have sometimes failed to learn. It takes long to squeeze the fever of hope out of the heart; many a bitter dismissal, many a sharp disillusion, to make a man utterly happy and apathetic. But I took my dose at a draught, and since that hour am cured.

ELSIE

A STORY OF FISHER LIFE

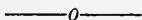
Buy my caller herrin',
They're bonnie fish and halesome farin' ;
Buy my caller herrin'
New drawn frae the Forth.

Wha'll buy my caller herrin' ?
They're no brought here without brave daring ;
Buy my caller herrin',
Ye little ken their worth.

Wha'll buy my caller herrin' ?
Oh ! ye may ca' them vulgar faring ;
Wives and mithers maist despairing,
Ca' them lives o' men.

—OLD SCOTCH SONG.

ELSIE: A STORY OF FISHER LIFE.



I.

Aut quis
Simpvium ridere Numæ, nigrumque catinum
Ausus erat ?

AT high water the waves wash within a few feet of the fisher's cottage. When the wind blows from the east the windows are sometimes darkened, as by snow, with the white drifted foam.

This winter afternoon, however, the tide is out, and there is a long space of black tangled rock between the sea and the cottage door. 'Tis a hard black frost, and the steep braes down to the beach are white with snow. The day has been sullen and heavy and lustreless, and the shade of the winter twilight (though it is little more than three o'clock) already gathers into the sky.

Upon the beach a lithe figure moves stealthily from rock to rock, or lies and watches silently in their wake. Over the bay, scattered parties of wild ducks are feeding busily,—making the most of the few minutes that are left them before the dark closes in. A pair of huge "annets,"

that look very white and stately on the tawny water, have been gradually nearing the spot where the watcher is concealed, when suddenly a sharp report is heard, and a light puff of blue smoke rises overhead. The grey eider splashes away seaward, but the drake lies still and motionless, and in a few minutes the east wind and the incoming tide lay him at the feet of the fowler.

He has taken up his prize, and is regarding curiously the beautiful dyes of the rich eider-down—so charmingly warm and cosy for this bleak winter-tide—when he hears his name called from behind.

“Peter, Peter!—come hame to your supper.”

“I’m just coming, Elsie,” replies the fisherman, picking up his gun.

“What’s that you’ve gotten?” the girl asks, pointing to the duck, when he reaches the place where she waits for him.

“A bonnie bird—ane of the muckle annets. Ye’ll get ane o’ the tail-feathers for your hat, only the Souter will be seeking it to stuff.”

“Gae it him, if ye like, Peter; I wudna wear’t.”

“Ye’d like a red ribbon better. The neist time I gang to the Brough I’m to fetch ane, ye ken, Elsie?”

“I thocht ye were to gie it to Kirsty Davidson, when I last heerd tell o’t,” retorts Elsie, looking a little wicked. “But ye may gie it her for what I care, Peter.”

“Wha tell’t you that?” asks the straightforward son of the sea. “I’ll teach them to lee, the cutties.”

They had reached by this time the little brook that babbles o’ summer nights through the village. Masses of ice were floating about on its pools, and the stepping-stone was away. Elsie paused.

“How am I to get over?” she exclaimed.

“Tak aff your hose and sheen,” says Peter, becoming mischievous in turn. “It’ll warm you, my lass.”

“O Peter!” she replied, with the least little bit of a quiver in her voice, “it’s no kind o’ you.”

Elsie looked really very nice. Her thick woollen shawl was thrown over her head, and the bright little face, all rosy with the cold, peeped from under the coarse cloth hood. Her fisher’s petticoat was not too lengthy, and the clean-cut ankle, even in its stout grey worsted stocking, was a study in its way. The little foot was not over-delicate, but quick, decisive, and *prononcé*.

“I’ll carry you over,” Peter says, relenting, and putting his gun down.

Elsie, however, wouldn’t hear of that, and tripped down the bank to make the trial herself. But when she had put her foot on one of the nearest pieces of ice, and felt it give way under her weight, her heart failed her, and she jumped back.

“How *am* I to get over?”

Peter quickly solved the difficulty. Coming behind unperceived, the young giant put his arms round her waist, and fairly lifted her off her feet, as he would have lifted a child. Skilfully taking advantage of the broken ice, he was across in a second.

“Noo, Elsie, I maun ha’e a kiss for luck,” he said, before putting her down.

But Elsie would by no means agree to any such overture, and buried her face in her hands. A brief struggle ensued, and then Elsie, her cheeks even rosier than before, recovered her feet, and ran off, like a scared fawn, to the cottage, smoothing her shawl and hair as she went, while Peter returned for his gun.

The inside of the cottage was sufficiently plain and rude, but it looked comfortable — homely, yet home-like. A bright fire of peat burned on the floor and played upon the whitewashed walls, and the earthenware plates and saucers which were suspended in a “haik” along them. A bed,

sunk in the wall, a substantial-looking "dresser," a sea-man's chest, a few three-legged stools, and some wicker-baskets filled with lines, formed the whole of the furniture. A "kettle of tea" hung over the fire, and simmered with cheerful composure.

In this little cabin old Peter Stephen and his wife had lived for five-and-thirty years. They were, if not perfectly happy, at least perfectly contented. The idea of "raising himself in the world" had never entered into Peter's head. His forefathers had lived in this village, and fished in this bay, all their days, and he was ordained and appointed to do the same. So it would be with his sons, and his sons' sons. To them there was no world beyond the limits of their little sea-bound settlement. In this century of hurry-skurry ("progress" they call it), it is pleasant to meet with such people. Their placid peace, their supreme repose, their perfect content, soothes the chafed spirit as a verse of holy Writ does.

"Whar are my glasses, lassie?" old Peter inquires, when they are all disposed about the hearth. "Here's a letter frae your brither, Peter."

Elsie finds the spectacles, and the old man spells away patiently through his son's letter. Then she takes her knitting and sits down quietly beside old Hester, who is "shelling" mussels to bait the lines for to-morrow's fishing. Peter, stretched at full length along the chest, glances occasionally over Elsie's shoulder to see how the "netting" gets forward. Unhappy boy!—it is clear as day that the little witch has bound the good-humoured lazy giant fast in her meshes.

And Elsie? She is the niece of the gudewife; daughter of a gude-brother who was lost long ago in these fickle Northern seas. Father and mother are both dead, and she has lived ever since she was a child in her aunt's house. Is she pretty? Pretty, certainly, though you

can't tell why exactly; for no one feature is quite perfect. But there is a light, and gleeful, and saucy grace about her which makes her presence felt like a glint of sunshine. Her bright red hair, in its untutored waves and ripples—

“ Like a clue of golden thread
Most excellently ravelléd,”—

is quite in keeping with the careless and dishevelled charm of her face. Red, fair reader, the hair undoubtedly is; that hated colour in its fiercest intensity; but only a reckless and unprincipled critic could assert that in this instance it is unbecoming. And, in spite of the touch of sauciness, the expression of the soft mouth and brown eye is very sweet and simple and honest. In that homely interior, and amid these stolid and weather-beaten figures, Elsie moves as graciously, as noiselessly, as the shadows in a dream move.

“ Naiad by the side
Of Grecian brook, or Lady of the Mere
Sole sitting by the shores of old romance.”

“ Ye mind the Yak wives, feyther?” asks Peter. “ When I gaed wi' Captain Brown to the sealghing last spring, ane swam on boord five mile aff the shore. Her skin canoe had been crunched by the ice. We thocht her a marmaid when she cam' bobbing up first, wi' her lang hair hangin' doun till her middle.”

“ Ay, they're surprisin' bodies, the Yaks. Troth, they mak' their bit boaties skite thro' the water uncommin! I've seen them dancin' through the jabble, when we were beatin' wi' reefed topsails, as skeely as a loom or a deuk. They're skeely craturs.”

“ Hardie says they dinna believe in heaven or hell,” interposed old Hester. “ They're dounricht misbelievers.”

“ I dinna ken,” answered her husband, reflectively. “ Some are better and some are waur; they are a' thieves,

the hail crew of them, nae doobt; yet the cratur's are no that bad either. I mind a harpooneer we left ahint ae summer, and they were unca guid till him—gaed him a wife, and bits of sealgh blubber to eat in the winter-time, and biggit him a snaw house. It was desperate dark, though; and he was like to gang daft when we cam' back. His wife, puir bit bodie, was loth to leave him, and grat like Elsie when she tined her sweetheart."

Elsie tossed her head contemptuously.

"I ne'er had a sweetheart to tine," quoth Elsie, "and I'm no seeking ony." Peter gave a tug at one of the stray curls that had escaped from her cap. "Dinna, Peter!—ye're makin' me miss the stitch. Did ye no bring her back, uncle?"

"Na; that couldna be, though she was fain to come."

Elsie's bright eyes moistened and flashed.

"That was cruel o' you, uncle."

"What could we dee, lassie?" answered the old man, composedly, in reply to the reproachful glance. "They're nae like ither folk, ye ken, and the minister says he disna believe that they've sowls o' their ain. But I'm no sure o' that—I've aye thocht better o' the varmint sin syne. Noo, Elsie, sing us a sang, and syne we'll awa to bed."

Then Elsie began in a low and monotonous but sweet voice one of those old ballad refrains which still linger about the country-side.

"When thou from hence away art past,
Every night and alle,
To Whinny-muir thou com'st at last,
And Christ receive thy saule.

If ever thou gav'st hosen and shoon,
Every night and alle,
Sit thee down and put them on,
And Christ receive thy saule."

A loud rap at the door.

“ Well, Peter,” said a short, strong, wiry little fellow, who entered, “ are you for the sea the morn ? Whan’s the tide ? ”

“ Four, or thereby,—but we’d better be aff earlier to catch the ebb. There’s cod aff the Gutterbank, I’m jalousin’, John.”

“ Phelim got a heavy shot roun’ the Boroughhead,” interposed Peter junior.

“ We’ll try thereawa’ on Mononday,” said his father. “ It’s ower far to gang the morn. Hoo’s the guidwife, John ? ”

“ ’Deed she’s but poorly hersel’, and wee Ailie’s very sair wi’ the hoast.”

“ I’ll gae doon and sit wi’ her a bit,” Elsie offers.

“ Na, na—no the nicht, Elsie. It’s bitter caul’, and the snaw’s driftin’ thick.”

So John stuffs a “ live peat ”—*vivum cespitem*, as a punning Horatian would say—into his pipe, and trudges out into the snowy darkness. Then the rushlight is extinguished ; Elsie says her prayers on her knees, unlooses the coarse grey woollen petticoat, and slips in to her cosy nest at the “ but ” end of the dwelling ; and deep sleep falls upon the cottage, thickly and silently as the falling snow.

II.

Gelidos inficiet tibi
 Rubro sanguine rivos
 Lascivi suboles gregis.

IT snowed heavily all night ; but with the turn of the tide the white passion of the dark abated, and the waning moon waded knee-deep out of the storm-spent

clouds. The pale apparition was looking back, through the sad wintry silence, upon the muffled earth, when the fishers' boats moved out to sea. That would be about four; and then in the little village the lights were again extinguished, and until the first cold streaks of morning seamed the horizon, all was still—still as the polar winter or the grave.

The village well is nearly half a mile from the village, on the ridge of the picturesque little ravine through which the Norburn winds. On the opposite bank, and still further inland, stands Hawkstone. The gentle slopes of the glen are there covered with sheltered plantations and the flower-beds of My Lady's garden. Now the wreathed snow bends the branches, and *pallida mors* has been among the flowers.

A pretty simple fountain had been erected over the well. No unfit combination,—*mens sana in corpore sano*. It was a favourite *rendezvous* for gossips and sweethearts; and the granite slab at the side—where the matron, out of breath with the pull up the hill, might rest her limbs while the limpid water filled her pitcher—was seldom quite unoccupied. Even this morning, in the dim winter twilight, a solitary figure might be discerned—a form simply draped, that paced uneasily to and fro, and leant for a moment once and again upon the cold stone, not to rest, but like Lady Anne in the bitterness of her pain,

“ She leaned her back unto a thorn,
 Ah, well-a-day !
 And there she has her twa babes born ;
 The wind gaes by and will not stay.”

An inner anguish, that rent her heart, as the pitiless knife rent the sacrificial kid's whose life-blood stained thy murmuring stream—*loquaces lymphæ tuæ*—O famed Bandusian well !

The morning was now fairly risen,—risen, one says, in obedience to ancient law and custom, though the word is not the right word to describe the dawn. No. The whole atmosphere had gradually *filled* with light; a grey, austere, uncertain light, which is properly the dawn-light, and to which the daylight is as the living face to the hushed and vacant *Death* of the Vatican. Every object on a sudden grew wondrously distinct; the black tangled rocks, the stones upon the beach, the white-gabled red-tiled cottages, with grey masses of peat-smoke hanging overhead, which the wind was too light to lift. A solitary fisher, in a blue-striped shirt, and with a wicker-basket slung on his arm, came trudging across the sands on his way to the rocks, to gather bait—mussels and limpets—for the day's fishing. Then along the uneven ocean ridge wavered a pearly flush, the *tremola della marina* of the paradisal pilgrim; and one little cloud, just hanging on the verge of the horizon, suddenly burned into gold.

I don't know that the black-veiled form spoke aloud; but the anguish of the pained spirit spoke in the abrupt gait and uneasy gesture; and it was not difficult to construe aright that silent but expressive speech.

“Ay! I mind the place like yesterday, and it's near twenty year. There's the very stane Missy would aye sit on, as quiet and bonny as a queen. I wonder wha are in the servants' ha' now? Auld Jean must be dead lang syne; she was an auld-farrand body when I first kent her. They're no up yet; they wouldna ken an' I gaed roun'. Na, na, I couldna, it would hurt ower sair. O God!” she exclaimed, as if struck sorely by sudden pain, “surely Thou wilt remember me in Thy mercy!”

Unmindful of the thick snow, she fell upon her knees and prayed passionately. The agony at length wore itself away in tears and prayers, and she rose and seated herself on the slab. Though still pale with the violence of the

pain, she strove hard to regain her composure; and by the time a fisherwoman she had observed climbing the hill approached, the strong will had triumphed, and the white face behind the black veil had grown hard and impassive again.

"It's a caul' mornin'," observed old Hester in a friendly way, as she placed one of her pitchers below the thin jet of water. "Ye'll be bidin' at the ha', mem?" she added, after she had "got*hold of her breath." Hester was by no means an old woman; she must have been ten or fifteen years younger than her husband, and though known as "Old Peter," to distinguish him from his son, the fisherman was still hale, and hearty, and vigorous. But Hester had grown stout as she grew in years, and her "breath" was now rather apt to play her false.

"Yes—no—I mean, I have been there," answered the stranger, greatly embarrassed.

"Have been there!" repeated Hester, arrested by something in the voice.

"O Hester!" the other burst out, unable to restrain herself any longer, "do you no mind me? I'm Katie, little Katie, your ain sister Katie."

Hester uttered a suppressed cry, opened her arms a little, as if she would have taken the wanderer into them, and then drew them back rigidly to her side.

"Na, na," she muttered, "I hae vowed a vow, and maun keep it."

Katie had sunk upon the seat, and with beseeching eyes and outstretched arms bent towards her sister. But when she saw that sister draw back, and the averted face grow cold and rigid, her manner altered, the shrinking, appealing timidity of her address departed, and she stood up and faced the other, quietly but resolutely.

"I ken what you mean," she said; "but I trow, Hester,

you might ha' said ae kind word to your mother's daughter ; God knows she disna hear ower mony."

"Katie Armstrong," said the other, "I made a vow to God, and keep it I wull. Your feyther's folk hae been in Norburn for a hunner' year, and a' that time nane but yoursel' has brought disgrace upon her folk. Katie, Katie, it was an ill time when we kent what you had deen. It killed the feyther: he was never himself after he heard that you were aff. And then I vowed that I would not tak your hand, nor look upon your face again. Ay, I have prayed," she continued bitterly, "that you might dee ; that she wha had been our pride, our sinfu' pride, might never come back to be our shame. Depart, and trouble us not."

A quiver passed across the pale face at the mention of her father's name ; but the bitter invective passed by, and did not touch her.

"And so the old man is dead," she said, quietly. "God rest his soul ; it wunna be lang till we meet. You wished me dead, Hester," she continued, with the same impassive calmness ; "weel, sometimes I ha'e wished it mysel'. But God did not take me away, and I thocht it best to bide His time. I ken that I ha'e sinned, sinned sairly ; but He saw how I was tried, and maybe He will pardon the sin. I ha'e fallen," she went on, "but no so bad as I micht. I was blinded, and the wily tempter owercam', but I sinned not again. Eh ! that was an awfu' wak'ning. But I couldna lie doon and dee, and so I ha'e worked on for years—work as hard and honest as your ain—to keep body and soul thegither. Perhaps God has heard my prayers—perhaps He may ; I think sometimes He has, but I canna tell ; whiles the foul sin comes back on me, and drives me into the blackness o' darkness. I didna come back to shame you : I meant not to ha'e seen ony o' you ; but I was fain to look once mair on the auld place. Ay,

ay!" she murmured to herself as her eye wandered over sea and land, and fastened on each well-remembered spot, "there's nae change here,—just as it was when we made snawba's at the schule, and Alick wudna tell the maister wha broke the window. Puir Alick! puir Alick! Alick wudna ha'e been sae hard on his little Katie. But he was awa' afore I gaed. Fare ye weel, Hester, and may ye never fin' the sair, sair heart I have whiles." And she turned away.

Katie turned away. Hester had listene'd with averted face to her sister's rapid words. She was moved; the woman's heart was touched—she did not like to own how deeply. Even her vow might have given way under the pressure; but when she looked up, Katie was already at a distance, beyond reach of speech.

"Dinna gang, Katie," she exclaimed, involuntarily; but Katie heard her not, and she did not follow her.

"It's better no," she said, as she watched her disappear along the high road that led to Peelboro'. "I couldna ha'e ta'en her hame wi' me. What wud the neebors ha'e said? And little Elsie—na, na; it's best as it is."

She turned to lift her pitcher; the interview did not seem to her to have occupied more than a few seconds; but the pail had long been full, and the water was running over, and wearing a black channel through the snow. She lifted it, looked again in the direction Katie had gone, and then wended slowly down the brae to the cottage. A cheery voice was singing within, and a blithe nursery stave greeted her ears as she approached,—

"Now in there came My Lady Wren,
 Wi' mony a sigh and groan;
 'Oh what care I for a' the lads
 If my wee lad be gane?'

Then Robin turned him round about,
 E'en like a little king;
 'Gae pack ye out at my chamber door,
 Ye little cutty quean!'

“Na, it couldna be,” repeated the old woman; “but I might ha’e been cannier wi’ her.”

So Hester, according to her own judgment, had acted very prudently—too prudently, perhaps, in the judgment of the Immortals. For prudence is sometimes a most reckless spendthrift. Did Hester come to feel that her prudence on this occasion had been very costly? Her own people, indeed, saw no connection between the selfish act and the sentence which the Unseen Judge pronounced upon it. But I believe, on my honour, that it broke the cherished idol of the mother’s heart; that it quenched the fires on the hearth; that it left her old age homeless, desolate, and unloved.

III.

Love here blindfolded stands with bow and darts,
There Hope looks pale, Despair with rainy eyes.

PETER and Elsie had gone to the “Broch” on some matter of household concernment. The little fishing-village was half a mile or so from its bigger neighbour, and depended upon it for its supplies. When their shopping was finished—the weather being wild and stormy, and the occasion, indeed, of Peter being on shore—they strolled down to the harbour. The harbour is the place of interest in the “Broch” when a storm is blowing: and they had heard from some of those who were hurrying to the pier-head that a big ship was “in-shore.”

Thalatta! Thalatta! But it is not “the many-dimpled smile”—*ἀνηριθμον γελασμα*—that greets them this winter afternoon; the lion-like monster has been roused from his

summer slumber, and now lashes his tawny mane. 'Tis an awful day! The bay is crossed with crested billows; the brown skua gulls are screaming over the uptorn tangle which the sea has cast on the beach; a troubled gleam of rainbow touches the troubled water and the slate-coloured cloud of rain in the offing. On the grey edges of the driven sleet, dimly visible through it, a large barque rushes on before the blast. She has beat about the horizon the whole morning, but cannot weather the Burrough Head, and now—unable to live the night out yonder—makes straight for the harbour-mouth. 'Tis her last chance, and she needs must haste, for in another hour the retreating tide will shallow the channel, and strand her upon its beach. There,—you see her clearly now. A great Dutch barque—heavy and unwieldy—her rain-beaten sails sadly tattered—a red flag flying at her mizzen. On she comes with Dutch-like deliberation, yawing over the swell as if she would shake every timber in her to bits, and each moment nearing the white surf that breaks upon the bar. That is the point of danger. The bar is close outside the harbour-mouth, and one after the other the great waves—mountains of water that tower up high over the pier, and seem to drain the sea to its bottom—burst with a thundering boom upon it.

“He’s keepin’ ower far to lee’ard,” says Peter, comprehending at a glance the situation. “He’ll land her on the back o’ the pier.”

“Up with your top-gallantsail, man!” shouts the harbour-master with an oath, as if he expected the skipper out there in the tempest to hear him. “Clap on every rag you have, you auld idiot!” and he uses his arms like a pair of flails, to indicate what is needed.

The hint is taken, the topsail is slowly unfurled, and the barque, with better “way” upon it, keeps up gallantly through the surf. As a mere matter of speculative curi-

osity the spectators, perhaps, might have wished to witness the effect which the billow that has just now broken like a cataract would have had upon her; but the steersman, who with some half-dozen bearded Finns is now visible on the deck, has handled his tools well, and brings her rolling in upon the monster's back. Then there is a brief interval of calm—thirty seconds or so—and before the next “sea” breaks, a cheer has greeted the drenched crew, and the storm-beaten is within shelter of the pier.

Elsie stood upon the pier with her shawl wrapped round her head, clinging to her cousin's arm. She had watched the barque with a breathless interest which she could not quite fathom. These bearded Finns were no friends of hers,—why should her heart throb so wildly on their behalf? The truth was that unconsciously she had given the reins to her imagination. Had the man to whom she clung belonged to the vessel! Had Peter been on board! She shivered with actual pain as the picture passed before her mind's eye. Was it possible that such misery might be in store for her? But she quickly recovered her composure. It was only a dream, she said to herself softly, as she pressed his strong arm with the hand which rested upon it,—“Thank God, only a dream.”

IV.

Above us in worship

Flutter the terns, and the sea-gulls sweep past us on silvery pinions,
Echoing softly our laughter.

IT was the first Spring morning—in fact, I mean, and not by the Calendar. There is always one day in the year when the Spring seems to me to awake. The

snow has been gone for weeks, the sun has been shining briskly, the fruit-trees are white with blossom, yet the sky remains hard and stern, and the earth is black and inhospitable, as if the thought of winter still chilled its heart. But one morning you wake unwarned, and you have barely drawn aside the curtains ere you are aware that the bonds of death are loosed, that a new life has been born into the year, and that, like the eyes of a girl who has begun to love, the blue sky and the fleecy clouds have strangely softened since nightfall. And this very morning—when Peter and Elsie, in Peter's summer yawl, were speeding along to the bight where the sea-birds build—was the first morning of the New Year.

That noble coast-line—what words can I use to enable you to apprehend the wonderful charm which it keeps for those of us who have been bred among its cliffs? Seat yourself beside me upon this perilous ledge, half-way down the precipice, and we shall watch together the on-goings of a most orderly society. The sea is very worthy of our truest love at all times; but never more so than here. The cliff hangs overhead, and shuts out all communication with the prosaic country behind—the country of oats, and turnips, and oxen, and red-faced farmers, and agricultural principles. We are done with the old world, and the new stretches away from our feet to the furthest horizon, a luminous plain of waters. It is the ocean itself that lies below us, mapped out into great spaces of light and shade,—of light where the April sunshine simmers upon the sea,—of shade as the soft breeze follows the cloud along the water. We are all conversant with the plastic character of this season, the rapid and noiseless changes of expression that pass over the face of the sky in the course of a forenoon; and surely the April shadows that shift upon the sea, are even more fickle and capricious than those that cross the land. And is not the heaven that

arches the main richer and more brilliant than it is elsewhere? What a delicious depth of colour has been shed over the nearer sky! how delicate those more fickle tints that linger along the horizon! how exquisite the grace and intricacy of that fretted network of cloud which clings to the ether! how pure and lustrous those great white masses overhead that sweep slowly away toward the purple hills! Among the shadows, white sails in the blue distance speed noiselessly hither and thither; and closer to the rocks groups of auks caress each other with their bills, and enjoy the languid motion of the sea. And about us there is a great quiet—a cold and stately seclusion—broken though it be by the rustling murmur of the water upon the rocks, and the shrill complaints of a varied and animated life. The whole of this sweet, calm, Italian-like bay is shut in by the strange devices of a vagrant imagination—devices more quaint and daring than any artist ever ventured to work into his marble. The bold belfry of the Florentine, the crazy minaret of the Mussulman, the solemn strength of Notre Dame, the network meshes of the exquisite Antwerp spire,—all crowded and mingled together without the slightest deference to the scruples of architectural etiquette. Sportive columns, fantastic arches, eccentric domes, bridges fitly dedicated to the devil, long quiet coves in which the sea is always silent, proud defiant buttresses against which the white passion of the surf never relents! Fashioned by the action of the water upon the rock through long silent centuries, no poet was ever visited by fancies more wild and forlorn than may here be traced, wrought in the stormy architecture of the waves! And even these craggy precipices feel the gentle influences of the spring-time. The pale convolvulus creeps timidly along the giddy height; the blue violet and the yellow primrose peer curiously from among the long rank grasses; tufts of sea-pink and feathery ferns grow down

to the very margin of the water, and touch the black and stern face of the rocks with a tender and delicate beauty.

In the meantime Peter's yawl is racing rapidly away before the fresh spring breeze. Peter looks to the sail. Elsie is at the tiller. Elsie steers deftly—it is the one excitement of her life,—and the delicate face is flushed with colour as she keeps the boat true to its course. Smooth to-day is the rough German main: but the canvas is *taut*, and the water not an inch below the gunwale, and sometimes a dash of spray breaks across the bow into their faces, just enough to make Peter think of a reef should it freshen out of those white colossal clouds that are clambering across the hills. Then it slackens for a moment, and the little beauty lingers and hesitates and sways to and fro languidly in very wantonness,—light and buoyant as a bubble upon the waves. But again the passion is upon her; and brushing the foam behind her, she strikes her keel low and deep into the hissing water. The lovers are very happy—lovers, I suppose, mostly are—but to-day there is an intoxication in the morning air itself which is even more potent than love.

An hour's sail brought them to Longhaven,—a noble bay, hemmed in on all hands by magnificent granite rocks. The sea-birds had arrived for their spring venture,—guillemots, razor-bills, sea-parrots, kittiwakes, herring-gulls, the raven, and the falcon. Each tribe, you see, has its own “diggings,”—to which, year after year, it returns with un-failing regularity. The raven, who is the earliest comer, often beginning his architectural operations before the winter is well over, builds its nest far up on some slippery and utterly inaccessible ledge. The peregrine selects a crevice in the Bloody Hole, which looks quite as “ugly” as the other; but is in reality accessible to skilful and steady-eyed cragsmen, of whom there are several among our fisher friends. The faces of the bluffs on which the sea-wind

beats most fiercely, are covered with gaily-coloured eggs of marrots and razor-bills. The kittiwakes keep a sheltered nook to themselves, while the great herring-gulls, who sweep majestically overhead, observing them with curious eyes, are in possession of every splintered pinnacle. The rock-pigeon builds in the deep recesses of the caves, along with the cormorant and the shag. The nests of both of the latter birds are found frequently along this coast; but placed as they are, within the eaves of the caves, it is difficult to reach them, and the young are seldom captured.

As they approach, they notice the rabbits scampering about among the long grasses and the wild garlic, and here and there a goat is visible, tethered, as it appears, on the summit of the precipice. A troubled murmur passes across the crowded ranks of coot and razor-bill that are ranged along the faces of the bluff. Then beginning to discover that it is time to move, a stream of birds, long-bodied and short-winged, passes over the boat to seaward. Some of them take the water; but the majority, after a sweeping circuitous flight, return to their respective stations, and await the issue with that stolid calmness which characterises the puffin race. The snow-white kittiwakes hover overhead, or dart rapidly and clamorously upon the shoals of "soil," with which the sea at this season swarms. But they leave razor-bills and kittiwakes undisturbed. Peter is in search of the rock-pigeon, and the Dropping Cave, which they are nearing, is one of its favourite haunts. Quietly, without a word spoken, they enter the magnificent portal,—for this sea-temple, scooped out of the solid rock by the winds and the waves of a thousand winters, is more awful than any that man has built on the land. The upper dome is very fine—after the manner of the grand gloomy fanes of Eastern Europe, where the roof retreats into dim darkness, and the flickering flambeau only serves at times to strike into bright relief a heavy rafter, or a carved line of delicate

cornice, or the gilt wings of an angel hovering above the aisle ; but perhaps the under world is even more interesting. Through the limpid water they see the black-backed fishes moving stealthily among their forests of tangle ; shining white pebbles lying softly upon the yellow sand ; seaweeds ruddy and crimson with the freshest blood of the sea ; long-legged crabs walking daintily among the sharp rocks ; a great blue lobster at the door of his hole ; sea-urchins near the surface, as prickly as porcupines,—the whole purified, idealised, and though not three fathoms from their feet, remote and distant as in a dream. When fairly within its mouth, Peter raises his voice, and beats the oars on the side of the boat. Startled by the noise, a flock of blue pigeons, sprinkled with white, issues out of the gloomy darkness, where the noise of falling water and the occasional plunge of a seal is audible, and make for “the open.” Then both barrels are discharged simultaneously, producing such thunder as a whole park of artillery makes elsewhere, and waking echoes, and echoes of echoes, that seem never to cease,—for often, when they fancy that all is over, some distant bluff takes up the challenge, and of new breaks the silence. The rock-pigeon is a difficult bird to shoot under such circumstances—it flies rapidly, the cave-light is imperfect, and the roll of the boat is apt to unsteady the hand. When the smoke clears away, however, they find that one or two have fallen ; and a similar success attends them at the Mermaid and the Souter caves, which they attack in succession.

Peter’s friend, the Souter, is anxious to add the eggs of the black guillemot to his collection, and Peter knows where the single pair which frequent Longhaven have this year established their nest. The Scrath Rock is one of the wildest and most picturesque in the world. A solid mass of granite, two hundred feet in height, and one thousand feet in circumference, is divided from the main land

by a deep and narrow channel. This immense block has been rent in twain,—how, when, or by what dread Titanic hand, no mortal can tell. The rent, which widens as it ascends, is bridged at the top; and through this great natural arch (forming as it were a mighty frame which intensifies by its deep carmine the purity of the sea and sky in the vignette which it encloses), the blue water and the white sails of passing ships sparkle brilliantly. Half-way down its slippery and polished face the pair of “duskiess” had established themselves, and they could see them flitting, like black butterflies, about the rock. They had selected, as it seemed, a secure and inaccessible recess; but Peter, a mighty cragsman, was not daunted. He landed upon the island, and quickly reached the summit (for the ascent was comparatively safe and easy), where he relieved himself of boots and jacket. Then he cautiously lowered himself over the face, and crawled along on his belly, snake-like, in the direction of the nest. See, he has reached the nest, and now he prepares to return. As he does so, a mass of rock which he had disturbed as he descended is dislodged, and passing within a yard of the ledge to which he clings, leaps from one projection to another, till, with a noise like thunder, it buries itself in the sea. Had he gone a yard further it would have taken him with it; even as it is, it leaves a wide gap which might task the skill of a sinewy leaper on *terra firma*; and here a sheer precipice, one hundred and fifty feet in height, yawns beneath. But Peter’s shoeless feet cling like a hawk’s or a squirrel’s to the cliff, and in another moment—for he dare not give himself a moment to realise the extremity of the peril—he has crossed the gulf and is safe.

And Elsie? The boat had been fastened to the rock, and she was laving her hands in the cool water, and gazing lazily and dreamily into the under world. Then she started suddenly. A large stone bounded down the face of the

rocks, and plunged into the water not far from where she waited. Her heart leapt into her mouth. Where was Peter? The gulls were in a state of clamorous excitement; but she fancied that through the clamour she heard the voice of her lover. Had he missed his footing? Was he clinging in sore straits to the cliff? She grew giddy—she clasped her hands over her eyes. She spoke no word in her terror,—knowing that a word might scare him; but it needed all her force of will to keep herself in hand. A moment later—ages it seemed to her in the solitude and the darkness—she heard a step upon the rock beside her. She looked up,—there stood her lover with his placid smile and wide honest eyes. She could not resist the impulse. The little woman threw herself into the giant's arms with a low cry of relief. "Dear Peter! Dear Peter!" Yes, he was safe again in her arms, and she was safe in his; and at that moment she realised perhaps for the first time how dearly she loved him.

It was a homely rendering into modern domestic prose of an early heroic picture, out of which the charm has not yet faded,—

"Then lifting her neck, like a sea-bird
Peering up over the wave, from the foam-white swells of her bosom,
Blushing she kissed him; afar on the topmost Idalian summit
Laughed in the joy of her heart, far-seeing, the Queen Aphrodité."

V.

And autumn with a noise of rooks
That gather in the waning woods.

HOW delicious are the bays and coves along the coast in the early autumn! The crisp sea-sand—the crimson sea-weeds—the beaten sward with its hardy flowers

—the fields of yellow oats hanging precipitously along the brae-sides, which picturesque-looking bandits are reaping as their fathers have reaped them since the days of Hengist. The tarrock skims lightly along, and screams as the skua comes prowling round the cape,—high up, the gannet watches its prey, and arresting itself in mid-flight, dives with prodigious force, straight as an arrow, a hundred yards below the surface,—the terns, like dappled downs, are blown about the sky, or, balanced upon the breakers, weave their wings swiftly together. A gay and animated picture in the flush of the October sunlight—a light which mingles in its rich and saddened tones the autumnal beauty and the autumnal decay.

This, for example, has been one of those delicious days whose charm is none the less exquisite because there are no words fit to arrest and perpetuate its peculiar loveliness. Hour after hour the waves broke upon the sandy beach with the same monotonous roll, though a perceptible change might be detected by the practised ear as the tide retreated from the land and again returned. The boat of a solitary fisherman, and a lustrously white bird—a gannet, or one of the larger gulls—lay the whole morning together near the centre of the bay. About noon, a large ship, with every inch of canvas spread, dropped lazily along to the south. As the day waned, and the tide ebbed, the gull and the fisher left their positions; small flocks of ducks beat in quickly towards the shore in single file; and once a pair of red-throated divers, in their petulant coquetish way, chased each other around the margin of the bay. High up upon the downs the lights began to twinkle—a red, lurid glow showed where the village blacksmith plied his craft—voices muffled by the twilight came down upon the shore—and a wary heron flapped its unwieldy wings as it passed along to the pool where, until the grey of the morning, it will watch the retreating tide. And now, while the

roar of the restless ocean rises up to them for ever, silently one by one, the stars come out above the hills.

But too often, alas! just such a day of autumn sweetness and peace ushers in a terrible autumn night of rain and wind and disastrous storm.

VI.

Only I discern
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

THE lovers had had an angry contention.

“Weel, Peter,” said Elsie, “ye may gang your gate. I dinna mind whether ye like me or no.”

“I dinna doubt you,” replied the giant, angrily. “Is’t Tam Buchan ye’re forgathered wi’ noo? Are ye trysted wi’ him the nicht?” he asked, scornfully; and Peter was not pleasant in his scornful moods.

The little gipsy flushed up. Her whole face glowed with the disdain which her soul felt; and Peter’s eyes, giant though he was, fell before the angry lightning he had evoked.

“Tam Buchan!” she said, throwing back her head with a bright and indignant expression of surprise. “Tam Buchan! na, na, Peter, he’s ower like you for me to court him.”

Peter stood before the little tormentor a moment irresolute. He was hurt and sore, and was on the point of retorting bitterly; but the bright and angry gleam in Elsie’s eyes arrested his speech, and he only said, in a constrained voice,—

“Aweel, aweel, Elsie, tak your ain way; I’m aff. The

boats 'ill be starting shortly, and they'll be needin' me to stow the nets. Gude een to ye!"

O Peter, Peter! have you indeed gone? Not one little word of endearment for this last greeting; not one expression of unconstrained tenderness; not one smile or embrace. Relent and come back; could you see her now you could not but relent. All the bright, beautiful, panther-like mockery has died out of the face, which is no longer flushed, but very pale and wan. Yes, she cannot be angry any longer; she must weep to ease that sharp pain at the heart; and laying her head down upon her arm, she sobs sorely and bitterly. He was unkind, she thought; but she herself was to blame too. She would tell Peter that on the morn when he returned. Yet why not tell him to-night? Why not be reconciled at once, and weep all bitterness away upon the faithful and manly heart which, she knew, loved her so well?

Stirred by this new longing, Elsie wrapped her plaid round her head, and ran down towards the harbour. As the tide was ebbing, the boats were being towed towards the point of the pier; the crews, bearing nets and small barrels of water, were hurrying to the beach. The whole place was alive and bustling merrily, as it always is before the departure of the fleet. Elsie stopped short on the hillside that overhangs the harbour; she could not face the crowd: if she met Peter, she must needs throw herself into his arms, and she could not do so among these strangers. So she sat down and waited, hoping that he might notice where she sat, and come to her. She saw him distinctly; saw him casting the nets into the bottom of the boat with his brawny arms; saw him with the huge oar pushing his craft away from its neighbours towards the harbour-mouth, and then—ah! surely they were not starting yet?—the mast was raised and fixed, and the sail slowly and laboriously hoisted. She could doubt no longer; they were

gone: and forgetting everything except the passionate desire to receive but a single word of forgiveness, she ran down the steep pathway to the beach. Peter, Peter, do you not hear that imploring cry? No, he hears nothing, save the waves as they plash against the sides of his craft. The boat beats strongly and lustily out to sea before the fresh evening breeze.

'Tis a pretty sight enough, for one whose heart is not too heavy. The rough weather-beaten forms of the sturdy tars; the monotonous beat of the long oars, and the heavy lurching of the craft, when they meet the ground-swell outside the harbour-bar; the creaking of the mast and tackle as the sail rises heavily from the deck. It is hard work, you see, to force the inert monster into motion; but at length, touched by subtle force, he digs his keel keenly into the hissing foam, and meets proudly the chill kiss of the autumnal breeze, which freshens the water, and deepens the frosty green on the sky, and drives away the slanting gleams of the sunset.

Elsie sat down on the hillside, and watched the fleet depart. They crowded out; but her eyes were fixed on *one*, until its brown sail mingled with the brown of the twilight. Then she rose and walked home very wearily. Her heart felt very empty. With that boat the hope that had buoyed her up departed, and she returned faint and desolate. Janet had got back from the "toun;" but old Peter had not returned. Janet noticed Elsie's pale cheeks and red eyes,—

"What maks you look sae white, Elsie?"

Poor Elsie, she could restrain herself no longer; a passion of tears choked her, as she turned her face to the wall, and murmured,—

"That I had said but one word!"

The twilight had deepened into night—the cold, clear

night of the late autumn—as we smoked a meditative cigar along the castle cliffs. Though the sea was perfectly smooth, its roar was loud and defiant—a reminiscence of past storms, it might be: a presage, perhaps, of storms to come. Otherwise, the night was very beautiful,—still and lustrous, with fitting gleams of fire in the north. That pale and silent array of warriors, on what mission is it bent?

“ Their helmets gleamed white through the vapour,
In the moonlight their corselets did shine,
As they wavered and flickered together,
And fashioned their solemn design.”

Swiftly the fire of fight gathered along the northern horizon—swift charges—swift retreats—a kindling onset, as the northern chivalry swept the field, and the arrowy shafts of the archers rang against their burnished corselets, until the battle streamed away, and was lost upon the distant firmament, behind the Northern Star! There was scarce a breath of wind; what there was felt cold and chill for the season, and came direct from the east. “There will be more wind ere morning,” my host said to me. “I hope the boats are within hail.” As he spoke we looked across that wan water, and saw, or fancied that we saw, the lights on board the fleet twinkling in the distance, many miles to the south.

We went to bed, and slept soundly. About four next morning the servant wakened us—

“It’s blowing a gale,” he said, “from the sea; and the hail country-side is down on the shore. The boats are trying to weather the Borough-head.”

We rose, and dressed ourselves hurriedly. The wind howled among the turrets, and by the grey light of the dawn we saw that the sea was already fiercely agitated. Huge white breakers, running across the whole bay, roared

in hoarsely upon the shore. Here and there amid the tumult, a solitary boat was visible,—a scrap of sail hoisted on one of the masts, the other bare of canvas,—plunging deeply and heavily among the waves, and vainly attempting, by lying close to the wind, to escape the rocky headlands.

“God help them!” said my friend; “for man can do little for them this night.”

VII.

This ae night, this ae night,
 Every night and alle,
 Fire and sleet and candle light,
 And Christe receive thy saule.

BEFORE eleven o'clock the wind began to rise, and a little later the pier-head at Peelboro' was crowded by those who began to look anxiously for the return of the fleet. One or two of the crews—more cautious than the others—about this time reached the harbour in safety, and were warmly greeted by the watchers. But this happened before midnight, and for two hours thereafter, the wind continuing to rise till it shrieked and howled among the shrouds of the vessels in port, no more appeared. The night had become very dark; it did not rain, but a thick murky cloud stretched across the sky, and blotted out the stars, and it was impossible to see any distance seaward. Only the white fringe of surf, which indicated the line of rocks beyond the bar, grew every moment more fatally distinct. Ah! that wild waste of waters out yonder in the stormy gloom, what hapless struggles, and gallant toils, and bitter throes of anguish, does the darkness veil this night!

“Where are the boats?” was the question that many an anxious heart in the crowd asked fearfully; for it was a crowd composed principally of the wives and daughters of the fishers. But there was little said, the anguish was too profound for noisy demonstration. A bright light flashed out a little way into the darkness, and struck clearly against the massive wall that protected the entrance to the channel from the east. On this a harbour-pilot was stationed, and as his shadow wavered and flickered in the glare, they could see distinctly the tough and weather-beaten form of the old tar, in his round hat and pilot-jacket, peering curiously into the night. The town clock was striking two, when a hail from the opposite side told them that the first boat was in sight. In another second it came within the flash of the light, and an interval of intense suspense to all who stood there followed. The blast was blowing right in-shore, and the weather-pier of the harbour had to be fairly rounded before the sheet could be lowered—a feat which required no little nerve and hardihood. They were evidently brave and skilful fellows, however, who worked this boat. Through the heavy swell that would have borne them to destruction, they held their own gallantly, and though they came in at prodigious speed, urged on by the swell, and their great sail, which had only a single reef, they were past the light, and the pier-head, and the troubled faces, before the sheet came down.

A hearty cheer, through which the pent-up feelings of the crowd first found vent, greeted the men; but this was only one of a hundred boats that were still out in the stormy darkness, amid the angry waves, and the same deep and painful silence again ensued. A few minutes passed, and one by one, four black sails struggled out of the profound gloom, and three of them succeeded in making the harbour. But the last was not so fortunate. It was

evidently steered by a good seaman ; two heavy swells that broke close upon its bow when it first came in sight, being very skilfully avoided, and no one doubted that it would be equally fortunate with those which had preceded it. But as it approached the mouth of the harbour, the rope that held the sheet was either unskilfully loosed, or gave way under the strain ; and in a moment the unlucky craft was at the mercy of the breakers, which carried it like a cork towards the white line of surf. An involuntary cry of horror escaped from the crowd. They saw the steersman rush from his seat in the boat and make a vain attempt to clutch the sheet as it escaped, ere the wind tore it away in shreds ; they could almost hear the deep and bitter curse which broke from his lips at the ill luck or folly which had delivered them up to death. They could note this, but little besides, for the tragedy was consummated with terrible rapidity. The oars of the men were of no avail against the deadly gripe of the current, and although they strove gallantly for life, it was clear from the first that they were drifting hopelessly to death. A rope, as they were hurried past the pier-head, was flung to them, but it snapped like a reed before it could be fastened. Past the sickened onlookers they went, not thirty yards away, the light streaming on the white horror of their faces as they struggled helplessly with their oars. The next wave that broke upon them bore them out of sight, and shivered the craft against the Witches' Rock.

"Merciful heavens !" some one exclaimed, as the light fell upon the steersman's pale, resolute face, "it's young Peter Stephen."

What cry is that ? It is the cry of a despairing woman, of a woman whose heart is broken. Poor Elsie !

Elsie had gone to bed after her aunt had administered a strong cup of tea, and quickly sobbed herself to sleep. The sore smart of the recent quarrel, the sense of an im-

pending calamity, were forgotten, and the girl dreamt of her lover, and a bright smile played about the rosy lips as she dreamt. About midnight she wakened suddenly, with a feverish start, the wind was howling round the little cottage, and old Peter was moving about the room with the lamp, which he had lighted at the embers of the peat-fire on the hearth.

“What’s the matter, uncle?” she asked, wearily.

“It’s a bad nicht come on, my lassie,” said the old man; “I’m gaun down till the pier-head.”

Elsie sickened with fright. Her presentiment of danger, then, had been too true. “Tak’ me wi’ you, uncle?” she asked.

“Na, na, you’re best in your bed. There’s na fear o’ the boats—leastwise o’ the lad; he kens hoo to tak’ Peel-boro’ pier, if ony ane kens, I warrant.”

The old man put out the lamp, and cautiously opening the door, went out into the darkness. The dying embers on the hearth gave out a dreary and forlorn light. Elsie could endure the suspense no longer; hurriedly throwing on her dress, she wakened her aunt, and they went down together to the pier.

She crouched among the crowd. The wind blew her long hair about her face unregarded. Terrible to the strongest man in the crowd was that silent suspense; an agony, a fever of misery, to that poor girl. Above the roar of the wind, above the tumult of the waves, a refrain rang in her ears, “That I had said but one word.” Never, never, never, can that one word be uttered now; not till the great day when they shall stand side by side before the Judge, will she be able to ask him to forgive her.

She did not faint or go into hysterics, as fine ladies would have done. She stood pale and tearless among the crowd. Her uncle was by her side, and she slipped her cold hand into his. There the two watched without speak-

ing or moving; the girl waiting her lover, the father his son. A lusty cheer greeted each boat as it ran into the harbour, but *the one* for which they waited did not come. At length Elsie felt old Peter's hand clutch hers convulsively, but he said nothing. Another moment, and the unlucky boat and its ill-fated crew were being dashed among the waves and the rocks.

She had seen *his* face for a moment as the light fell upon it. Pale and resolute, but full of anguish; she could read its every line, as though he had been standing by her side. It was a terrible vision; so close to her, and yet separated for ever by the great gulf. Her head swam round. "Let me go to him," she cried, in wild unconsciousness, and then staggering forward, fell stunned and helpless into the old man's arms.

VIII.

Is there no pity sitting in the clouds?

A DEEP grief had fallen upon Peter's cheerful dwelling. Little Elsie had been struck down, and was now lying in a state of feverish insensibility in her lonely little crib. His son, the brave, honest, simple-hearted giant, the pride of his old age, was dead, drowned in those treacherous waters which had already proved fatal to so many of his hardy race. The body, however, had been recovered, and this was a great source of comfort and consolation both to Peter and Hester. The devouring sea would not prevent them from paying their simple charities to the dead—their homely homage to death. The scarred features had been carefully composed—the wet sea-weed

had been combed out of the yellow curls—the linen winding-sheet which the mother had prepared for the husband had been appropriated to the son—the body had been laid decently in the plain coffin, with its simple “P. S., aged 25,” on the lid, and the coffin had been laid decently in the old churchyard among the windy bents on the shore, “which twice a day with his embossed foam, the turbulent surge shall cover.” All was over and finished, and the plain slab had been laid above the dust of the simple-hearted sailor; but Elsie still remained in the same state of bewildered unconsciousness. Old Hester hobbled about the cottage, old Peter sat over the hearth, gazing into the embers; but Elsie would not waken out of the strange and perilous sleep which had overtaken her. At length, weeks afterwards, the low voice of the comforter penetrated the dulled ear, and sank into the sad, sore heart. The spirit roused itself, cast off the ghastly winding-sheet of seeming death in which it had lain, and then the body quickly gained strength, and Elsie—a very different Elsie from the radiant Elsie of yore—was able once more to attend to the aged couple, to whom she was now doubly dear.

Old Peter was an office-bearer in the little Calvinistic conventicle built on the shore in front of the village; and on the Sunday following the funeral, we met a party of fishers returning home, who informed us that the Rev. Mr Sturmup had that morning preached a “gran’ discourse” on poor Peter, and that the close of the sermon had been reserved for the evening service.

“Let us go,” I said, “and hear him. I want to see what this wild people of yours really believe in.”

“I am told he is a vehement bigot—loud, long-winded, and intolerant. However, the evening is fine; it will be a pleasant walk across the bay.”

The twilight was falling ere we passed through the de-

serted streets of the deserted village ; for the entire population had already crowded into the little chapel. Only as we passed Peter's cottage, we heard old Hester, as she sat solitarily by the fire, "crooning" over the words of some half-remembered text or hymn. The light played upon the withered features of the old crone, and into the little crib where Elsie, pale and smooth as a marble figure, lay in her unquiet sleep. As we approached the conventicle, we found that the service had commenced, and the words of the grand sea-psalm, sung gruffly and rudely, but heartily, by every one present, greeted us as we entered.

"The floods, O Lord, have lifted up, they lifted up their voice ;
The floods have lifted up their waves and made a mighty noise.
But yet the Lord that is on high is more of might by far
Than noise of many waters is, or great sea-billows are."

The building was quite crowded, and we had some difficulty in finding an unoccupied pew. The preacher was a long, dark, bony man—middle-aged, apparently—the expression of his face harsh, and at times even repulsive. That he was a man of no inconsiderable ability was evident from the first sentence he uttered, and his opening prayer consisted of a very clever and elaborate account to the Almighty of the object and character of the scheme of salvation which He had invented, and with which therefore He might have been presumed to be tolerably familiar. Instead of those simple, touching, and beautiful confessions of sin and dependence on the Divine Mercy with which our ritual has made us familiar, he indulged in elaborate argument and rather boisterous declamation. Still, it was an able and impressive performance ; though undoubtedly, whatever it might be, it was not prayer. It was rather an ornate Confession of Faith addressed directly to the Almighty ; with this effect, that it made, or seemed to make, the person to whom it was addressed, a witness to the truth of what it asserted. As such it had no doubt a

certain impressive solemnity, and prepared the hearer for the peculiar and powerful discourse which succeeded,—a discourse, like the creed it represented, gloomy and fanatical indeed, but rendered striking and picturesque by its scent of the sea.

Ye shall all likewise perish, was the brief, and characteristically misshapen, text from which it started. “Men,” the preacher began, “are born in sin. They are rotten to the very core. They are not, indeed, devils—no, they are not devils *as yet*,” he repeated, emphatically; “but to the natural man good is as hateful as it is to the devils in hell.

“The Almighty,” he continued, “had it seemed good to Him, might have left us to perish utterly. We could not compel Him to save us. He is the All-powerful. We are not necessary to His happiness. He is the All-happy. We had no claim upon His mercy—whatever He has done for us, has been done out of His own infinite beneficence.”

“No claim?” muttered my companion, uneasily. “Was He not their Maker? He who had implanted these capacities for sinning, permitted these possibilities of evil! Have they not the claim which the weak have upon the strong? Not necessary to His happiness? Has the Divine Purity, then, no satisfaction in the diminution of pollution?”

“Hush!” I said; “let us see how he gets them out of the scrape.”

“But, my brethren, He did not leave all to perish. He chose to save some from the wrath which is to come. Not, however, for any goodness or virtue of their own, but out of His own free choice, are the elect redeemed. And who are the elect? Nay, my brethren, let us not inquire too urgently. We cannot tell who they are—we cannot penetrate His decrees—we cannot explore the depths of His sovereign and almighty will. This only do we know, that these are they which have come out of great tribula-

tion. Be patient, therefore, my suffering and sorrowful brethren! Be patient and endure to the end, until the old heaven and the old earth have passed away, and ye behold that new heaven and that new earth, where," he added, as he gazed down on old Peter and the vacant pew, "where there is no more sea."

He paused a moment as if to realise the vision he had summoned up. For a moment it seemed to cast a certain grave beauty around the harsh features—for a moment only. When he resumed, the lips were hard and stern as ever.

"Of those who are left to perish what shall we say? They are abandoned to destruction by an infinitely wise and holy God,—is not that sufficient for us who believe in Him? And yet we need not doubt that they justify their damnation. They break the tables of the law, the commandments of Sinai; they are liars, murderers, fornicators, adulterers. On the Sabbath-day, on the day when the Maker Himself rested from His labour, they eat and drink, and make merry. O stiff-necked generation! who shall deliver you from the wrath to come? Know you not that this is a holy and divinely consecrated season? When on this day I behold the sailor or the husbandman walking heedlessly along the shore of the ocean which encompasses us even now, I hear from out of heaven the menace of an angel-voice. 'Know you not,' it asks, 'that you are walking on the shore of the boundless ocean of Hell? Do you not see its molten waves of devouring fire? Do you not feel the scorching blast that fans the smoke which rises from its dreadful waters? Are you not blinded by the glare which reddens the adamantine heaven? Hear you not the trumpet of the destroying angel, the shrieks of the damned, the anathemas of devils? Ay, there they writhe in torture. The souls of strong men are torn asunder in their agony; their sisters and

their wives clasp imploring hands, and ask God to save their tender limbs from the fire which burns and yet consumes not. Ay, God save them! But even the Lord of Hosts cannot do it. Even the Omnipotent cannot rescue them from the lake. His hands are powerless. Justice, which sits above the Throne of God, has set fast its decrees. The worm dies not: the fire is not quenched. We are lost—*lost*—**LOST**. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but Hell shall endure for ever.”

Overcome by excitement, his black hair lashed back from his pallid brow, the sweat falling in great drops from his face upon the Bible, his voice quivering with emotion, he paused a moment as he closed the volume, and then opening the little hymn-book that lay below it, said in a low and exhausted voice, “Let us praise God for His infinite goodness, by singing together the Sixty-second Scriptural Paraphrase, beginning at the seventh verse.” And then the rough voices took up the hymn.

“Reserv’d are sinners for the hour when to the gulf below,
Arm’d with the hand of sov’reign pow’r, the Judge consigns his foe.
Though now, ye Just, the time appears protracted, dark, unknown,
An hour, a day, a thousand years to heav’n’s great Lord are one.”

“A verra comfortable discourse,” said Widow Bodie, an old lady in a red cloak and white mutch, as she accompanied Widow Buchan to the door of her cottage.

“That exhibition is immoral,” said my friend, as we left. “I have felt Rachel’s unholy fascination. I felt it again to-night. The man is possessed by a demon.”

The shadows of the autumn twilight lay upon the bay as we strolled home across the sands. How grand and peaceful the sea was that night! The ripple broke noiselessly upon the beach at our feet; but away out yonder in the gloom, we heard the voice of the great Deep,—
“Deep calling unto deep.”

“No,” he continued, “such convictions as that man enforced to-night would make life intolerable, were they credible. But who believes in the eternity of his own misery? Hope is the heaven-touched instinct which tells him that out of this evil must issue an ultimate good. It is the finger which points to the hidden blessedness. What heart could utter the ‘Vale, vale, in æternum vale!’ without breaking? If misery be eternal, then hope is a lie.”

Overhead spread the infinite spaces sown with illimitable systems. Can it be that behind the starry silence rises a petulant Olympus? Do Odin and his fierce warriors still quaff the bowl sweetened with the bitter tears of mortal men? Thank God that it is not so. *As for all the gods of the heathen, they are but idols: it is the Lord who made the heavens.* We are no more the victims of vindictive malice or of aimless caprice; but the worlds lie in the hollow of His hand, and in His encasing spirit we live and move and have our being.

Homer is not to be blamed for the unseemly tumults which convulsed Olympus, seeing that the Thunderer himself had to strain every nerve to prevent the wrath of Achilles from thwarting the Supreme design.

“Lest, frantic for his loss, he even pass
The bounds of fate, and desolate the town.”

But how can we excuse the British Christians who endow the Lord of Hosts with the frailties of mortal combatants, and attribute to the Almighty in His government of the universe the policy of a parish beadle?

IX.

I shall be married shortly.

To whom ?

To one whom you have all heard talk of.

Your fathers knew him well ; one who will ne'er

Give cause I should suspect him to forsake me.

A constant lover—one whose lips, though cold,

Distil chaste kisses.

* * * * *

Death, my Lord,

I hope will be my husband.

A BRIGHT jagged coil of red granite runs into the green water at that point. A stormy place in winter, when the fishers come during the northern storms to watch the long lines of Arctic birds that the fierce sea-wind drives before it. But now the crimson autumn sunset rests peacefully upon the bright plain of waters underneath, and dyes the red granite with a yet deeper carmine.

One solitary watcher haunts that solitary spot. A simply-draped form, with clasped hands folded upon her breast, is clearly outlined against the white sky above the sea-line. The face is sad but composed,—the yellow hair is drawn back from the fine brow, that yet bears the traces of an old pain. The sharp pain stings no more indeed, —God has healed the bleeding heart ; but the cheeks are thin and faded, and the blue eyes are very dim now. If you look curiously at these dimmed eyeballs, you will understand how last night, as the village children played gleefully about her upon the soft yellow sands, Elsie hid her face in her hands, and moaned,—“ Oh that I might see ! ”

But these bursts of passion are not frequent now. Her life is calmed into a sad content. She is willing to wait ;

to wait in blindness for the hour when her eyes will be opened; to wait in loneliness for the day when at eventime it shall be light. Still, her heart is very empty—at times; at times the weariness of life becomes a burden almost too grievous to be borne. *Mine eyes fail waiting for thy salvation.*

When the men are on the sea, and the women at their household work, she steals away unnoticed to her lonely watch-tower above the waves. She hears their tender moan in the long summer twilights; she listens to the dreary wail they make when the keen winter wind strikes stormily against the granite headlands. And though her eyes be veiled, still, as she feels the sea-breeze wander across her face, that glorious spectacle is not altogether hidden from her. In memory, the golden-lighted main burns below the blue horizon, and she sits and gazes on the smooth and treacherous water,—breathing quietly as a child, smiling peacefully as a saint,—where he she loved was drowned. Oh, empty heart, wait in patience.

“A little longer ere life, true, immortal,
Not this our shadowy life, will be thine own;
And thou shalt stand where winged Archangels worship,
And kneeling bow before the Great White Throne.”

X.

The doom which haunts a fated house by the shores of the Northern Sea as by the sleepless Cephisus, in the fisher's hovel as in the palace of the king.

THE Teal-Moss is a capital locality for wild-fowl; but there is another station which, for duck-shooting, an indolent man prefers. The wild duck commonly pass

a number of hours during the day at sea (where they are out of harm's way), returning at sundown to the stubbles and the inland marshes. They follow the same route with great punctuality—across a ridge of sandy bents, then across the barley-fields, and so up to the lonely sides of the valley. Angus Caird and I conceal ourselves among the long grasses on the downs as “the gloaming” approaches, and wait the evening flight. Nothing can well be pleasanter during these soft autumn afternoons. You smoke, of course—everybody does. You hear the reapers at their work, the laughter of children and sweethearts, the tramp and neighing of the horses as they wend home from the watering-place—all the cheerful sounds of farm life. The shrill and plaintive call of the partridge sounds from the fields, and now and again a covey sweeps swiftly past to its roosting-place on the links. The hoarse rattle of the corn-crake—no, the corn-crake has lost his voice by this time, not to recover it again till spring returns, and the earth “renews its ancient rapture.” Then, while the soft mist rises from the heated ground, and the lark in “a privacy of glorious light” chants his evening song, but ere the rosy flush has faded from the sky, or ceased to rim with gold the phantom island-shores that float along the horizon, the wild ducks, in companies of twos and threes, begin to whistle overhead, and ever and anon a brace comes within range of our fowling-pieces. And as we sit and watch, Angus favours me with his notions on men and manners, old-world stories, and “the clash” of the country-side. Angus is a great institution. He is as old and as wiry as the Prime Minister. He has consumed oceans of whisky in his time. I believe, had it been properly mixed, that, like the Celtic son-in-law of Noah commemorated in the famous ballad, he might have drunk up the Deluge. Angus was a mighty poacher in his youth—the dread of all the gamekeepers and game-preservers in

the neighbourhood. But he has become a privileged character in his old age (he is close upon eighty), and is permitted to land his salmon, or bring down his brace of "deuks" without molestation. His fly falls on the water like a midge; he is a dead-shot at a seal; and, in the less reputable branches of the craft, I have heard that he is as accomplished as his namesake, Sir Walter's friend.

" Donald Caird can wire a maukin,
Kens the wiles of dun-deer stalkin',
Leisters kipper, makes a shift
To shoot a moorfowl in the drift.
Water-bailiffs, rangers, keepers,
He can wauk when they are sleepers;
Not for bountith or reward,
Daur they mell wi' Donald Caird."

A shrewd, douce, "pawky" old gentleman is Angus, not without a vein of romance either. Moon-lighted nights, forays after wild duck and ptarmigan, the moan of the western sea on the shore, or its whisper among the reeds, have enriched his character. Like all sea-born and sea-bred men, he is a bit of a poet. The ballads of these sea people, you must have noticed, are seldom coarse in feeling or prosaic in expression. There is a natural melody in them; they rise and fall with the waves. But their sympathy with nature, though intense, is not cheerful. It is touched with the sadness and the dread of men who know what death on the winter sea is like. They love, but they fear her.

"There's a loon," said Angus yesterday afternoon, as we lay in our hiding-place among the bents—a hiding-place, however, from which a glimpse of the bay could be obtained. "Shall I gie him a shot? He's no aboon a hundred yards, and I've a charge o' heavy leads in."

Angus never shoots with anything smaller than No. 2, so that his "heavy leads" must be like small cannon-balls.

"For the Lord's sake, sir, haud doon your head: there's a sealach makin' this way. It's a pity I've no a bullet in my pouch."

"Gaudebant carmine phocæ. Try him with your fiddle, Angus."

"The brute's aff," said the old man, after a pause and a long look. "I ken that fellow's nose weel; he's as keen as a whitret, and as wily as the Laird o' Braxy."

"Don't speak evil of dignities, Angus. I thought you and Braxy"—Braxy is a neighbouring laird—"were fast friends."

"Hoot, sir," he replied, "I canna thole him. He's racked the rents, and turned a when o' the pair bit cottar bodies into the muir. Ye'll mind Andrew MacTavish? A canny auld chiel is Andrew; sair hudden doun wi' the rheumatiz, and aye grumblin', as he micht indeed, and his leg as stiff as the funnel o' the loch steamer, but wi' sense and spunk eneuch, and likin' his snuff verra weel," said Angus, as he took out his "mull," and thrust a huge spoonful or two up either nostril. "Andrew was swear to gang; he had lived in the place for forty year. The wife had deed in it, and three o' his bairns; guid bairns they were, and weel liket in the country. So Andrew puts on his shoon, and hirples across to the Laird. 'Deed, Laird,' says Andrew, 'I canna look to bide lang noo, and ye'll let me dee in the auld hoose.' But he wudna, for he's a dour and greedy body, and wanted a langer rent; so Andrew was forced to pack. Faith! I wish we had the auld Laird back; he was a *raal* gentleman. They didna mind then if a lad was whiles seen in the gloamin' wi' a maukin at his belt and his gun under his shouter. But the law's changed noo. New maisters, new men; and troth, sir," Angus continued, waxing confidential, "if Braxy fa's ower the back o' the pier ane o' thae mirk nights, he wunna be lang missed. What think you tried he last?"

He wanted the fisher-bodies down at Norburn to buy the verra right to fish in the sea which nae man can sell, so he gets Sawney to ring the bell, and when they are a' seated in the Kirk—for public worship, ye wud jalouse?—he begins and bargains wi' them like a travellin' packman. Heard ye ever the like? But they were ower cute. Ae lad—Fluke they ca' him—asked him for a sang: anither wud hae a sermon on greed. And auld Browney gaed up to the pulpit and began a discourse—for Browney can speak like a buik when he's no blin' fou—on the money-changers in the Temple, and what was dune till *them*."

Angus chuckled over this reminiscence, and took another spoonful ere he resumed.

"And there was Elspit Gray,—ye've seen her aften, I'll warrant?—she was a servant-lass at the castle lang syne. Weel, sir, she dee'd yestreen. She was a gran' auld wife, and keept up her head till she gaed. The laird aye said she was a born gentlewoman, wi' her saft hands, and her white mutch, and her glitterin' een, like a kite's. She was blin' for lang, and didna hear muckle forby. So she wud sit ben the hoose for weeks without speaking a word to her ain dochter, as gran' as a queen with her crown on. It was gruesome whiles, though—she's gaured me loup when often I've come on her at orra times—her head turned up, a licht on her face, and her een glowerin' oot into the mirk."

I had seen old Elspit often, and had been struck by her grave and almost solemn cast of beauty. As a girl, she must have been strikingly handsome: but even as a girl, her expression could never have been other than stern. The features had not grown hard as she grew old: they must have been petrified in girlhood. The story of some cruel wrong was vaguely associated with her in my mind; a story which I had once heard, but had long forgotten. So I asked Angus if he knew the details.

“I ken it weel,” he said, “and guid richt I have—nane better noo. I was a wean at the time, and she was a bit lassie hersel’—a bonnie lassie, wi’ bricht een, and curly red hair, that happed her roun’ like a hood. It was in the hard time afore the war, when the hail country was fairly wicked wi’ hate and hunger. Her feyther was verra chief wi’ the laird,—a strang, stout chiel, that spoke his mind freely. But he was hard on the starvin’ folk, and ‘the boys’ swore that he shudna live past Marymas. Sae it chanced that ae mirk nicht in the fa’ a band o’ them cam to his hoose—he was a fearless man, and wudna steek the door for a’ the deevils oot o’ hell, he wad say—and into the room where he was sittin’ wi’ his wife Marion, and little Elsie upon her lap, beside the fire. There was a dull licht, for the peats were low, and they dragged him oot, and never a word spoken; for man and wife kent what was come upon them, and that it behoved not to pray to them that shed innocent bluid. They stickit him like a stirk at his ain door. Weel, the wife jaloused that they wad finish wi’ her (for she had ever backed her man up—he was aye richt, the rest were aye wrang); and when they were awa’, she grippit little Elsie, and steekit her into a closet in the wa’. There was a chink in the buird, and she says to her—‘Noo, lass, they are killin’ your feyther ootside, and when they hae kilt him, they will come back and kill me. Look weel at them when they come, and mind you swear to them when you see them in coort. I’ll cast a peat on the fire the last thing to raise a bleeze, and struggle hard that you may take a guid look.’ Marion Gray was a keen-spirited wife; she was ane o’ the auld Leslie clan, and married her man for luve, but she was noo clean daft, and her last thocht on earth was to hang the loons. Auld Elspit had a picture o’ her mither, that was painted by a foreigner when she was a lass,—a lauchin-face, safter-like than Elspit’s. The

bairn keeked thro' the chink, and saw them murder her mither. It's a terrible but true story," said Angus, wiping his brow, over which the sweat was running. "But she had marked them weel, and swore to them afore the lords. I was there mysel'; and weel I mind it, tho' I was but a wean at the time—it's seventy year this very fa'. There were the twa lords, sitting crackin' in their red gowns like twa howdies, and a wheen glib lads wi' horse-hair wigs, and the prisoners ahint them. There was unca little against them, though; and the writer-body—a fat man, wi' a red roun' face like a haerst moon—was cock-sure they wad wun aff, till the lass was fetched in. Her face was deadly white, but her een burned like live peats. The writer-bodies were no for lattin' her speak at first; but she was sae quiet, and douce, and keen, that the lords pit her in the box, and speert at her aboot the Catechism, and the Testament, and the Ten Commandments, and she answered ilka word freely and fairly. Then she looked lang at the men, and says quite quiet, pointing to ane and anither o' them, 'Ye were there, and ye were there, and ye were there.' It was like as if she had spoken in a dwam, or aff a buik: there was nae dauntin' her. The three loons were hangit, and Elspit gaed hame wi' Whitey, that was sib to her feyther's gude-brither. She grew lang and bonny, and Sandy Gray courted her; but they say she never leuch again. And 'deed, sir," he concluded, "it was a burnin' trouble for a young bairn."

Having finished his narrative, Angus took a pull at the capacious flask which I handed to him. There are no abstainers among the northern hills. The sportsman "takes his dram" after he has slain his stag on Ben Vorlich. The fisher "takes his dram" when his twenty-pound salmon lies on the grass at his feet. The pastor "takes his dram" after his Gaelic discourse. The bard "takes his dram" when he has recounted the exploits of

Fingal and the Fairshon. And each in succession "blesses" the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and "tamns ta whisky tuty."

"Elspit was the last o' the clan," he resumed. "She saw her folk a' oot. Little Elsie bided wi' her, after auld Hester gaed,—but she didna bide lang, puir lass."

"Little Elsie?" I said; "I did not know that she was related to the old woman?"

"Indeed, sir, she was," Angus replied. "Elsie was caed after her gran'mither. Hester Stephen was her eldest dochter, and Elsie's father, wha was drowned lang syne, was married upon the neist sister. The ither, ye may hae heard tell, gaed wrang—Katie they caed her. Whist! sir,—whist! There's a brace o' deuks anent the burn."



LEAVES FROM THE SKETCH-BOOKS



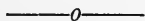
OF

PHILIP EVERGREEN, PAINTER

“ And even while I write, thou too, dear old friend, laying down the poet's pen, the pen of keenest sense and kindest humour, hast gone away into the Unknown Darkness that girdles this visionary life. We are such stuff as dreams are made of. Visionary grow the old familiar scenes and faces, as brother after brother steals silently from us ; spectral and remote the talk, the controversies, the criticisms, the habitual friendly greetings, that were once so simple and commonplace. These too, these vague wistful memories and regrets, the fleeting years will too quickly bear away ; but something surely must remain—something that will remind us ever and again that we have known one whose life was just in the judgment of men and pure in the sight of God ; a noble, tender, truthful, modest, and manly soul.”

—EPITAPH ON A POET.

LEAVES FROM THE SKETCH-BOOKS OF
PHILIP EVERGREEN, PAINTER.



The Poet, as he wanders along the river-bank in the May-time, meeteth the Maiden whom he loves. Being thereafter parted from her, while across the sea, he dreameth of her as the sailor-lad in his boat dreams of his true love at home.

THE FISHER LAD.

I.

ELSIE, the lass with the curly locks,
Sits and spins on the top of the rocks ;—
All night long she sleeps in her nest,
And dreams of the fisher-boy out in the West.

II.

All night long he rocks in his boat,
And hums a song as he lies afloat,—
A song about Elsie, the rose of the town,
Whose lamp shines out as the sun goes down.

III.

The dun duck dives, and the roving lark
 Flits, with shrill whistle, into the dark ;—
 And, heaving the herring-nets over the side,
 Night-long the fisher-boy drifts with the tide.

IV.

Under his feet the herring are streaming,
 Over his head the stars are dreaming ;
 And he sits in his boat, as it rocks in the bight,
 And watches, and waits for the morning light.

V.

The wind is soft and the stars are dim,
 But never a mermaid whispers to him ;
 And the siren may warble her softest note,
 But she won't beguile him out of his boat.

VI.

At break of day from the sandy bay,
 He draws his nets, and he sails away ;—
 " Over the foam let gipsies roam,—
 But Love is best when it stays at home."

*What time her lover is across the sea the Maiden dreameth
 of love.*

NETTY'S SEA-DREAM.

Lo, it cometh. Down the gale
 Speeds the fairy bark ;
 Lo, it cometh, and its sail
 Lightens through the dark ;

Lightens through the twilight, love,
Where the fulmar floats ;
Shines upon the fishers, love,
Rocking in their boats.

For the down of eider
Is not half so white,
As the sails which guide her
To thy feet, to-night.

King of kingliest realm,
Noblest knight is he,
Standing at the helm,
Looking o'er the sea ;

Looking to the landing
Where the tangle dips,—
See, thy knight is standing,
Smiling with his lips.

“ Quick, O blue-eyed brothers,
Row me to the shore,
Where the maids and mothers
Hear the surges roar.

“ Among maids and mothers
Watching by the shore,
One, beyond the others,
Loves me evermore.

“ Let thy shadow float, love,
Down the moonlit pier,
Till we beach the boat, love,—
For thy knight is near ;

“For thy knight is near thee,
 And, across the dark,
 Sweet, he comes to bear thee
 To the rover’s bark.”

The lover, perplexed by love, is teased by the Loves.

MY DOVECOT.

I.

A WILFUL Love, a nest of wilful Loves,
 Lighted upon my dovecot—where my doves
 Bask in the sunshine: all who saw them light
 Took them for doves,—their bosoms were so white,
 And from their wings, in changes manifold,
 Flashed emerald, and amethyst, and gold.

II.

Then from among this crowd of wilful Loves,
 Hov’ring about my ivied eaves like doves,
 One spake out mockingly,—“Be not afraid—
 But woo the willing though reluctant maid.
 She will not shun thee long,—the virgin’s wings
 Are weak for flight when Love, the hunter, brings
 His falcons to the chase; and maiden grace
 Is doubled when Love’s flush is on her face,
 And in her eyes his light. O simple boy,
 Art thou afraid because the maid is coy?”

III.

But some among them, peering through the leaves,
 That clustered round the porches and the eaves,
 Sang sadly in the sunshine,—“What beginner
 In our fine craft, O boy, need hope to win her?”

She does not care for simple home-spun pleasures,
 For rustic jollities and country measures,
 When honest Robin tramps the sanded floor,
 And steals a kiss behind the barn door.
 Desist, desist, the virgin will not yield,
 Nor, boy, for thee her captive spear and shield."

IV.

Then from among this nest of wilful Loves,
 Sunning themselves upon the thatch like doves,
 One laughed out loudly,—“ Lo, the funeral urn !
 The heart-strings snap—the kisses cease to burn.
 Her brow is white, her eyes are blue, her hair
 Is golden like the pheasant's, and the snare
 Of silken words is round thee ;—yet decay
 Steals on apace, nor lingers by the way.
 Why art thou constant ? Love is light as air.
 Why dost thou sorrow ? Other maids are fair.
 Be quick to win,—before the day is done
 See that thou take thy pleasure in the sun.
 O moody jester ! melancholy clown !
 Thou too, with us, to darkness must go down."

V.

Then fretfully I said,—“ O wilful Loves,
 Drive not afar my tranquil white-winged doves,
 From rustic porches, and the emerald leaves
 Of ivy drooping round fantastic eaves
 Above my window. For your songs to-day
 Ring in my ears and wile my soul away ;—
 And I—a simple shepherd by the brook—
 Have lost my sheep, my sheep-dog, and my crook."

Thereafter, having wooed the Maiden, he discourses of her fancifully under the similitude of the Miller's Daughter.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.

THE blithest lass on Ythan water
Is Sally Brand, the Miller's daughter ;
In the stream she dips her toes,
Wonders where the water goes ;
Sits and sighs and smiles all day
In the wonderful old way.

The fairest lily of the valley
Is not half so fair as Sally ;
The bluest blue-bell on the heather,
Dreaming through the summer weather,
Is not near so slim and trim
As the lass of Clova linn.

Fresh as rainbow on the water
Is the dusty Miller's daughter ;
In the water as in glass
She sees knights and ladies pass ;
And she dips her dainty toes
In the water as it flows.

Not a lad in all the valley
But has lost his heart to Sally :
She has smiled on very many—
Never lost her heart to auy,
Till brown Robin down the valley
Came to sit and sigh with Sally.

Oh the happy summer weather !
Oh the blooming purple heather !
Oh the days when down the valley
Robin came to sigh for Sally !

Though she hides a tender heart,
Coquetting with a rustic art ;
Though indeed she loves him duly,
Yet she will not answer truly ;
Only—through the mill-wheel's clatter—
Says, " Love's such a serious matter."

So she sits among the heather,
Dreaming in the summer weather,
Of her strong-limbed, brown-eyed lover,
With his sickle in the clover,
Of her red-legged, brown-eyed Robin,
Riding down the hill on Dobbin.

Dreaming,—“ Though I love him so,
That I fain would ease his woe,
Yet I fear that Rob the reiver
Is at best a sad deceiver.

“ He has won my heart 'tis true,
But he stole our Nancy's too ;
And I'd like to know what Mary
Heard him whisper in the dairy.

“ Fickle as the wind that blows”—
Still she dipt her rosy toes—
“ Off the hill and down the valley,—
Oh, it's sad !” said saucy Sally.

“ And he trysts with Annie Gray ;
 Never gives a look my way ;
 No ! ” she said, “ I don't ”—half-sobbin'—
 “ Care a pin for brown-eyed Robin.”

Here she stops, and in a flutter
 Not another word can utter ;—
 Robin's arms are round her waist,
 Robin's lips to hers are prest ;—
 “ Sweet,” he said, “ save saucy Sally,
 There's not an angel in our valley.”

*The Maiden yieldeth her troth to her lover ; yet yearneth
 for her own people, whom she must leave, and the village
 wherein she was born.*

THE REPLY.

CHILD, art thou wearied of the tranquil bay,
 Where thou hast wandered by the shore to-day,
 Seeing the sea-mews wheel and the white surges play ;

The golden gleam of autumn on the hill :
 The iris fluttering o'er the lonely rill :
 Already dost thou fret for flight, O maiden of the mill ?

Keen is thy mother's care : thy father too
 Waits for his dear ones underneath the yew :
 Where wilt thou find afar hearts constant, tender, true ?

Thou dost not hearken : thou art strong with joy :
 Love is more exquisite than any toy,
 And sorrow comes not yet the idol to destroy.

Go forth then, Child, and quit the tranquil bay
 Where thou hast wandered thro' the bents all day,
 And seen the sea-mews wheel, and heard the surges play.

Thou wilt return anon : when Love's decay
 Vexes thee with remembrance of the day,
 Ere thou hadst left thy home to try the unventured way ;

When thou hast wept above the trampled sod ;
 When thou art bowed beneath the wrath of God,
 Who snapt thy brittle joys, and swept the dear abode ;

Then wilt thou seek the shelter of the bay,
 Where thou didst wander thro' the bents in May,
 And saw the sea-mews wheel and heard the surges play.

*His lady urgeth him to seek for fame rather than for love,
 but he will not consent.*

LOVE IS BEST.

BESIDE the rosy islands of the West,
 There winds a glen of all the glens most fair,
 Where, day and night, the North wind is at rest,
 For Love lives there.

Thence wandering in the noontide of my life,
 A goddess stept from out the shadowy green,
 With pensive eyes, and lips by love's sweet strife
 Opened between.

And through the dewy coolness of the leaves
 Echoed a voice which taught us how to woo—
 The voice of love in visionary eyes—
 " Cuckoo ! Cuckoo ! "

And, cheek to cheek, we lay among the bent,
 And through the wood we wandered hand in hand,
 And all the goodness of the Lord was spent
 Upon that summer land.

Then, stooping down, she whispered in my ear,—
 “There is a marvellous fountain in the wood,
 And, drinking there, whoever cometh here,
 Shall find it good.

“For, drinking there, his name shall grow a name
 Known unto men through all the far abodes,
 And, mounting up as incense-smoke, his fame
 Shall reach the Gods.”

Then, turning quick, I touched her on the mouth,
 And said,—“O sweetest, let this matter be;
 I ask not anything of North or South,
 But love from thee.

“I never more will lay my lance in rest,
 Nor in the storm of battle shall my crest
 Break, like the foam, against the foeman’s breast,
 For love is best.

“And I am all aweary of the world,
 And roaming o’er the seas with hungry heart;
 In this deep bay my tattered sails are furl’d—
 I will not part

“From thee, and from the tresses of thy hair
 Tangling my sense, and from thy perfect breast,
 And from the sweetest lips Love anywhere
 Has ever kist.

“Trample upon me with thy dainty feet,
 Upon thy slave who breaks his captive bow ;
 But from thy feet which trample on me, sweet,
 I will not go.”

*He narrateth how they journeyed together into the West,
 and how the new moon rose over the Meres.*

TWENTY YEARS AGO.

I.

THITHER we went, when all the fields were red
 On either hand
 With poppies, waving with the waving corn,
 Into the land
 Where Derwentwater, i' the lap o' the hills,
 Through greenest isles,
 And myrtle thickets, and the daffodils,
 Divinely smiles ;
 Where Skiddaw, stretching o'er the gloomy vale
 Of sad St John,
 Sees great Helvelyn bare his mighty brow
 To the dim dawn ;
 Where on the banks along the mountain road
 The ivy creeps ;
 Where, by the rushes of the lonely lake,
 The mallard sleeps ;
 Where the pine reddens with the sunset fire
 From off the West ;
 And round its roots the tender hyacinth makes
 A lilac mist ;
 Where, through a wilderness of tangled ferns,
 The pheasant gleams,
 And all the vales are pleasant with the sound
 Of brawling streams ;

And fragrant with the sweetness of the grass,
 And new-mown reeds,
 Which, with long rakes, the sunburnt mountain girls
 Heap on the meads ;
 And exquisite with colour—the blue-bell
 Swings in the foam
 Of torrents, and across the steepest fell
 The foxglove is at home.

II.

So we twain journeyed on these summer days
 Deliciously,
 Until the pike, wherefrom the Lion ramps
 Defiantly
 Against the sky, had wested, and the vale
 Lay at our feet
 In emerald and purple, and the breeze
 That night was sweet.
 And stealing down by Grassmere's mighty graves,
 And Rydal Mere,
 It murmured of the men who laid their bones
 To moulder here,
 While overhead the starlit spaces rose
 From sphere to sphere.

III.

And with us, slowly broadening, eve by eve,
 The young moon rides,
 Bending her silver bow o'er breezeless tarns,
 Where night abides,
 Well pleased with silence, and the lonelier cries
 Which stir the hills :—
 But ere we came to Windermere's soft woods
 And babbling rills,

The bended bow Artemis laid aside,
 And on a field
Of lucid blue, the Huntress poised aloft
 Her silver shield.—
O moon of mine, who with pale bended brows,
 And watchful eyes,
Markest with eager earnest wistful gaze
 These evening skies,—
Bow down thy neck, and let thy splendour break
 Around me, sweet,—
A stream of light that, ever broadening, draws
 Me to thy feet,—
Where I abide until the happy hours
 Have ceased to beat.

IV.

Still 'mid its leaves the water-lily heaves
 'Neath soft Lodore,
And the wild myrtle scents the summer air,
 As long before,
When we together watched the sun decline
 Into the west,
And one sole thrush was singing drowsily
 Beside its nest.
But not for us, Cordelia, not for us
 Do lilies blow,
Nor through the accustomed unforgotten vale
 Shall Rotha flow.
Thou bindest now no more thy hair with flowers
 From Bretha brought,
And the wild rose, the foxglove, and the heath
 Are each unsought

By us, who wander sadly by the shores
 Of other streams,
 Where the pale morn upon the wintry north
 Delays his beams.

V.

Ah, my first love, 'tis twenty years ago
 Since you and I
 On that sweet lake, beneath that purple dome
 Of evening sky,
 Looked strangely out into the unknown years,
 And thought of all,
 The joy, the grief, the vict'ries, the defeats,
 That might befall
 These two beginners,—much has changed, my dear,
 Since that old time ;
 But simple honesty and stainless faith
 And love like thine,
 The years consume not, and this dearest hand
 Abides in mine.

*What time they are in a far country she singeth to him
 an old sorrowful ballad, after the fashion of her countryfolk.*

YTHAN WATER.

“O MAY JANETTE, O May Janette,
 The moon is shining rarely,
 Set down your milk-stoup on the yett,
 And say you love me fairly.”

“ I canna bide, I canna bide,
 My minnie seeks for me,
 Where Ythan water, deep and wide,
 Rins by the Trysting-tree.”

“ O May Janette, O May Janette,
 I’ve loved you late and early,
 Set down your milk-stoup on the yett,
 And say you love me dearly.”

“ I canna bide, I canna bide,
 My minnie calls for me,
 And Ythan water, deep and wide,
 Rins by the Trysting-tree.”

“ O May Janette, O May Janette,
 What maks your minnie greet,
 When wi’ his knaves the fause Kennet
 Gaes trampin’ down the street ?

“ O May Janette, O May Janette,
 An ill weird ye maun dree,
 If ye sall meet the fause Kennet
 Beneath the Trysting-tree.”

“ And what cared I when young Kennet
 Gaed trampin’ doun oor street ?
 And what cared I when young Kennet
 Was lying at my feet ?

“ O fast and fain doth Kennet ride
 Across the flowery lea,
 Until he meet his bonnie bride
 Beneath the Trysting-tree.—
*And ye may tak his red life blude
 For what he did to me.*”

“ O fast and fain may Kennet ride
 Across the daisied lea,
 But there’s a gude shaft at my side
 Will gang as fast as he.—
 And Ythan water’s deep and wide
 Beside the Trysting-tree.”

Under the similitude of Rosamond he declareth that even sorrowful love is stronger than death.

ROSAMOND.

Bow down once more and kiss me on the mouth.
 I must arise and go into the South.
 While yet the swallow lingers in the South,
 Bow down, O love, and kiss me on the mouth.

Nor tears, nor prayers, nor love, nor lover’s vow,
 Can stay the spirit on the portal now.
 A mightier monarch’s hand is on my brow.
 Yet ere I rise and go into the South,
 Bow down, my king, and kiss me on the mouth.

Dearest, I go,—but truly death is sore,
 And though I do not fear that death is more
 Than love, yet cold and dismal is the shore
 Which lies between me and the golden South—
 So kiss me, love, once more upon the mouth.

Lo, they have spoken evil words, and said
 “ Go, let her hide her shameful wanton head.”
 Nor will they weep for me when I am dead.
 Yet ere I rise and go into the South,
 Bow down, my love, and kiss me on the mouth.

Dear, let them speak ;—it will not hurt me there,
Nor will their sharp words make our love less fair,
Wonderful, excellent, beyond compare
Of aught that lies between us and the South—
Bow down, my king, and kiss me on the mouth.

They have not loved ; surely their hearts are small ;
This is not love which fears to stand or fall.
For love regardeth not herself at all.
So ere I rise and go into the South,
Bow down thy head, and kiss me on the mouth.

Dear, I can die for thee ;—exceeding well
To die for thee, O Love, though cruel hell
Gape for my soul ;—hist !—that's the curfew bell,
And we must part before we meet i' the South ;—
Yet kiss me, dear, once more upon the mouth ;—

And hear me speak one word before I go.
Even if the cool and healing waters flow
Far from the road that leads me to the South,
I am not sorry that I loved you so.
Then kiss me, dear, once more upon the mouth.

After brief joy his lady is taken from him, and in extremity of sorrow he goes into the darkness.

WHITHER ?

SHE lay upon her bed with folded hands,
And pitiful straight fingers closely prest
By one who loved her only. God in Heaven,
Why hast thou still'd the beatings of her breast,

And left me stranded in the mire of hell ?

For deepest hell has no more dire eclipse
Than passed across me, when I watched her die,
And saw the spirit flutter from her lips.

Then I went out into the windy night ;

For she had said, " Darling, I go before
A little way, and when I reach Christ's heaven
I will await thy coming at the door."
And the night looked less lonely than the place
Wherein she lay upon her bridal bed ;
Not moving from the right hand to the left—
For no breath stirred the gold upon her head.

And so the dark was round me and the night,

The populous night with all its trains of stars,
And o'er its dome the chivalry of heaven
Flashed all their spears, and in the wake of Mars
An angry light showed where the armies pressed
Around their leaders,—till the battle ceased,
And the light waned behind the northern star,
Where Odin and the strong Immortals feast.

O foolish fancy !—the Immortals linger

In the fond passion of the bard alone.
Lord God of Hosts, Thy hosts are ranged for battle,
The Heavens are Thine, and Thine, O Lord, alone.
But not loud winds, nor lightning, nor heav'n's trump
Affright us. Mightier is Night. We shrink
From uncomplaining night with its calm stars—
Innumerable worlds that sparkle to its brink.

The stars may whisper through the infinite waste,

But *thou* art mute. To what divine retreat
Hast thou withdrawn, and which of all these worlds
Is gladdened by the music of thy feet ?

I cannot know : I fall upon my face,
 And pray our Lord I may not lose thee there,
 In the great company of white-robed saints,
 Whose awful number no man can declare.

“ The sun shall no more be thy light by day,
 Nor shall the moon thee light, for Christ our Lord
 Shines on thy face until thy bruised heart
 Is cured of sickness. Nor shall flaming sword
 Thee keep from out the garden of the Lord,
 But by green pastures and the running streams
 He leads His flock, and in His arms the lambs
 He carries tenderly, until the gleams

“ Of the Eternal City are made plain ;”
 So it is written. But the night moves on
 Thro’ the abyss. And my most passionate heart
 Calls to the night. But from the darkness none
 Answers my speech. And I am left alone
 To look into the darkness for a face
 Which looks on God ; to listen for the voice
 Which joins His Seraphs’ in the holy place.

In the madness which afflicts him after his dear lady has gone away, he believeth at times that he has been the occasion of her death.

THE HARVEST IS ENDED.

SHE was my first, my last delight,
 I thought upon her day and night,
 I seemèd dead when out of sight
 Of her who was my one delight,—
 And through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn went ripening on.

Blue eyes as innocent as morn
Smiled on a restless heart, forlorn
Of what it sought for,—bluest eyes
Pensive with maiden mysteries.

And through the sunshine and the rain
The corn went ripening on.

The sweetest voice was ever heard
From minster choir or twilight bird ;
And through the shining golden hair
The braided roses looked less fair.

And through the sunshine and the rain
The corn went ripening on.

Lips that a crownèd king might kiss,
And glean therefrom undreamt-of bliss,
Were kissed by me, and her white hand,—
Was whiter none in all that land.

And through the sunshine and the rain
The corn went ripening on.

I did not tell her of my love
Until the sun was high above
The pine-wood by the windy bay,
Where the vexed billows break away—

While through the sunshine and the rain
The corn goes ripening on.

The crocus had forgot to bloom,
The last wild hyacinth in the gloom
Of the fir-trees was fading fast
When round her waist my arms I cast.

And through the sunshine and the rain
The corn went ripening on.

O mother of the dying Christ,
 O blessed mother of the blest,
 Look down upon a heart in pain
 And make it sweet and whole again,—
 While through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn goes ripening on.

She was my love, she loved me well,
 Yet there that night we bade "farewell;"
 With unkist lips and tearless eyes
 We parted there in sullen wise.
 While through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn went ripening on.

We parted, and the blackness fell
 Upon my soul which souls in hell
 Feel when they think upon the sweet
 Cool waters where the angels meet,—
 And through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn went ripening on,—

Where sitting at the feet of Him
 Who sits between the cherubim,
 My only love beholds the face
 Of Jesus in the blessed place.
 And through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn went ripening on.

I left her in my sore distress,
 I left her in my wretchedness,
 And neither sun, nor fire, nor tears,
 From out my heart the madness wears—
 While through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn goes ripening on—

Which crazed me when I knew that she
 Had fallen, stricken down by me ;
 Which crazed me when I knew my sweet
 Had left me, and in some retreat—
 And through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn goes ripening on,—

Within the far-off heaven, where I
 May meet her not—for she will fly
 From him who smote her—looks no more
 On that unlovely hateful shore—
 And through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn goes ripening on—

Where on this windy autumn night
 Beneath the low moon's parting light,
 I press my heart against the stone
 Where her sweet body lies alone.
 And through the sunshine and the rain
 The corn goes ripening on.

At other times it seemeth to him in his madness that evil spirits have power over him, and that his dear lady weepeth for him in the heaven.

IN THE DARK.

THERE'S Kate, with a cheek like a cherry,
 And the bountiful lips of our Jess,
 And the wicked blue eyes of dear Cissy,
 And little Nell's lavish caress.

And we fill the broad bowl to the brim,
And we chorus brown cheek and white arm,
And we strew yellow ringlets with rosebuds,
And we ask, with a jest, "Where's the harm?"

Yet they say that pale Isabel stands
At the feet of our Lord in grace,
Pressing her innocent hands,
In shame, to her angel face.

Because that the man of her heart,
Of her maiden faith and desire,
Has forgotten his snow-white dove,
His innocent angel love,
And wallows and routs in the mire.

Because that a soul when lost
Can never be washed in the river,
Which flows by the palace of God,
Where she weeps for ever and ever.

So they say: yet, it may be, she knows,
While she sobs in the blaze of light,
While she sobs in her robe of white,
That he never forgets—oh! never—
How Isabel died in the night.

*But after long years he has comforting thoughts which
ease his sorrow.*

"THE E'EN BRINGS A' HAME."

UPON the hills the wind is sharp and cold,
The sweet young grasses wither on the wold,
And we, O Lord, have wandered from Thy fold;
But evening brings us home.

Among the mists we stumbled, and the rocks
Where the brown lichen whitens, and the fox
Watches the straggler from the scattered flocks ;
 But evening brings us home.

The sharp thorns prick us, and our tender feet
Are cut and bleeding, and the lambs repeat
Their pitiful complaints,—oh, rest is sweet
 When evening brings us home.

We have been wounded by the hunter's darts.
Our eyes are very heavy, and our hearts
Search for Thy coming,—when the light departs
 At evening, bring us home.

The darkness gathers. Thro' the gloom no star
Rises to guide us. We have wandered far.
Without Thy lamp we know not where we are.
 At evening bring us home.

The clouds are round us, and the snow-drifts thicken.
O thou dear Shepherd, leave us not to sicken
In the waste night,—our tardy footsteps quicken,
 At evening bring us home.

Therefore, until he rejoineth his lady in the heaven, he can say with him who wrote the New Life,—“ After writing this sonnet, it was given me to behold a very wonderful vision, wherein I saw things which determined me that I should say nothing further of this most blessed one, who now gazeth continually on His countenance qui est per omnia secula benedictus. Laus Deo.”

CATARINA IN VENICE

A ROMANCE ON THE LAGOON

“ Neighboured close
Oceanus and Tethys, in whose lap
Sobbed Clymene among her tangled hair.”

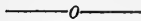
JOHN KEATS.

The evening is drawing to a close as we reach, on the Bologna road, the mountain-ridge above Fiesole. Golden is the sunset, wonderful the hues of purple that are distributed over the hills, delicious the soft pensive distant note of the cuckoo in the still seclusion of these mountain valleys. One last glorious glimpse of the gay capital of Etruria, and then the night comes down upon us rapidly like a shadow, and we begin the ascent of a spur of the Apennines,—a waste and dreary tract of granite rocks, against which the full moon strikes noiselessly her silver shafts. With the first flush of dawn we are roused among the decayed villas and the neglected gardens that surround Bologna.

*One other long hot dusty day upon the roof of the diligence, and then
—— Venice and the Adriatic!*

CATARINA IN VENICE:

A ROMANCE ON THE LAGOON.



I.

And then
The moist ways of the sea they sailed.

I SPENT the summer of 18— in Venice. The inevitable railway has crossed the Lagoon since then, rather, as I think, marring the impression of the approach. But on the 1st of June thirty years ago, we quitted the mainland at Fusina, and turned the boat's prow right out to sea. The night breeze, blackening the waves, blew in sharply and shrilly from the Adriatic. The Italian shore from which we had started quickly became distant and indistinct, until it disappeared in the growing darkness—all but one ruddy peak of the Euganeans, on which the sunset lingered. Then the night came down upon us in grim earnest, and found us still labouring in the sea-trough. For a moment it seemed a wild and extravagant whim—the mad freak of an Englishman—at such an hour, in our crazy craft, and as the wind drove the foam into our faces,

to tempt the caprice of the sea. But the boatmen held on their way collected and undisturbed, and hummed at times to their oars short snatches of monotonous song. For why should they fear? This silent and desolate water was one of the beaten highways of the nations. For centuries it had formed the main road between the monarchies of Europe and its most polished and warlike republic. And now, as we turned our faces to the East, and looked through the drifting foam, the red moon rose from the Adriatic, dispersed the clouds, and discovered along the horizon, amid a charmed pause in the waves, the white domes and cupolas of Venice.

At present the Trieste boat is to be preferred. Though by this route you do not obtain perhaps the same vivid impression of a city driven from the land and adrift among the breakers, yet the labyrinth of narrow and squalid canal, through which by the other you must pass ere you arrive at your hotel, is avoided. You are ushered at once into the presence of the Republic. All the noble edifices associated with its national and historical life are grouped together on this its furthest shore. No land is visible from the Piazza except the Lido. The winged lion, as he paws his lair, looks out upon the sea. The breeze that sweeps through the pillared screen of the ducal gallery comes salt from the Adriatic. 'Twas bravely done. She had been spurned from her native soil. She had been forced, like a sea-mew, to build her nest upon the surf, and to stay it among the reeds. And lo! she accepts her doom; and turning with beautiful scorn from the betrayer, casts her white arms, queen-like, upon the waves.

II.

I am become a name :
For always roaming with a hungry heart,
Much have I seen and known.

I STAYED at the Hotel de Ville on the Canale Grande. One enjoys a light breakfast in hot weather, and those they give you in Venice are unexceptionable. A bunch of grapes, a delicate roll of snow-white wheat, and fragrant coffee smacking of its Oriental culture. Nothing gross, material, or unbecoming the sedentary genius of the place.

The morning after I arrived I was dreaming over this fragrant fare and a classic number of *Galignani*, the thermometer being at the time above 80° in the shade, when a gentleman walked briskly into the room, and after surveying me curiously for a second, seized my hand in both of his, and shook it cordially.

“By Jove! old boy, I am glad to see you. Where have you been for the last thirty years? Your home connection has fairly given you up, and after advertising in vain through the columns of the *Pekin Post*, the *Timbuctoo Tomahawk*, and other cosmopolitan periodicals, an upstart is seated in the ancient stronghold of the Smiths. But I knew you would turn up. In fact, I have a snug little bet with D—— on the chance of your resuscitation, so you may believe I am heartily glad to see you.” And he shook my hand again till the tears came into my eyes.

I returned his greeting. In truth I was glad to meet him. Sedley was one of those vagrant Englishmen who are met with in every Continental city. International law would have been puzzled to fix his domicile. He was intimate at the Tuileries, had spent the past winter in a certain royal palace on the Neva, in Rome was hand and glove

with the Pontifical College and the Scarlet Lady. There was a rumour current some years before that he had been wrecked during a yacht voyage to Iceland, but it was a mistake, or at least an exaggeration, for I met him about two months afterwards in the Troad. We had some good cock-shooting upon the skirts of Ida; and for snipe, no emerald bog, we agreed, could surpass Scamander. He was unfortunately captured by some Greek pirates a day or two thereafter; and as I was forced to start on a mission to Central Asia before his ransom—they were most extortionate rascals—could be had from our banker at Athens, we had not met since.

Sedley was a capital travelling companion. He managed admirably; abused the *garçon* intelligibly in every known language, and never during the course of our acquaintance once lost his temper. It was impossible for postboy or peer, dairymaid or duchess, to resist his genial vivacity and unconquerable *bonhomie*.

He had been staying, he told me, for the last three or four months, in Venice, and was now, as I quickly discovered, thoroughly *au fait* in the *Chronique Scandaleuse* of the pleasant city. His aunt, Mrs Marsh, and her only daughter, a girl just three-and-twenty, but already a widow and a mother—"Poor Hastings," quoth the good-natured narrator, "bad lungs, liver sticking to his ribs, and that sort of thing you know; didn't live six months after his marriage,"—had arrived during the previous week, and he was now engaged in catering for their amusement. "But stay, here they are. I must introduce you."

It was agreeable to a man newly returned from the sombre East to look again "on the unveiled faces of women," and to hear the pleasant English words dropping from women's lips. The mother was a fine specimen of the antique English gentlewoman; grave, precise, and stately, but unaffectedly kind withal. Her daughter looked



charming; the black braided hair, and the dark mourning dress she continued to wear, contrasting strikingly with the marble-like pallor of her complexion.

III.

On her still lake the city sits,
While bark and boat beside her flits;
Nor hears, her soft siesta taking,
The Adriatic billows breaking.

“**A** RIDE in a gondōlla?” said a citizen of the Great Republic who was sitting at the next table to his fair companion. “Guess you air for a ride in a gondōlla to-day?”

Well, my friend,—call it what you like,—you cannot vulgarise the gondola of Venice. The past is not quite dead so long as the gondola survives. Moor-black, grim, and defiant, with the barbaric scimeter at its prow, stealing like a water-snake through the dim canals, it is yet at heart the most tenderly sad and seductive of mistresses. In its Calypso embrace man scornfully forgets his cities of merchant traffic, of intellectual toil: the strife of their everlasting turmoil

“Far, far away doth seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores;”—

he enjoys a Pagan life, basks in the sunshine of a Saracenic heaven,—

“And he hears in his ears
The voice of the river,
Like a maiden, love-laden,
Go wandering ever.”

Yes! the sombre gondola is to us for ever beautiful and beloved: for it is the true handmaid of that ravishing caprice—Venice.

IV.

And when the Lady of the light, the rosy-fingered Morn,
Rose from the hills, all fresh arose.

A COOL sea-bath was a great luxury in those breathless summer days; and whenever the morning was fine we used to bathe from the Lido before breakfast. Sedley, who somehow knew every one, had contracted an intimacy with the priest who lived quite alone in the dormitory attached to the small chapel that still stands on the island, though now untenanted and fast becoming a ruin.

“That’s the Palazzo Soranzo,” said Sedley, as in our gondola we glided rapidly down the Canale Grande to Lido. It was yet early morning, and Venice had not awoke—if she ever does rightly awake, which, unless in the Piazza, may be doubted. The night-blinds of the houses were closed; the dark gondolas lay untenanted and tied to the palace stairs. The market-boats alone were stirring.

These market-boats of Venice!—ever must they retain a charmed place in the memory. They come from distant islands in the Lagoon, and are manned by seamen bronze-limbed and swarthy-browed, lithe, compact, and sinewy; the sons of the seamen who at Lepanto smote the Turk. Their canvas sails are painted in radiant colours; and from the centre the Greek cross or the full-rayed sun blazes in gold. On their decks, in curiously shaped wicker-work baskets and amid the green vine-leaves, figs, grapes, peaches, and wine-coloured gourds, are piled in ripe profusion. The craft lie all the morning at the market-quay below the Rialto—repeated line for line in the still and glowing water, and bearing into the heart of the faded city

a sense of freshness and fragrance from green islands in the Lagoon where the gifts of Nature are prodigally bestowed, and tawny men still cherish the hardy virtues of the Republic.

"That's the Palazzo Soranzo," repeated Sedley. "Catarina Statella has taken it for the summer."

"And who is Catarina, pray?"

"O benighted Pagan! Catarina is a household word in this Christian city. She is acting at the Fenice just now. You will see her to-night—no, not to-night. She went to Milan a week ago, but she will be back for the Sunday festa."

"Very good. I will see your prodigy then, if I am not grilled to death in the interval;" and I leaned back on the seat, and laved my hands indolently in the cool water. "Where does she come from?"

"Poor thing! her story is rather hard—barely respectable, in short; so you had better shut your ears."

"I am not particular."

"Her father—an Italian count, I believe he was—had some absurd notions about Italian unity, and in consequence got a civil hint from the Austrian police that he would perhaps find it as pleasant to live abroad; so he quitted his country and went to England. Our frightful climate of course killed him. He died in six months, and left his daughter, a girl of fourteen, literally destitute. You may guess what followed. The child was thrown on the streets, and went to the mischief with the utmost despatch. Of course it was very reprehensible, you will say, and so on; but the poor thing was starving, and it is hard to get a morsel of bread in the Great Babylon without paying for it. Whose fault is that?" continued my companion. "The victim's, of course, who breaks the one commandment that she may keep the other. So Catarina came to grief more or less,—to all kinds of mischief, I fear,—

but being a shrewd little monkey, contrived to do so without exactly going to the devil."

"Well?"

"Well—she met Henry Ashton—Lord Oakland's eldest son,—in Covent Garden, when she was half starving, one rainy afternoon, and with all possible frankness told him in her broken English how she was placed. Ashton is not worse than his neighbours: but he is not better; and the end is, they have lived together, one way or another, ever since. I believe Catarina really likes him; at least is grateful to him, not knowing to what wretched depths she might otherwise have sunk. Mind I don't say that there is anything actually wrong—that may or may not be—she treats him with a sort of grotesque petulance that may mean much or little. There is a good deal of mystery altogether about the relationship. I fancy, however, she is rather tired of him: he is a thorough Englishman, and therefore you needn't wonder that he bores her."

"What took her to the stage?"

"Ashton knows something of music. He wouldn't be his father's son if he did not. And the first time he met her, the child was singing, as well as her tears and hunger would admit, one of the pretty Italian songs she had been taught in the nursery. He liked the voice, and she had masters when they went to Florence. The little minx was vastly independent in her notions; so one evening she disappeared, and Ashton found her next week warbling triumphantly at the Scala. Since then she has had a run of luck, and now does very much what pleases her best. But she is a good-hearted little soul at bottom; and wouldn't hurt a fly, I believe, unless very hard put to it."

We disembarked on the near side of the Lido, and walked across the narrow island—through rank herbage, salt with the brine, and tenanted by bright-eyed lizards in green and golden armour, who glided noiselessly through

the grass and into the sand, as we approached. On the opposite shore a swarthy islander, with his patched pantaloons tucked up to his loins, was wading about in the shallow water, fishing for the bright-coloured shells which, with gold and silver stuffs, Oriental gems, perfumes, and spicery one buys in the Merceria. He had a considerable heap already collected upon the snowy sand, and when he saw us he came ashore, and insisted on our buying a *capello di mare*, and a curiously-twisted buckie bristling with fierce spikes, for which, much to his contentment, we gave him a *zwanziger*.

"Have care, Signior, have care," he exclaimed as he saw us undress. "The ebb runs out strong now—it will take you into deep water."

However, we plunged in, confident in our seaboard training which had wrestled with the angry streams of the north, and could baffle, we thought, the syren caresses of the Adriatic. The Adriatic! For now we had passed all the islands; the Lagoon, with its charmed quiet, lay behind our backs; and we were cradled on the fragrant bosom of the sea itself. Nay, perhaps we daringly deemed, strong swimmers as we were, that the waves might take us with them as they listed; for it was Greece we knew that lay along the opposite shore; we almost fancied that we could trace the outline of its rocky coast on the horizon; and into this very water the sun-god of Homer plunged! The infatuation was only momentary. We quickly recovered our senses; and then Greek and god had both gone down to darkness, down even into Hades, and left the sea they made half divine to a brace of naked irreverent Englishmen, and the snow-white mews who stared and screamed at us from aloft.

"We will breakfast with the Padre," said Sedley. "He asked me to bring you."

V.

Vesper-lays

Sung to the Virgin while accordant oars
Urge the slow bark along Calabrian shores.

I FOUND the Padre Agostino an agreeable man. His appearance was striking, and on the whole prepossessing. The type of his pale face was essentially classical; each feature—mouth, nostril, eyelid, cleanly cut and finely chiselled; the general effect still, cold, and unimpassioned. That was its character when in repose; but Sedley used to say that he reminded him of the figures in the frieze of the Parthenon. *There*, though both man and beast are in a manner perfect, yet it is a perfection formal, uniform, monotonous; the perfection that is obtained by copious application of rule and line; you cannot tell, as you gaze, what this inanimate form, when urged by natural passion, and in the exercise of its highest activities, may resemble. Something less insipidly perfect, but infinitely more picturesque and vivid; the difference, in fact, between the Greek architect and the Gothic; between his pagan serenity and our versatile manliness.

Here let me explain at the outset that I do not wish you to accept as absolutely authentic any analysis of character I may give you in this tale. I met the men and women I am speaking of, and tried at the time to understand their characters, as I am now trying to describe them. But I may have been mistaken; very probably I was. Some of them puzzled me at the time; the memory of them is still a puzzle: there were difficult contradictions, perplexing passions, curious inconsistencies in their characters, which I should never have had to unravel had I chosen to depict a creature of my own brain. So, pray,

take my opinion for what you may think it worth : there will be no offence if you differ, for indeed I often question its correctness, when some trait that it does not account for or explain recurs to my mind : and then judge for yourself.

And as to Agostino, I came to know that this man concealed beneath the austerity of his habit a ripe and meditative intellect ; beneath his ascetic and unimpressionable manner fiery passions and a voluptuous temperament. I believe he resisted temptation—fought fiercely against it ; but the conflict, to the discreet observer, was sometimes visible, though it was confined, even when most marked, to the sudden contraction of the small woman-like hand, to the vehement curve of the dilated nostril.

He came, I believe, of a noble Venetian family, and was thoroughly Venetian at heart. But Venice was lost and degraded, and the Roman Church, as a great political power, became, to his energetic and masterly mind, what the Venetian State would have been had he lived in the days when emperors stood uncovered before the Doge, and the policy of Christian Europe was dictated by the conclave at St Mark's. He was no believer, I am convinced, in the characteristic pretensions of that Church : I doubt if he believed thoroughly in any living creature except himself ; and I have seen his lip curl into scorn at the tinselled mummeries he was sometimes forced to transact. The *spectacle* of the Cathedral and the Festa he left mostly to others ; he preferred the solitude of his island sanctuary—a harmless whim easily overlooked by the shrewd heads who knew of what stuff their man was made. But the chair of St Peter, as a great political engine, he admired, and even perhaps venerated, in so far as his idiosyncrasy could venerate anything. He was ambitious through every fibre of his frame ; he loved power for its own sake,—a dangerous mistress ; and he consented to serve the Church

as the only possible way by which he could reach it. But it was a sacrifice to what was perhaps the only genuine part of his nature—his attachment to Venice ; for if there was anything that he specially loved in her history, it was her superiority to ecclesiastical bigotry, and the exacting and jealous nationality of her spirit. I am sure that he cared for Venetian art not so much because Titian, Veronese, Tintoret, were great artists, but because they were Venetian laymen and not Italian priests ; because they left the Church hero and the Church saint for the statesmen and soldiers of the Republic.

“ Yes,” he said to me one day, speaking with unusual freedom, “ ours is the only spontaneous art in Italy. It descends to the common earth, deals with the men and women of the day, commemorates the worthies of the age, emblazons the achievements of the Republic. Our churches are rich with trophies of secular triumph ; our altars hang with banners snatched from conquered nations : statues of great statesmen and victorious soldiers replace the effigies of priest and pontiff. Art is released from the exclusive service of the Church as it is nowhere else in Italy, and becomes the willing handmaid of the great merchant commonweal.”

We were lying out a mile beyond the Lido in his one-oared skiff, which he managed with the skill of a gondolier. It was mid-day, and under the burning blaze of the sunlight lay the shining city, like a golden ball on burnished steel. Over the land and sea alike there rested a great quiet—the breathless pause of the summer noon.

Agostino seemed to feel that he had said something inconsistent with his usual position ; and he twisted round his avowal with great ingenuity to fit the theory which he commonly employed with heretics—viz., that the Catholic Church was the mother of the arts ; that not alone for its religion but for its public policy, its social life, its painting,

its poetry, its architecture, Modern Europe was indebted to Rome. He resumed the point when, after retreating from the Lagoon, we took refuge in a cool dark cell of his little establishment—his library it might be designated, for on its walls the Padre had arranged the scanty volumes he had brought with him from the city. I had been arguing that religious art, except in the widest sense, including the secular as well as the spiritual life, establishing no distinction between the temple worship and the worship beyond the gates, was a weakness and an encumbrance.

He replied abruptly, "Whether it be so or no, it has produced the masterpieces both in painting and poetry."

"Perhaps in art," I answered; "but was not this owing to the accidental connection of its ablest men with the ecclesiastic? I often figure to myself what Raphael might have done had he not restrained the natural bent of his genius to satisfy the priest. Glimpses I get sometimes of the beautiful domestic life of the central Apennines—the finest for all artistic purposes, I think, in Italy—the green leaves and the purple bunches of the grape shading the young mother's face as she sits by the open window in the mellow glow of the twilight and plies her flying shuttle to some simple song; while the children return from their rambles in rosy groups, and crowned with the golden fire of burning wild flowers, the summer spoil of the woodland! Would not *that* have been better than a Michael or a St John, nay, even than a Cæcilia? But poetry—where is there any church poetry that deserves the name?"

"Indeed there is much. Most of the mediæval pathos and tenderness were absorbed into its hymnal; its awe and impressiveness were spent on its architecture. Peter the Venerable, Thomas of Celano, Abelard, Robert of France, and before them all, Adam St Victor, the laureate of the Church throughout all ages. Judge for yourself."

He brought from the shelf a richly illuminated manu-

script in antique morocco and silver clasps. I turned over the leaves, and he went on,—

“I am sure that you will be surprised by the exceeding beauty of many of these poems. I read them again and again with increased delight. Where is there anything more sweetly and musically written than Peter the Venerable’s Hymn to the Magdalene; more solemn and awing than the triple thunder of the *Dies Iræ*, peal following peal through the vaulted aisle in dire and rigid order, like the measured tread of an army of horsemen; more pitiful irony than in the

‘Quam maribus osseis tangit,
Crystallinam phialam frangit.
O inepta et rustica mors!
O cadauca juvenulæ sors!’”

“But it is chilly and distant,” I answered; “very perfect, but of no human interest. The only thoroughly hearty and vital verse I ever read in the Church Latin is Walter Mapes’s, especially when he discourses of strong liquors. There is the true smack and relish of good wine in his drinking songs. What a jolly old churchman he must have been! Does it not run somehow thus?—

‘Meum est propositum in taberna mori:
Vinum sit appositum morientis ori,
Ut dicant cum venerint angelorum chori,
“Deus sit propitius huic potatori!”’

The song is not profane: the man is so utterly in earnest, his whole soul is so thoroughly saturated with monastic tittle, that the prayer ceases to be irreverent, as it no doubt would have been had it come from the lips of an abstainer or a mere wit.”

“I think you are wrong. On the contrary, I know nothing in our transcendental moderns that can rival the

tender, denying, passionate unselfishness of some of these poems. The bride's 'I am sick of love,' is not more absorbed than its mediæval paraphrase." And he repeated the poem:—

“ ‘Ut phœnix moriar!
In flammis oriar!

An amor dolor sit,
An dolor amor sit,
Utrumque nescio;
Hoc unum sentio,
Jucundus dolor est,
Si dolor amor est.

Jam vitæ stamina
Rumpe, o anima;
Ignis ascendere
Gestit, et tendere
Ad cœli atria;
Hæc mea patria!’ ”

“Fine,” said Sedley, who had joined us while the Padre was reading; “but could the mild raptures of religion inspire these vehement lines? Pardon me, but was there not some mundane inspiration in the case? Have not the words the taint or the tenderness of woman’s love?”

“I know not,” he replied, somewhat harshly, I thought; but he pressed his lips together, and his brow ruffled. “Woman’s hate and woman’s love”—and he drew himself up, and the Greek mouth curled into involuntary disdain—“constrain not the servant of the Church. But the words were written by a good and true man, a learned father of the Dominicans.”

“Your Abelard may have been an excellent fellow, that I don’t doubt; but the lady—nay, do not frown—the lady must have been brave and gentle as *the* Heloise to inspire such words.”

“You judge us as you must be judged,” said the priest, calmly. “Believe me that true love, the *ala bina caritatis*,

fans alike the earth and the heaven. Men once could understand this, and acted it out in the daily experience of their lives. But you are so used to associate warmth of expression only with warmth of sense, that genuine love has become to you a nightmare, a monstrosity. You cannot read the Song of Solomon, or you read it with a blush. And then you come forward with this narrow and meagre shamefacedness which your sterile Protestantism has developed, and tell us that we are impure."

"True, my dear Padre, Protestantism has no doubt much to answer for besides our power and freedom. Still, you will not convince me that there were not some naughty boys among your Italian singers. Why, not even the Virgin herself is safe in their hands. Our northern singers, if I remember rightly, are purer. The epithets they use are all delightfully characteristic of sinlessness, innocence, repose. Mary is the *Stella Matutina*, the *Rosa Mystica*, the *Columba Formosissima*, the white-bosomed dove which broods all day over its nest in the woodland, and dreams of a child-like love. She walks among the tender-leaved lilies; nay, herself the lily—*inter rubeta liliūm*."

"Most of these expressions belong equally to the Italian hymnology. But perhaps in a sense you are right; and inasmuch as there is greater ardour in our Southern temperament, why should it fail to find expression, even through our religious life? It would be an anomaly did it not."

He was turning over the leaves. "You will find," he went on, "a wider sympathy with the manifestations of natural beauty, a more frequent recurrence of those moods which we consider characteristically modern, than most of us, with our false notions of the mediæval imagination, will admit. The hymns *ad nocturnas* breathe the pensiveness of autumn twilight; those *ad matutinas* are radiant with the gladness of the dawn:—

‘ Ecce jam noctis tenuatur umbra,
 Lucis aurora rutilans coruscat,
 Nisibus totis rogitemus omnes
 Cuncti potentem.
 Ut Deus nostri miseratus omnem,
 Pellat languorem, tribuat salutem,
 Donet et patris pietate nobis
 Regna polorum.’ ”

He read well ; but I thought somehow of Horace and an older minstrelsy. “ Does not the march of the Horatian verse fall like foreign footsteps through the church aisle ? Will not the odour of Paganism cling to the old metre ? I think it must. You can never quite disengage it from the Sybarite. Tie it to holy words, to Christian music ; but the ghost will not be laid, and instead of saint and martyr rise visions of Lydia’s golden hair, or of Lalage with her honeyed tongue and silver laugh.

‘ Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
 Dulce loquentem.’ ”

VI.

They say your eyes, my Florentine,
 Are English: it may be:
 And yet I’ve marked as blue a pair
 Following the doves across the square
 At Venice by the sea.

THE young widow, Lettice Hastings, or “ Letty,” as her cousin called her, was certainly a very dangerous person to come much in contact with. I am one of those men, I confess, who believe that a young and pretty widow is the most difficult of all women to cope with successfully. ’Tis a pretty burlesque, no doubt, to muffle youth and vivacity in these preposterous weeds, these

mummy-like cerements. The stiff frilled cap, the quaint and old-fashioned bodice, contrast so piquantly with the summer blush on the delicate cheek, and "the purple light of love" in the sparkling eyes.

Lettice certainly did look very pretty in her light mourning. The little Parisian cap was so demurely coquettish, the white arm glanced so snowily through the transparent crape, that the death-gear might be said to form a snare for the living as well as a monument to the dead. Fatherless babes are not generally supposed to add to the attractiveness of their mothers: a mistake: for when Lettice came into the breakfast-room with little Walter's head on her bosom, and his fat little fist doubled up round her white neck, you at once thought of Andromache:—

" And like a star upon her bosom lay
His beautiful and shining golden head ;"

and loved her as you love the widowed spouse of the hero-slaughterer.

And as, besides these paramount considerations, Lettice was a clear-headed, frank-hearted English girl, without a grain of nonsense or affectation in her nature, and quick and ready in her attempts both to please and to be pleased, it was utterly impossible not to like her. Venice is at all times bewitching: but Venice with a young and pretty woman at your side

" takes the prisoned soul
And laps it in Elysium."

We used to spend the morning among pictures; for Lettice had a fine eye for colour, and a great liking for all paintings by Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto—though I think she preferred those of the last. A great if somewhat fantastic critic has asserted, that for anything their paintings tell us to the contrary, these painters might never

have visited the sea-girt city where they spent their lives. In so far as the introduction of natural forms is alluded to, this is probably quite true; but would these men have been what they were had they not been Venetians? Surely not. Nowhere else could they have obtained the transparent shadows, the aerial glow and gloom, the savour of oriental richness which they have wrought into their human subject. The stirring human story was what they tried chiefly to express; but with the manner in which that story is told, the ineffaceable impression produced on their minds by a life-long familiarity with the natural specialities of Venice, with golden sun-risings and bloody sunsets on the purple Lagoon, is bound up for ever. Throughout Tintoretto's works especially, there are ringing echoes of those deep sea murmurs—

“ Which his first endeavouring tongue
Caught, infant-like, from the far-foamed sands.”

So also of its mural art. Many of the guiding lines of Venetian architecture may be described, as they have been described, by imagery suggested by the action of the sea. The white cupolas rise like wreaths of *sea-foam* in the dawn; the crests of the arches toss themselves into the sky in flashes of sculptured *spray*. It is impossible to deny that there is a certain propriety in the association which this language is meant to indicate; for it is difficult to overestimate the subtle and far-reaching influences which the sea exerts on minds of a certain order. I have known many men upon whom certain aspects of the sea, the moaning of the winter wind, the flapping of the wings of sea-birds over desolate reefs of rock, the monotonous beat of heavy waves upon a bleak extent of barren sand and bent, have been so wrought and impressed, that the impression could be detected in almost every condition of their intellectual activity, in the habit of their thought,

in the melody of their sentences, even in the tone and cadence of their speech. And it could hardly fail, that to those who lived veritably among the waves, the sea should acquire an intense and peculiar significance; or that the Venetian should have been so subjugated by this perpetual fellowship, that it should have visibly impressed his art and his architecture, and made his city—the queen and mistress of the sea for centuries—the expression, as it were, of the most ideal and poetic features of the Adriatic.

I dislike no penance more cordially than sight-seeing: an unpleasant duty, which English travellers religiously transact. Sight-seeing in Venice, however, is comparatively a very comfortable operation, for it is performed in your gondola. But even in Venice we used to experience a sense of serene satisfaction when the dinner-hour approached, and we knew that the whole of the evening lay untouched before us,—a charmed vista, terminated by the beatific vision of ices at Florian's, and the odorous Manilla in the moonlight beside Saint George of the Seaweed.

VII.

O father! what a hell of witchcraft lay
In the small orb of each particular tear!

“CATARINA has come back from Milan,” said Sedley, looking up from the shabby Venetian newspaper he had been diligently perusing. “She sings to-night at the Fenice. We must go.”

When we entered the house they were at the end of the second act. I forget now what the opera was named, but

I believe it was an Italian adaptation of *Macbeth*—very grotesque in its way, for a certain Carlotta, amid a cloud of white-bosomed nymphs, in extremely transparent gauze, was skipping over the floor, to the unbounded amazement of the good Duncan, who had probably never seen anything of the kind before. I secured a comfortable position in the *fauteuil* which Sedley, with the connivance of the box-keeper, had conveyed into his box, and glass in hand leisurely surveyed the beauties who lined the principal tier: women with their golden hair in sunny ripples, like the ripples that shine on the Adriatic. Titian painted their mothers.

But Carlotta had skimmed off the stage as a sea-mew skims the waves, “now wafted through the air, now moistening the tips of its wing-feathers in the violet-coloured sea;” and ere the burst of applause that followed her performance had ceased, Catarina stood suddenly before the people, and hushed the tumult. Like most opera-goers, I know nothing of music; but I fancy that her voice was not one of great extent, or compass, as they call it. Though there was passion, expression, natural music in its tone, which made it really more persuasive than a more powerful organ, still, as a singer, Catarina was matched often—sometimes probably excelled. But as an actress she stood alone. In this second scene she had little to say—a few passionate words of anger and entreaty. But the vignette was perfect in its way; an elaborate picture could not have been more curiously finished. She stood before the house for one breathless moment, a white-armed fury. Very beautiful, but fierce and unrelenting as the panther, as raising her white arm she points pitilessly to the chamber wherein lies the king. Such an arm! It spoke to the people expressively, eloquently as her face. What often becomes an encumbrance to an inferior artist, was with her the highest spell of her craft. In its strained and agitated

muscles you could read anger, contempt, defiance, detestation; most womanly weakness, when at the end it dropt exhausted and helpless by her side. She cast it up to heaven, and its grand vehement curve invoked the vindictive gods; it clasped the neck of her Roman lover with the passion and tenderness of an Italian Aphrodite.

When the curtain fell, I found that Sedley had quitted the box; so I lay back and ruminated on this ireful apparition—this low-browed Roman matron.

But Catarina's triumph was reserved for the last act. The general conception of the act was ridiculous enough; but her acting redeemed it. She has taken off her jewels and the rich robes which befit a noble's wife: there is nothing save her white night-gear around the queen. Her small feet are bare; and though they are blue with cold, the marble floor does not chill her. She advances coldly, calmly, stilly—like the visitant of a dream. What wants the queen? She knows well, no doubt; for there is neither hesitation nor embarrassment in her gait. But look into her eyes. They are blank, expressionless, like a statue's. The lamp is there, but the light has been extinguished, or rather inverted, turned in, to illumine that inner life men call the conscience. For see, a spasm of pain contracts the pale lips, and the white hands wring each other in a fierce pressure. "Out, damnèd spot." 'Tis in vain. That white arm and that little hand, all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten them again. Ay! she knows it. She will give up the fight. The fever has devoured her life, and the damned spot has eaten into her soul. What a sigh is there! 'Twas that sigh snapped the heart-strings. Back to bed, fair queen, an you list: but it matters not. The hours are numbered. No man or woman could groan that bitter groan and live. So the pale apparition passes away to her doom,—pale, but with the flush of pain still upon her cheek.

“Catarina wants us to sup with her,” whispered Sedley, as the curtain fell upon the funeral train that bore the queen to burial.

“Where? In Hades?” I asked, for the spell was not yet broken.

“By no means,” he answered, laughing, “else had I declined the invitation with thanks. No, no! at the Palazzo Soranzo, a much nicer place, and pleasanter company, I take it. At least, she has the best *chef* in Venice, a real artist, like his mistress. There is a delicacy,” he continued with animation, “a subtlety, nay, at times a grotesque oriental richness in his conceptions that become Venice admirably. He is one of the masters; D—— says he belongs to the chosen people.”

“Let us go.”

And we went.

VIII.

Here you come with your old music—and here’s all the good it brings. What! they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings, Where St Mark’s is—where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings.

THE Palazzo Soranzo, on the Canal Grande, is one of the most sumptuous in Venice.

We were led through the central sala, which was, *more Veneziano*, filled with flowers and vines, among whose branches a few lamps were suspended, along the grand balustrade, to Catarina’s own room. The other guests, two or three Italian gentlemen and a brace of Englishmen, Henry Ashton and Mr D., had arrived, and the party was at supper. Sedley mentioned my name: Catarina bowed and smiled. The pallor of the spectral sleep-walker still

haunted my mind ; I saw before me the rosy revel of a Bacchante. The contrast was effective and striking. Could this girlish form assume the superb matronhood of Rome ? could the merry and mocking eye, the mischievous smile, pale their lustre at will under the pressure of an intolerable woe ?

The style of the room added to the contrast. It is a thousand pities that so little remains of the rich interiors of the old Venetian life. San Marco and the Ducal Palace may survive for another generation ; but those domestic adornments, not less, nay, even more characteristic of the genius of its people, have been either destroyed or dispersed. At home the Venetian noble was the most luxurious of men, a luxury ministered to by a taste sumptuous in its simplicity, refined in its caprice. His was a civilisation which combined a Roman manliness with an oriental languor. Massive couches, gigantic cabinets, mirrors framed in columns of jasper and porphyry, benches at which the sons of Anak might have supped, were overrun with the whimsical fancies of the Moor. When I first knew Venice much of this remained ; but thirty ruthless years have left scarce a single trophy behind them. Catarina's room retained its antique magnificence. There had been no change for a century ; none perhaps since her fair namesake, Catarina Cornaro, " a widow, but no wife," came back from Cyprus. The transparent floor of cool and snow-like marble ; the elaborate carvings of the antique high-backed chairs ; the fantastic cupids around the mirror from Murano ; the walls hung with the celebrated cloth of gold, which weavers of Bagdad wove for Alraschid, and merchant-princes bore from the Tigris to deck their palaces on the salt Lagoons. The ceiling was painted of a sky-like blue, with fleecy patches of vapour, and behind the clouds, roguish and rosy-cheeked, the fair-haired Venetian children lurked and smiled. But the crowning glory of

the room was the cinque-cento frieze, with its quaint border of grotesque satyr and purple grape-crowned faun, circling the immortal gods of Giorgione. For lo! the Immortals.

With ruffled plumage the kingly bird nestles in the unwary breast of Hermione. Apollo strings his lyre beside the banks of the Amphrysus, and night after night, upon old Latmos, Diana stoops to kiss the dead Endymion. Here the smiling Hebe fills with flowing nectar the cup of an enamoured god; and Bacchus, flushed with the grape-juice and crowned with the vine-leaf, springs lightly from his chariot—

“While his eye
Makes Ariadne’s cheek look blushingly.”

Death itself is changed by the magic pencil into an influence graceful and endearing. Hyacinthus forsakes not the beautiful world, and the pleasant sunshine that he loves: but, as a delicate flower, still communes with the god. The melancholy tree is charged with the drooping spirit of Cyparissus; and in the feathered anemone Adonais blushes into a purer and gentler life. But now bow down, bow down; for lo! Aphrodite in her immortal girlhood woos the young Anchises among the sheep-cots on Ida—Ida, that looks down on windy Troy!

We gathered round the open window which reached to the floor, and admitted right into the midst of us the full sweep of that glorious outer life. The moon had scarcely risen; the warm haze of the summer night hung over the city: innumerable lights played upon the rippling water. In the pauses of the talk we heard the lapping of its waves on the palace walls; for in Venice the sea is never still. Through the most sequestered canal the tide of the Adriatic ebbs and flows. Among its palaces and its tombs, its marts and its churches, there is the unresting murmur of the very sea.

“Through all the isle
There is no covert, no retired shade,
Unhaunted by the murmurous noise of waves.”

The talk turned naturally upon the fortunes of this strange people.

“Ah!” said Catarina, “I wish I had lived two hundred years ago. What a famous life I should have led then!”

Sedley was very glad that her birth had been postponed.

“We could not have spared you,” he said.

Her male friends—and she had none of the other sex—addressed the actress in a certain tone of freedom, the inevitable result of her equivocal position; but it never degenerated into grossness or indelicacy. Catarina was not exactly what she should have been, perhaps: but one felt when with her that this was more the accident of her position than her choice. She could not have been naturally vicious. The slight child-like form, with its indefinite and impalpable grace, was innocence itself—so far as one could see on the surface. And if her language, the tone of her thought, the consciousness of her smile, the occasional levity of her manner, at times insensibly produced the conviction that there was a taint somewhere, the sensuousness of her constitution was so bound up with and disguised under a bright and sparkling intellect, a restless and sensitive imagination, that it rather added to her charm. Hers was the moral languor, the spiritual *abandon* of an Aspasia.

As I saw her that night she was certainly very lovely, though the loveliness was elusive and intangible. The hazel eyes in which the colour changed as it changes on the sea: the golden brown hair which rippled round the low Greek brow, and fell in a soft curve over the shapely shoulder; the transparent delicacy of the cheek, which yet retained a rare flush of bloom, like the flush caught of a strayed sunbeam by a pearl or a shell below the sea.

Everywhere, alike in body and mind, the same type asserted itself: a charming uncertainty, an April-like indecision: shades of feeling, tricks of manner too evanescent for analysis, too subtle for classification. One felt disposed to lay hands on this fairy creation—could such a gossamer be touched by mortal hands without breaking—and forcibly prevent it from turning itself, as seemed inevitable and perhaps most meet, into a harebell or a sunbeam.

By what evil fortune, by what monstrous caprice, was this slight and fragile creature caught in the iron net of inexorable Fate?

“Who could I have been?” she asked; “I am not quite sure.”

“Bianca Capella,” Sedley suggested.

“Catarina Cornaro,” said D., one of the Englishmen present.

“The Greek girl whose morning bath was the dew,” said the Padre.

“Bianca, no; Catarina, yes. Yes, I should have been the bride of Cyprus. Besides, I was named after her.”

“Catarina let it be,” answered Sedley, twisting some vine-leaves that lay round the fruit into a wreath; “may I crown your queenship?”

“We thank our loyal servant,” she said, inclining the little head to him with grave condescension. He twined the green leaves into her light hair. “Green on gold,” he said, “the colours of the Cornari.”

“Just so, and the Doge—Marino Faliero, is it not?—welcomes us home to Venice. ‘Nay, my lord, we cannot enter Bucentaur. We are a daughter of Venice.’ ‘And Queen of Cyprus,’ replies the stately gentleman in his noble way, as he leads us to his barge. I should have kissed him ere we landed, I know I should: Catarina did it, of course.”

“Happy man,” murmured Sedley.

“Yes,” said D., “those old merchants understood the grand courtesies of national life. We have forgotten the art. The antique gentlemanliness has departed. I, too, belong to a merchant people; but it deals only in the retail trade. We are a nation of shopkeepers.”

“We always did these things well,” said the Padre; “it was natural to us. The effect, indeed, was studied with an artist’s eye; but there was the true gentlemanlike spirit, as you call it, at the root, we may be sure. The most graceful courtesy the Republic ever paid, I think, was when, during the war of Chioggia, in calling on the citizens to contribute, it specially excepted from the tax ‘Tiziano Vecellio, that marvellous painter, and Jacobo Sansovino, the great architect.’ What a masterly tribute of admiration!”

“Only fancy,” exclaimed Sedley, “the uproar such an exception would make in England. Jobbery! Corruption! It would be denounced as a ministerial iniquity from every hustings in the country. How the economists would fume. How the working classes would be required to rise as a man, and resist these iniquitous burdens. ‘Walter Scott, that great poet, and David Wilkie, that memorable painter,’ would be made to pay up to the uttermost farthing.”

“I trust, when minister,” said D., “to teach our islanders a more generous respect for genius.”

“When the first miracle takes place I shall look for the next.”

“We shall see,” was the confident rejoinder. “I admire the Venetian policy immensely,” he went on. “It was the most subtle and sagacious that modern Europe has yet developed. What in its machinery was capable of being exposed to the daylight, was exhibited with supreme ostentation: what was narrow, vindictive, pitiless, they inexorably concealed. An oriental Machiavelli must have

devised it. Bolingbroke is the only English statesman who has understood it."

"Yet," said the Padre,—the Padre, I say, for it was the Church official who spoke,—“it was founded upon a lie, and so—*Delenda est Carthago.*”

“Let the gods decide,” answered D.

“‘Ilium is fallen, and they who dwelt therein
Are as they are before high-judging heaven.’”

I speak only of its policy; and good or bad, no policy, down to the minutest detail, was ever executed with more consummate ability. A governing oligarchy and a popular republic! That was the central idea, and you trace it everywhere. In its huts and in its palaces, in the haughty reserve of the Broglio, in the frank fraternity of the Piazza. It exacted the funeral simplicity of the gondola; it dictated the black domino of the noble. The mask was not a mere cloak for intrigue or adventure. No, it was a national institution, essential to the economy of Venice. For it preserved that mystery and *prestige* to the governing classes which such a constitution imperatively required.”

“Don’t you think,” said Sedley, “we had better import it into England? The governing classes there seem to be rather in need of it.”

D. was a remarkable man in his way. There was an exaggeration, an epigrammatic bombast in his talk, at which many wiseacres grinned, and which Catarina mimicked to the life. But he was a remarkable man—much more so than his critics. His political and historical creed was no doubt partly fictitious: it smacked of the insincerity which must always attach to the creed of the mere artist; but he construed it at least with the breadth and generosity of a poetic intellect. His nature was large and unselfish. He was insanely ambitious, but never base. He could abandon his principles: he never abandoned his friends. And

his persevering *insouciance*, his obstinate *nonchalance*, were indomitable. Nothing could shake him from his purpose: he held on to it like grim death or an English terrier. And he did not exactly fail. He was First Minister of the Oceanic Republic when he died.¹

As the night wore on the Padre disappeared: Ashton, engaged elsewhere, had left earlier. The mirth became fast and furious. Catarina was brilliant and bewitching—saucy, bitter, tender, pathetic, as the mood changed. Her vivacity was not the wild effort men can make to smother a rooted sorrow: there was not room for any deep misery to take root in her heart, and she had none to conceal. No doubt some bitter memories now and again jarred against the heartstrings, but they did not abide long; and when they did recur she made no effort to hide them, but gave expression to them with passionate directness. At such moments one feared to say what this angry child might *not* do: children have fired palaces before now.

We went out on the balcony. We heard the splash of the water below our feet, and a hundred church-bells answer each other through the mist. The grey ghost of the morning lay along the northern sky over Cadore. It was two o'clock.

“Let us see the Duomo!” cried Catarina, suddenly, clapping her hands. “Let us go,” we all echoed. We were excited, and we entered readily into the whim. “The sail will be superb.”

Catarina wrapped her opera-cloak round her, and drawing the white hood over her head, greeted us with one of her grave smiles. “I am a sister of the Carthusians,” she said.

Our gondolas were lying at the door, and wakening our

¹ Is it necessary in 1878 to apologise to the Earl of B. for the liberties taken in 1854 with the initials of Mr D.?

men, who were lying in a heap fast asleep in the bottom of the most commodious, we bore down the Canale for the Piazza.

Catarina was in great spirits. In her white hood she was the most charming nun the moonlight ever looked on. Her eyes sparkled with glee at the frolic on which we were bent, and at length she burst into an *Io pœan* of victory. It was the fierce Osmanli chant in *Mahomet*, which in the opera is chanted to the menacing music of barbaric cymbals. We joined in the chorus, gondoliers and the rest of us, and from among the hoarse male voices rose, like the spring of a crystal fountain, rejoicing, triumphant, the liquid notes of the great singer.

“The Infidel is at the gates, and the senators of the Republic are a-bed,” concluded Sedley, in a sort of Runic chant. “We will hang the banner of the Moslem on the vanes of St Mark. We must humour her,” he whispered to me, as we landed at the stairs of the Piazzetta; “but it is more than likely we shall spend the morning with the Austrian police. We are in for a row, you may be sure; but here goes.”

However, we met no one. Two or three sleepy gondoliers raised their heads as we passed them from out the forest of gondolas which were moored at the stairs; and between us and the Lido the painted sails of a few fishing craft bearing up from Chioggia were dimly visible. But the great square was silent as the valley of death. Not a creature stirred, and the Infidel were masters of the situation. Catarina insisted upon another Saracenic chant in celebration of our victory as we marched round the Piazza; but no one interrupted us, though we saw a black-bearded Jew thrust his ugly head out of a little window near the summit of the orologio. The head retreated hastily when D. solemnly adjured it in what we understood to be the Semitic tongue.

“We must say good-morrow to his Saintship,” exclaimed Catarina when we reached the Duomo. The great gates were closed; but a small door at the west angle stood open, and we entered the famous cathedral of the Lagoons. During the brightest sunshine the interior oppresses one by its gloom; now it was mirk as the day of judgment. Our mad gaiety vanished. The gloom sobered us. It was too solemn for our infidel scorn. We groped our way quietly through the darkness to a chapel near the high altar, where lamps were burning and two old priests muttering the service for the dead. I leaned against a pillar, a square massive column that could have borne Ossa and Olympus on its sinewy shoulders, and enjoyed the Rembrandt-like effect. The lamplight peered into dark and mysterious vaults, played upon vast gilded arches, discovered the rude and quaint character of the gigantic figures in mosaic capriciously scrawled over the spacious domes, and revealed above the altar one glorious woman-face by Tiziano Vecellio, “that marvellous painter”—a sinful woman at her Redeemer’s feet, washing them with her tears and wiping them with her golden dishevelled hair.

“Pone luctum, Magdalena,
Et serena lacrymas,”

said the scrawl below. But now when my eyes turned from the picture they fell upon another figure with as fair a face, weeping tears as scalding as any Magdalen ever shed. It was Catarina. The awe of the darkness had fallen upon the girl’s heart, and in a sudden revulsion of feeling she had sunk upon her knees before the shrine, and now sobbed sorely and piteously, like one whose heart is broke.

“Pone luctum, Magdalena,
Et serena lacrymas.”

I do not know how long she remained. Slowly the daylight gathered into the edifice and subdued the darkness, revealing as it came the alternate pauses between the triple domes, the radiant angels, and the BENEDICTUS QUI VENIT IN NOMINE DOMINI, on its golden ground. Then slipping quietly away, I bade Catarina's gondolier wait her return, and reached home as the market-boats, with their purple and crimson colours, crowded on to the Rialto.

IX.

And many a breezy summer morn
Adown the Tigris I was borne.

A FEW days after our exploit on the Piazza, Sedley and I called on Catarina. We found the Padre—he was Catarina's confessor—before us. He proposed, as the day was fine and sufficiently cool, that we should visit the outskirts of the city.

We had a delicious sail. Catarina was in one of her quiet meditative moods; but Agostino was peculiarly agreeable. There was a brilliancy, a flush of excitement, in his conversation when she was present, that I did not notice at any other time, and which fired with vivid life his pale sculpturesque Greek face. He had brought with him from Catarina's table an Italian translation of the *Arabian Nights*, and now he read us, in a pause of the talk, one of those charming romances.

No one should visit the Lagoon without a copy of this wonderful book. At Venice, until he is five-and-thirty, even a man of the world can believe in it; elsewhere, by the year he has cut his wisdom teeth:—

“The visionary arches are not there,
Nor the blue islands, nor the shining seas.”

These *Noctes Ambrosianæ* might have been written in Venice: they reflect its romance, its intrigue, its warm shadows, its brilliant and festal life, as the sea does. In the Greek Archipelago read the *Odyssey*, in Venice the *Arabian Nights*.

For in Venice better than in any other European city we can re-live that bewitching romance. Again we are borne down the placid stream of the Tigris, and the palms and the cypresses mingle their shadows in the gentle water with the golden shrines of Bagdad. And we lie in our shallow skiff that scarce stirs the lilies, and shaded by the ample folds of our sacred turban, for true servant are we of the Prophet, gaze into the cloudless sky and dream of the glories of Alraschid. And in canal or piazza they rise up bodily before us,—the palaces, the gardens, the marble pavements sprinkled with oriental perfumes, the deep-bosomed maids, like those the Greeks bore from Troy, and, throned above the rest, the Persian girl, “serene with argent-lidded eyes,”—a splendid creature, well worthy of the golden prime, not of Alraschid alone, but of many a better Christian.

“I always loved Haroun Alraschid,” broke in Catarina, “he is so perfect a gentleman and so royal a king. He is perpetually doing mad-like things and getting into scrapes, yet he is never at a loss. Just like you, Monsieur Sedley, or Milord Palmerston.”

The Premier had even then entered on his perennial boyhood.

Sedley bowed his acknowledgments.

“For my own part,” said Agostino, “I love to quit Bagdad, centre though it be of that glorious fable land, and visit the strange peoples and the terrible monsters who skirt the margins of the world. I think the true

romance of the story lies there,—by the lonely sea-shores haunted by genii, in the deep valleys where the eagles feed.”

The Padre, we felt, spoke truly. In our case, at least, the fascination of these unearthly monsters has to answer for a roving disposition and an unsettled life. There is many a pearly fountain in the East where, as we lay beneath the walnut-trees, and cast the shells into the water, we have waited with a vague expectation in the depths of our hearts for the genie, all white with age and of a monstrous bulk, to approach us, scimitar in hand, and in a terrible voice admonish us, “Rise up that I may kill thee with this scimitar, as you have killed my son.” Often, indeed, in such places, have we been addressed by the good old man leading his black bitch, almost in the very words he employed to the unlucky china merchant, “Brother, may I ask you why you are come into this desert place, where there is nothing but evil spirits, and by consequence you cannot be safe?” And we have explained to him how an evil spirit of his own curses and distracts the Englishman, and drives him from land to land, and will not suffer him to be at rest. And many “a cloud of dust like a whirlwind” have we met advancing upon us, “which vanished all of a sudden,” but without the monster manifesting himself; though, after all, his departure would probably have taken place, now as of yore, “to the great contentment of the company.”

Then, tiring of talk, we raised the sail—the curious little sail which they use on the gondola outside of Venice when the wind is fair—and bore away to one of the larger islands where, amid ancient canals nearly choked with vegetation, rises the mother church of the Lagoon. Of all places in the world, Torcello, in its loneliness, its desertedness, its simplicity, is perhaps the fittest that could be selected for the bleak words of Tennyson,—

“ A place of tombs
Where lie the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sings,
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam.”

An old porterness with rusty keys admitted us within the deserted church. The plain rafters of the cupola, the plain stone ledges which sweep round the high altar, the plain block of marble which forms the reading-desk from which these stout-hearted fugitives were exhorted and warned, are all suggestive of the unpretending devotion of homely and simple men. Languidly through the encrusted window comes the faded light, and rests lazily upon an uncouth mosaic, or creeps stealthily round a delicate capital. It does not seem to us like a church that is decaying, though the salt sea-green that has crept round the pillars, as though they had been covered by clinging sea-weed, attests the destroying action of the water. No ! the old church is not decaying, for there is not life enough in it even for decay.

And as we pass from the sacristy, where we find intimations of local fast or parochial tax pasted upon the wall, and a surplice of the primitive church hung up against the door by some worthy shepherd of the flock who has been dust for a generation, into the blinding sunshine of the grass-grown piazza, Agostino waxes eloquent upon the marvellous transformation which the builders of this church effected, on the courage which founded, the energy which sustained, and the genius which adorned the great and courtly Republic which he loved.

While we waited for our boatmen on the steps beside the canal, a girl brought a reed-chair from the neighbouring cottage for Catarina. Her face and form were simply perfect ; though meanly dressed, her rags sat upon her as if the Graces themselves had been her handmaids. She might have stepped out of the picture of an old master or

from the studio of an Athenian sculptor just as she was. Where do these common Italian girls learn this art?—an art which seems to be lost even in Italy, except in some of the valleys leading to Cadore?

“A thousand thanks,” said Catarina. “How do you like your island, my girl?”

“Ah, signorina, it is very lonely,” the girl replied, holding up her hands, and shrugging her shoulders with the graceful expressive action which is natural to these born artists—“only father, grandmother, and myself; and father is often away with his boat. How I would like to live in the city!” she added, pointing over the reeds to Venice.

“Stay where you are, pretty one,” Catarina answered, with one of her doubtful smiles; “you are safer here.”

And then our men came, and we said farewell, and glided away through the reeds: but till we had passed the bridge, we saw the girl seated upon the stairs, looking pensively into the water at her bare feet,—the only young thing with life in it in all that barren island.

X.

Venice lost and won:

Her fifteen hundred years of freedom done,
Sinks like a sea-weed into whence she rose.

ASHTON was an English aristocrat, frank, indolent, courteous, but proud to the backbone. He was excessively fond, they said, of Catarina, but his hard, reserved, and unimpressionable manner would have deceived a spectator. He would rather have seen more of her; he would rather that she had not exhibited herself to the public; but his cold *hauteur* was no match for her

daring caprice, and after a vehement quarrel and a prolonged estrangement she was always allowed to take her own way. I believe, however, that he was somewhat wearied of the connection—it annoyed and worried him; but whenever he tried to break the fetter the old fascination revived, and the next morning found him at Phryne's feet.

“I am going down the Lagoon, beyond Burrano,” he said, one morning at breakfast. “Pietro says I can have good duck-shooting on one of the islands there. Will you come with me? I can lend you a gun.”

Ashton was an enthusiastic sportsman, and wherever he happened to be, contrived to gratify his taste. In those days I shared the Teutonic mania, and readily accepted his invitation.

In less than an hour our swarthy gondoliers had landed us on the island, and having disembarked our ammunition and forage, anchored their craft a little way from the shore, and began to fish for *scavoli*, which at this season are numerous in the Lagoon channels, and taken in numbers by the fishermen.

We had fair success. The island was little more than a mud-bank which had gradually been raised above the surrounding water. It was fringed with long reeds, out of which every now and then a duck would rise suddenly, and make for the open Lagoon, until arrested by a shot from Ashton's double-barrel or my long single-bore. Two or three that fell in the water were picked up by the boatmen. Mallard and teal we found most plentiful; but there were a few web-footed creatures of brilliant plumage and fantastic architecture whose names we did not know. They partook more of the African type than the birds generally met with in Europe, and had probably found their way here from the Egyptian or Nubian marshes.

Pietro, Ashton's *valet-de-place*, was greatly delighted with our success, and although already groaning under the

weight of the slain, insisted on taking his master to some marshy ground at the further end of the island, where he assured us we were certain to find a perfect assemblage of wild-fowl. Ashton agreed to go, but throwing myself on the sand, I gave Pietro my gun, and promised to wait their return.

I pulled my broad-brimmed cap over my eyes, and listened indolently to the gurgle of the water among the bulrushes. The boatmen never shifted their position, and I could hear the murmur of their voices as they conversed with each other, and their low excited exclamation when they found a fish fast and drew it cautiously on board. A flapper which had hidden itself among the reeds dropped noiselessly from the bank, and began swimming and diving rapidly along the shore. The flapping of wings overhead made me look up, and a flock of delicate quail passed me within a stone's cast, but veered suddenly round when I raised my arm, and, uttering a low cry of alarm, took a different route to the mainland.

And this was the Lagoon,—the Lagoon as it might have been a thousand years before, when homeless fugitives, flying before the hordes of Attila, found rest and refuge upon its barren islands. What was the prospect that greeted them as they looked down on the promised land from the passes of Cadore ?

A dreary enough spectacle it was, and is again after the lapse of a thousand years. It is in the sea, and yet not of it. The tides of the Adriatic ebb and flow through its whole extent ; but the water, except in one or two of the larger channels, is not more than a foot or a couple of feet in depth, and at ebb-tide the Lagoon is a vast arena of mud. Scattered throughout it are countless compact sand-banks overgrown with coarse sea-herbs, and lined by gigantic bulrushes, haunted by the wild-duck and the water-rat ; intersected by canals and open spaces of water,

along which, as though it were along the land, white sails speed quickly and noiselessly; tenanted by bright-eyed lizards, and the scattered huts of watermen, and legions of aquatic birds, whose shrill complaint mingles with the plash and murmur of the gathering tide!

Conceive one of the grandest dramas in European history enacted in a Norwegian morass or a Lincolnshire fen, and you will be able to understand the mysterious fascination of the Lagoon.

"Have you any faith in dreams and presentiments?" Ashton said to me, when we were smoking a cigar on the beach before embarking. "I awoke last night in a cold shiver. I can't recall the details of the dream, but the impression it left behind was *bloody*. If I were to obey my feelings just now, I would turn the gondola to the shore, and make you leave me on the mainland."

He spoke coolly, but I saw that he was quite serious.

"Of course I don't mean to go, but the anxiety I feel at this moment to quit Venice is curious."

"There is the Trieste boat in the offing. See, she is getting up her steam. We will put you on board."

"No," he said, laughing in his quiet way. "No; I will stay."

"I believe in omens," I answered. "I am sure the approaching calamity often casts its ominous shadow before it on the heart. I believe in omens: so did Shakespeare. If I were you I would go." I spoke half in earnest and half in jest.

"No, no. I promised to dine with Vittoria. What would he say to my excuse, 'I am afraid to dine in Venice to-night, and have taken the boat for Trieste'?"

"Let him think what he likes. Come, Antonio," I said, turning to the boatmen and pointing to the steamer, "we must be on board in twenty minutes."

Ashton interposed decidedly.

“It won't do. I have made up my mind.”

“These predictions
Are to the world in general as to Cæsar,”

he added, smilingly, quoting his favourite author. “Cæsar will go to the Capitol.”

“Yet Cæsar did not return.”

“Ay; but what said Cæsar?” And Ashton repeated the glorious words, as if their valour warmed his heart:—

“Cowards die many times before their death :
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear ;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come, when it will come.”

We returned to Venice in the evening, and having dined went down the Canale to the Piazza. It was the evening of a Festa-day, when, with a little aid from the imagination, one can still recall the pride and gaiety of its ancient state. The black coffin-like gondolas emerged from numberless canals, and hurried on to the Piazzetta; the gondola with the eastern battle-axe, ominous and menacing, at its prow; the gondola, the war-canoe of a barbaric tribe, in which this sumptuous city takes its pleasure. The arches of the Piazza were brilliantly lighted, and cast a glare across the crowded groups of pleasure-seekers seated in the square, upon the gold and marble and white lily leaves that twine round the capitals of the Duomo. Ices and wonderful oriental confections were being distributed among oriental visitors; and the coloured and picturesque costume of Moslem, Albanian, and Greek contrasted effectively with the white uniform of the Austrian infantry.

We seated ourselves among the bearded revellers, and listened to the music of the band. The Germans are

musicians by nature and education, and their military bands are probably the best on the Continent. Their national hymn as played by themselves is certainly the most pathetic and tender of all the national music of Europe.

“Ours,” said Lettice, “is the confident chant of a great people returning from battle: theirs is battle music, too; but it is the music to which doomed men could die bravely.”

The scene was altogether brilliant and striking, and suggested by a not very remote association, the barren islands among which we had spent the day. For this also had been one of them—this also was a barren and melancholy swamp, when despairing fugitives, lighted by the hostile fires the Goths had kindled along the shore, fled hither, panic-stricken, from the mainland. Did any among these outcasts foresee that on the foundations which they were staying painfully among the shifting waves and the unstable sand, would arise the most splendid and enduring of the mediæval Republics?

XI.

O! how frail
To that large utterance of the early gods.

NEXT morning I was early on Lido. I met the Padre, who took me to breakfast with him. His fresh strawberries, he said, were exquisite; and I must taste them.

The strawberries were excellent, and the Padre was very happy and animated. He had caught and tamed one of the large black-backed gulls of the Lagoon. It used to

stalk solemnly after its master through his garden, or stand meditatively on one of its yellow legs, keeping the other in reserve, and listen lazily to our talk. Sometimes, however, its natural instincts got the better of its acquired dignity, and when a worm or a snail came in its way it would pounce upon it and gobble it up summarily. This morning, as we sat on the bench by the doorway, we could not help laughing at its movements. It was more stately and magnificent than ever. It stood before us on its one leg, in a species of learned pose, at intervals nodding confidentially upon us, or turning out the whites of its eyes when any statement was made of which it could not approve. The Padre liked his bird, and the bird the Padre; and had they lived during the Middle Ages, the wizard and his familiar (that was the idea these strange intimates always suggested to me when I beheld the one stalking after the other) would have been burnt together.

I had lent him a volume of modern poetry: and the talk turned upon the poets. I found that, like most Italians, he had an immense admiration for Byron.

"I think," he said, "your Byron among the poets alone understands his trade. He is a man, and not a machine to clip stanzas only. He breathes the salt air: he swims the Hellespont. The old Greek ballad-singers did it too, though they forgot to tell us. I read the poems you gave me the other day by your new poet: they are fine, but too elaborate, cloyed with sweetness—a hothouse growth. I am content with Byron and his bold, fresh, inartificial life. I love the quick, eager dash of his waves on the sand; his clear, sharply-cut, unreflective judgment on all mundane matters, like a boy's in its glee and petulance."

It was pleasant to listen to his deep, mellow voice; and I was too indolent to interrupt him, even had I cared to differ from him, which I never do when the thermometer is over 70°. So he talked away in his easy meditative

way as though he were discoursing to himself—a habit he had acquired from living much alone—and I lay and basked in the sunshine at mine ease. At length he stopped abruptly,—recollecting his guest.

“But I am wearying you,” he said, “with my old-fashioned notions. Let us look at the garden.”

And we went, and *Jupiter Tonans*—so he had named the gull—shook his ambrosial feathers and stalked solemnly after us.

XII.

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
 We know her woof, her texture: she is given
 In the dull catalogue of common things.

IT was the afternoon before I got back to Venice.

Sedley met me as I entered the hotel. He seemed unusually excited.

“Ashton,” he said, “was found dead this morning in a narrow lane near the Rialto. Pietro has had the body brought here. The chief of the police has been with me all day; he has just now left.”

“Gracious God!” I exclaimed; “and Catarina? It must have been a terrible blow to her.”

“So it has. She was quite stunned by the news, and is now really ill. I could not tell her myself; so I took Letty with me, who broke it to her as gently as she could. But it completely upset her. Letty is a noble girl: she offered to go with me of her own accord, when she saw that I hesitated to ask her. There are not three women in England would have done the same.”

“Is she still there?”

“Yes: she could not leave the little Comtessa sobbing and shivering all alone in that great house. Besides, Letty’s presence seemed to keep her more tranquil. The doctor evidently dreads the shock to her brain.”

“Who could have done it? Is there any suspicion?”

“No. The whole affair is a mystery. However, the *chef*, an old acquaintance of mine, a shrewd, sharp-witted Frenchman—Monsieur Jean Dessin, by name—is hard at work. I believe he is on the scent. The man is keen as a needle.”

“Poor Ashton! He was really a good fellow in the main,” I said, trying to appease my conscience by a consolatory commonplace. “Don’t you think we had better see how they are?”

“I was just on my way. If Lettice stays at the Palazzo all night, I must get a bed somewhere in the house. I can’t let her remain alone.”

Catarina was rather better, but still at times suffering painfully from hysteria. Lettice came out to us: she was pale and tired, but quite determined to stay.

“We will come back in the evening,” Sedley promised.

We returned when it was dusk, and found Dr Stephen—a stout little Englishman who then practised in Venice—established in Catarina’s sitting-room.

“She is quieter,” he informed us, “but her state is critical yet. I will wait another hour. The case is peculiar.”

Sedley, who was worn out with his day’s work, threw himself on the sofa, and was asleep in five minutes. The doctor was well known among the residents for his short, decisive, peremptory manner, and his enthusiastic devotion to his profession. He was an able man, I dare say; but he committed the mistake (if mistake it was) of looking on his patients as specimens of clockwork, and treating them as such. A broken heart was a wheel out of order;

a rooted sorrow might be patched up like a damaged spring ; the written troubles of the brain could be erased by calomel and quinine.

We went out on the balcony, and the doctor, closing the window, lighted his cigar. A silver lane of light lay along the water, and from an aerial battery of clouds on the horizon came sudden sheets of flame.

The doctor, a hale and breezy man, with a vast deal of vital energy in his composition, did not believe in death.

“ It is the worst kind of quackery going,” he said to me. “ There was Huntly, the other day : when I was first taken to see him his feet were blue, his face cadaverous—the very picture of the King of Terrors. Why, he was being frightened out of his life ; that was all. I told him to give up his incantations (he didn’t believe in them, and they only made him worse), and had him on his legs in a week. Then his sister, poor thing !—a sweet creature, worth twenty cowardly sinners like her brother—caught typhus, and was as bad as possible. Ten years ago she would have beaten me,—I could not have pulled her through ; but six drops out of this little vial kept the flame flickering in the socket, and the fiend off, till her nerves recovered and went to work of themselves again. And now she is quite hearty.” And the doctor puffed away irefully at his cheroot.

“ But people do die sometimes, doctor, don’t they ? ”

“ Of course they do,—there are quacks and idiots in the world. What could you expect ? Death is a bad habit that won’t be got rid of till you convince the world that it is quite unnecessary. Get the notion out of men’s heads, and they will give up the habit.”

“ Well, I hope the poor Comtessa won’t think of giving in to it.”

“ No fear of her,” said the doctor, sharply. “ She’s

much too ill to give me any uneasiness. When a man is hit so badly that he won't come to himself for a week, he is quite safe. The body gets time to work off the mischief when the mind is out of the way and unable to play the devil."

"I am glad to hear it. But you don't admire the mind, doctor?"

"Certainly not; why should I? It is always in one's way, irritating the nerves, worrying the brain. You have no idea how it annoys me. And the evil is growing every day."

"How do you mean?"

"When I first practised, men were killed right off without needless torture. They didn't feel it. But when a man is hanged in these days his mind keeps on the alert to the end, and notes down, I am convinced, every stage in the process of strangulation. Death used to fell a man like an ox, and stun him at once. Now the poor wretch lies for hours wide awake—horribly aware of what is going on—analysing and dissecting each new pain that precedes dissolution, and waiting in a cold shiver for the last shock. You have no idea how much more disagreeable it makes it, both to himself and his friends."

"I understand perfectly. You see many men die, doctor," I went on after a pause; "do they do it well?"

"A few do, but the herd die like pigs. There is little pathos, little passion: no regular *dénouement* or striking crisis, but life is meanly shuffled off and poorly abandoned."

"You don't believe in the Mirabeau sort of style, then?—'Support this head,—would I could bequeath it thee!'"

"Certainly not. These studied attitudes are fictitious. But his last request for opium—*dormir*—is very common, and I don't see why it should not be gratified. If men *will* die, mayn't they die easily at least? Why force them

to bear the torture of dissolution when I can usher them without a pang into the next world ? ”

“ I believe there is a prejudice on the subject; probably selfish, like most other prejudices. The pain is needlessly protracted, because it is so hard a thing to part, I suppose.”

“ Whether selfish or not, it is absurd. The priests indeed say that up to the last moment the sinner may repent. Faugh ! I don't meddle with their stuff ; but to say that a besotted villain can change the habit of his life in fifty minutes is just saying a little too much. Such a moral code is dangerous to society. Depend upon it, the bravo will require some sharper treatment to cleanse his foul life than craven terror or mean remorse.”

The doctor, with his ire, his impatience, his intolerance, and the quaint originality of his manner, was an amusing companion, and we talked and smoked together till midnight. He then went off to visit his patient, and I saw him no more. After waiting a little while, I threw myself on the unoccupied couch, and did not awake till long after daybreak.

XIII.

Those have most power to hurt us that we love ;
We lay our sleeping lives within their arms.

ONE morning, about a week after the murder, Sedley came into my bedroom. I had not risen. He looked so jaded that I asked if he had been in bed.

“ No,” he answered, absently. “ I have been all night with Dessin at his office, going over the papers about Ashton's death. What do you think *he* thinks ? ”

“ What ? ”

“ That Agostino and Catarina are the parties guilty,” he

said, repeating each word slowly. "The priest has been already apprehended, and Catarina, who is too ill to be moved, is under strict surveillance at the Soranzo."

"Agostino and Catarina!" I exclaimed, when I had recovered my voice. "The notion is ludicrous. Why, I was the very next morning with the Padre, you recollect? The thing is impossible."

"So I still hope, in spite of Dessin's evidence. But the case against them is desperately strong. The police are perfectly convinced that they have struck the right trail. Nor can I wonder at it, for I see no other explanation."

"Take my word for it, there is some mistake. Agostino and Catarina! Why, you are joking!"

"I wish I were. But listen to Dessin's story, and then judge for yourself."

Sedley then gave me a narrative to the following effect:—

"I am not sure that Catarina ever loved Ashton. She liked him, that was all. There were few points of contact certainly between the passionate Italian and the composed, haughty Englishman.

"It could hardly, however, be expected that a girl like Catarina would all her life rest satisfied with this. I always felt sure that when she did love she would love madly, vehemently. Her child-liking for Ashton would dissolve at once; nay, all things considered, perhaps change to hate.

"Even before you came to Venice I noticed that Agostino was in a manner fascinated by her. He could not resist the attraction, though I am certain he strove against it with all the force of his character. He has a strong will, you know; but after a dire conflict the madness mastered him.

"When it was that Catarina responded I don't know. I have long observed that she was peculiarly still and

quiet in his presence,—quite unlike her gay, thoughtless little self. The Padre, on the contrary, when with her, was sparkling and animated, as you must have noticed. Then he was some old Temple-knight,—not a modern priest tamed down to the courtesies of the confessional. Agostino would have made a brilliant soldier.”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, no matter when or how, they loved. I don't say their love was criminal: it may have been. But it quite changed her character; to me it seemed as if from a child she suddenly grew into a woman. It reminded me of Undine in our friend's romance,—love gave the vagrant gipsy a woman's soul, and with it the tenderness and tearfulness of woman's devotion. The wicked, sparkling, malicious eyes moistened with love. It was a new life to her. Her acting before had been chiefly attractive for its wild vivacity and *abandon*, its child-like grace and gay animal enjoyment; now it became intense and subdued. She was interpreting what she felt. People didn't like it so much; but to myself it was a curious study, and altogether much higher art.

“ I don't believe Ashton noticed anything wrong at first. But in our reserved insular way he was exceedingly observant, and a tacit antipathy grew up between him and the handsome and haughty churchman, who was for ever with Catarina. I believe he and Catarina had one desperate quarrel about her confessor, and they separated—to meet next day. He couldn't break the chain. Thereafter the subject was avoided between them, and the Knight Templar came and went as he pleased.

“ All this I knew partially before the catastrophe. Now for what the police have collected.

“ At first my friend Dessin was quite at fault. He didn't see his way. Ashton had left the Soranzo about midnight: his body was found on the Riva d'Oro next

morning by a gondolier who was going down early to clean his craft.

“A casual expression of mine put him on the scent. Annette, Catarina’s Swiss maid, was examined. She professed to know nothing. She had gone to bed on the night in question about eleven, and fell asleep immediately. She thought that her mistress was alone; and the porter at the gate corroborated her statement.

“Again examined, however, she stammered and hesitated, and the truth came out. Agostino had been with her mistress that evening. Her room adjoined the one in which they sat, and she heard the Padre reading—it was Dante, she thought they called it: however, there was no copy of the *Commedia* in the room when it was searched.

“While they were thus engaged, Ashton entered without being announced. Annette did not exactly catch what followed: she had gone to bed, and was nearly asleep; but there was evidently a quarrel, for their voices were raised, and high words passed between them. In a few minutes Ashton left. The porter opened the door for him—the door leading into the street. Annette did not know how long Agostino remained; but she felt sure that it must have been an hour at least. She heard him and her mistress conversing together in a low tone, and she believed that Ashton’s name was frequently mentioned. The Padre left, and it was the girl’s impression that he had gone by the front entrance, for she heard the splash of oars soon after. But this was mere conjecture.

“After the priest left, Catarina had come softly into her room. She seemed much agitated. She told the girl that there had been a misunderstanding between herself and Ashton, and entreated her not to mention to any one that Agostino had been with her that night. Annette, who was much attached to her young mistress, at once promised. It was this promise, and a dim kind of suspicion that she

might bring trouble on Catarina, that prevented her speaking out when first examined. It was difficult to explain Catarina's request, except by the hypothesis of a guilty knowledge.

"About one, a gondolier asleep in his craft at the Piazzetta had been wakened by the gondola moored next his own leaving the quay, and bumping against it in passing. He did not observe where it was going or who was in it; for the moon was by that time down behind St Mark's. Once wakened he could not sleep; so he rose, and lighted his cigarette. On the water near San Giorgio, beyond the shadow cast by the city, the moonlight still rested; and while he smoked he noticed a small craft emerge from the darkness, and run quickly along the coast of the island. He could see it plainly enough during a moment or two: the moonlight was quite bright when it first appeared, but a cloud hid it from him, and when the haze cleared off it was no longer visible. Whether it was this boat or another that had left the quay he could not say. But he was quite sure that he had seen a craft near San Giorgio,—the direct road to Lido. It was a fine night, he said, but there was a fresh sea-breeze, which rippled the water, and made the craft less distinguishable.

"With this information Dessin thought that he was justified in apprehending the Padre. The Church is paramount in Venice just now, so he was afraid to do so without ecclesiastical consent. It was granted—reluctantly, for Agostino is one of their ablest and most useful men. He merely denied all participation in the crime, and declined to answer any questions except to his own superiors. He had not done it, that was all he would admit.

"His dwelling was searched, and a number of letters from Catarina found in it. Many of them are very *naïve* and touching; but I am afraid they tell much against them; for in almost every one of them, especially in the

latest, there is some complaint of Ashton,—an irritation and even violence of tone throughout when he is mentioned which surprised me. Dessin founds very much on these letters, especially on some expressions in the more recent, such as, ‘I will endure this no longer,’ ‘Would that he were gone,’ and others in a similar strain. Of course they are just the expressions which an Italian would use without meaning much; but read by the light—a false light it may be—cast upon them by this murder, I confess I don’t like them: they look bad.

“Besides the letters, they found a small dagger in his library. It must have been a similar weapon that inflicted the wound; and though there was no appearance of blood on it, the officer who found it noticed that small particles of sand adhered both to the blade and the handle, as if it had recently been struck forcibly into the beach. One might do so to remove a stain of rust or blood.”

I felt staggered. Each division of the proof seemed to fit so curiously into the rest, more especially when taken in connection with the terrible effect which Ashton’s death had produced on Catarina.

But Lettice was inexorable. The Padre might be guilty, but Catarina was innocent. And she accounted for the shock it had caused her by a suggestion which I felt might be true. The quarrel of the previous evening fresh in her memory, it had at once flashed upon her that Agostino *must* be the murderer. They had met in the street; Ashton had assailed the priest with bitter words; the Italian blood had been roused; the Italian dagger had done its work swiftly and passionately, as it can.

I never saw Agostino again. He had solemnly assured his superiors that he was innocent; and as they could not afford to lose him, they had demanded that he should be handed over to them and tried by an ecclesiastical tribunal. If he was ever tried he was probably acquitted,

but I never learnt. The trial at least had not taken place before I quitted Venice. The disaffected murmured a little ; but the Church and the Austrians were then potent, and the curious had the prospect of Catarina's trial before them.

For the lay authorities had determined that as Agostino had escaped them, Catarina should not. When Lettice broke the announcement to her she received it quite quietly, as if the idea were familiar to her mind,—as if she had never expected anything else. Her buoyant spirit was indeed quite broken ; but it needed Lettice's explanation to account for this rigid and unnatural coolness. She evidently believed, Lettice repeated, that Agostino had committed the crime. Her whole associations with the night of the murder had pressed that conviction in upon her brain. But this did not make her an accomplice, though I believe she dimly felt that she was somehow responsible and guilty.

And was she guilty ?

God knows—I do not. The Venetian lawyers, indeed, to whom I spoke after the trial was finished, always held that though the evidence might be legally insufficient to convict, there could be no moral doubt of Agostino's guilt and Catarina's complicity. But Lettice, as I have said, would never listen to the accusation ; for when Catarina first began to recover, she had told her of the charge (it was needful she should know), and Catarina had answered her humbly and gently, but quite firmly, "I have been very weak and sinful, but of *his* death" (and she shuddered) "I am guiltless. You do not think me guilty ?"

And Lettice had taken the bruised form into her spotless arms, and told her with passionate tears that she believed her innocent as one of God's angels.

XIV.

Thou anon wilt find
Many a fallen old Divinity
Wandering in vain about bewildered shores.

THE court-house where justice or injustice was administered in Venice being under repair, the courts of law had in consequence been temporarily removed to the ducal palace. Here, in the hall of the great Senate of the Republic, the Supreme Criminal Court of the Lagoons now sat.

On the morning of Catarina's trial I quitted my gondola at the Riva dei Schiavoni, and passed through the excited groups that crowded the famous port of Venice. The lowest no less than the highest classes inherit the fine eye for colours which distinguished their forefathers; and on the Schiavoni the mixture of the old national costume still worn by the seafarers of Palestrina and Chioggia, with the strange motley of the venders of water, of ripe fruit, of nightingales, and glittering scaly fish, and the gaudy shawls and head-gear of the Venetian matrons, reminds one of some brilliant historic painting by Veronese or Tintoretto. Breathe the groups of *The Venetian Slave* into vigorous and animated life, and you will obtain a picture of the Schiavoni as it may be seen any summer day.

Passing along that noble gallery where the cool sea-breeze sweeps unchecked through the pillared screen, I entered the palace. The court had not yet met, and during the interval I wandered through the magnificent suite of rooms which leads to the Grand Sala. Glorious rooms! glowing with gold, pillared on porphyry, clothed in wonderful mosaic of oriental serpentine and rarest

marble, flushed with the radiant smile of Tintoret and the festive genius of Veronese.

There is a picture by Paul in one of these rooms which I have always thought, ever since I saw it as a boy, the most fascinating in the world—*The Rape of Europa* they call it, if I remember aright. The sea is fresh and fragrant with the dawn; the grass is green, like emeralds newly broken, or like the grass in Dante's paradise; ripe and ruddy are the flowers with which Europa and her sisters clasp the horns of the milk-white steer! By her fair immortal hand she swears she will ride to-day, and the gentle bull bows his ambrosial mane before the sandalled foot. Oh, famous festive Paul, who understood that old Paganism so well!

As ten struck, the tolling of a bell announced that the court was about to meet. The outer door of the Senate Hall was by this time opened, and I went in. All the needful preparations had been completed for the trial. The judges were to occupy the raised daïs which runs along the upper end of the chamber below the *Paradise* of Tintoretto; a small enclosed space immediately below was appropriated to the advocates who were to prosecute and defend; and, behind the prisoner's dock, seats were placed for the audience of Venetian idlers, who took a stall here as they took one at the opera. I sat down among them, and, while we waited the entrance of the court, glanced round the hall. It is a noble room. The roof is the masterpiece of Palladio and Sansovino. The blue sky, riven by the endless evolutions of the embroidery that wanders snake-like from side to side; the bright bursts of angels shining through the transfigured clouds; the winged cherubs along the massive cornice; the columns of solid marble which grow at length into quaint satyr or fantastic faun; the panels between their golden borders ripe with the colours of Tintoret and eloquent with the deeds of

Contarini; each detail contributes to produce a unique effect. A more fitting council-chamber could not have been devised for the haughty deliberations of that superb Republic.

But this day the effect was cold and inharmonious. The spectators were few and insufficient. The ceremony in itself was not imposing, and did not rightly fit into or appropriate that vacant and idle splendour. It was a contrast, no doubt,—the contrast between the richness of the old life and the poverty of the new; but it was not effective, for it was a contrast disenchanting to both. The Grand Hall never impressed me less than on this occasion.

XV.

It doth appear you are a worthy judge :
You know the law ; your exposition
Hath been most sound ; I charge you by the law,
Of which you are a well-deserving pillar,
Proceed to judgment.

THE judges on the bench were all Germans, an Italian being considered unqualified to occupy that dignified position. Their several idiosyncrasies were effectively marked.

The President of this the Supreme Court of the Lagoons was a man who may be said to have shown throughout life a remarkable talent for confusion. He worked as hard as a mill-wheel, and he liked his work. Yet whatever he did was done ill. It was sure to be slovenly and imperfectly digested,—even those points of practice for which the mill-wheel intellect is popularly supposed to be competent. He was perfectly conscientious; but never impartial. He tried to be judicial; but he habitually decided

under the influence of passion. He would no doubt have done his duty had his temper permitted him. But the dryest matter of legal lore could, on occasion, add fuel to the flame. An attached servant of the Catholic Church, he was the cause of its bitterest defection and its most dangerous schism. Any object he undertook to further he was sure to defeat. Even his friends admitted that he was a paradox. But the rigorous judgment of the historian cannot admit so much. He was not a paradox; he was only a blunder.

Baron Roderfurth, who occupied the place on his right, is still widely remembered throughout the German empire as an accomplished scholar and a profound lawyer. He died early, a year or two after the time of which I am writing. But he lived long enough to add the fame of wise decision and judicial integrity to the eloquence and ingenuity of the advocate. He was never popular, for he concealed the amenities of his intellect under a polished *hauteur* of manner, which was more offensive to the bar than the rough violence of the President, or the caustic impertinences of Kroitser.

Kroitser, the youngest of the dignitaries, was sharp as a needle. In a limited circle his logic was cutting and inexorable. But its scope was narrow; and when once across the border, it decoyed him into cunning pitfalls and masterly fallacies. He employed his leisure chiefly in bating the President. He tore his chief's blunders to pieces with a zest that never flagged. He impaled him on the horns of harrowing dilemmas. The President's death, I believe, was hastened by this mosquito torture. He was worried out of his life.

When the judges had taken their seats, Catarina was brought in between two *giandarmi*, and placed at the bar. She was very pale, but quiet and composed. The occasion seemed to have nerved her, and roused her from the stupor

which had oppressed her since Ashton's death. Once or twice the old piquant flush crossed her cheek, the eye broke timidly through the thick cover of the eyelash, and a dreary smile hovered about the cold sweet lips. On the whole, her manner indicated neither timidity nor restraint. She looked round the assembly without embarrassment. The distinguished critics whispered to each other that in a woman standing, as it were, face to face with death, this composure indicated the impassibility of hardened guilt. Her nerves certainly had been finely strung for the occasion. She never quailed, never faltered for a moment. But the test is the most imperfect that can be tried. For nerve entirely depends on temperament; and a cool constitution will remain unembarrassed whether its owner be innocent or guilty.

She was neatly, perhaps elegantly, dressed. She was not got up, as beggars are, to elicit sympathy. There was no studied plainness, no affected simplicity. It was like her manner, easy and unexaggerated. Her little white silk bonnet had been designed in Paris. She wore it the last time I saw her in the Piazza, and now she wore it when she was being tried for murder. It had evidently never occurred to her that she should invest in a new and artistic article for the occasion.

The interest of the trial to the jaded pleasure-seekers of Venice lay in its piquancy. It was a fresh and pleasurable emotion to watch this young and pretty girl in the dock, surrounded by the accessories of the felon. It was a new and pleasurable emotion to hear her whose slightest whisper had been their law, tell her judges calmly that she was not guilty of the murder of her paramour. These and countless other weighty considerations of dress and deportment, gave a zest to the performance which the intrigue of the Piazza or the artifice of the theatre had lost.

But the piquant interest rose to its height when the

letters to Agostino were read. They were letters written in the ardour of a sudden and southern passion, and they contained extravagant epithets of endearment. There were sentences in them that, had they been revised at a cooler moment, would have been scored out by the writer herself. It is easy to understand how they sounded in the freezing atmosphere of a court of law. The *roués* grinned with delight, and raised their glasses simultaneously to mark if the victim winced. They were gratified. She did wince: at this point, and at this only during the trial, a deep blush spread across her face, and she bent her head on her white jewelled hand for a moment, and then raised it again—cold, and with her lips pressed tightly together. This was the telling point in the exhibition; and when the exquisite torture was finished, the success of the *spectacle* elicited a buzz of congratulation.

The theory of the police was the one adopted by the prosecution, and enforced as far as possible by the evidence. But one felt from the beginning that the facts required to be wrenched and strained a good deal to make them fit the hypothesis. The explanation was coarse, improbable, and inadequate. The motives it ascribed were too feeble, the passions it described were too base. It was a police caricature of human nature. It bore about as much resemblance to the facts of life as the portraits in the classical "Hue and Cry" did to the offenders they were meant to represent, and whom they effectually disguised. Had it been accurate, a reconstruction of the accepted treatises On the Constitution of Man would have been rendered necessary.

Catarina's advocate—Fieschi, I think, they called him; I saw him years afterwards in very different circumstances—felt his advantage, and used it with mastery. He was a man of immense moral, if you like it better; immoral, force. However good your cause might be, when he was

opposed to you, you felt that you were doomed. You became a criminal in your own estimation. No innocence could resist the weight of that immaculate indignation: it could as well resist the Ten Commandments. He was neither witty nor sarcastic; but the haughty scorn of his virtue, the intense bitterness of his integrity, crushed its victim to pieces. His presence was imposing, and he knew how to use it to perfection. He folded his black silk gown about him with the offended dignity of a Chatham. The contemptuous curl of his nether lip was deadly. His manner was singularly still and impassive until the victim was fairly in his toils, when he came down upon him like a thunder-clap. None of his brethren could encounter him at a hand-to-hand fight. His ablest adversary, indeed, was the advocate for the prosecution, who sometimes foiled him by stealthy fence and Parthian-like retreat.

But in the present contest Fieschi had certainly the best of it. The whole case went down before his elephantine assault. He broke through the cunning toils that had been laid for him, trampling his enemies into the mud as he passed, and leaving them in it.

The weak point in the case, and on which it ultimately broke down, was the interval of an hour which, by Annette's account, elapsed before Agostino followed Ashton from the Soranzo. It was impossible to account for that hour. Ashton's body was found in a lane leading directly from Catarina's palace to his own hotel, showing that he was on his way home when assassinated. Had he waited, asked Fieschi, for a whole hour to be murdered? No; his death must have taken place five minutes after he quitted Catarina—forty minutes, at least, before Agostino left the palace.

After a short consultation in private, the judges returned to the bench, and delivered their opinions.

The President was of opinion that Ashton was dead. Further than that, it quickly became evident, from the obscurity of his observations, he could not see his way. After wading blindly in the dark through an hour's talk, the main fact remained, however. He voted to acquit.

Roderfurth agreed; and in a lucid and judicial argument showed where he considered the evidence incomplete. His speech was calm, eloquent, and incisive: as a piece of legal logic unanswerable, I thought.

Kroitser, however, dissented with his usual acrimony. He held that the charge had been proved. The speech delivered by the advocate for the prisoner, he went on to say, had mainly contributed to this conviction. Despite that speech, he had not made up his mind until he heard the argument of his learned brother in the chair. *That* decided him. *Now*, he had no doubt they ought to convict.

So Catarina was acquitted.

But the excitement that had sustained her through the trial at length gave way. The moment the verdict was returned, her head fell forward on her breast, and she was borne, seemingly lifeless, from the court.

XVI.

Then, Timon, presently prepare thy grave :
Lie where the light foam of the sea may beat
Thy grave-stone daily.

IT is pleasant to muse sometimes over the deep things of Shakespeare. They are like those in Holy Writ: you never feel sure that you have got to the heart of the meaning. Somehow they won't exhaust.

What did Timon mean? He was sick of this false

world, and his soul was bitter within him because of its deceit. So he would die, and make his grave beside the sea, beside the fitful margin of the sea, entombed upon the very hem of the sea. Why? Because the sea was fair and fickle and false as any woman? Because its embrace was deadly, and its smile treacherous? Or was it because he felt that that wild unrest allayed the storm that raged in his own breast? Because he could sleep better where the fierce winds howled and sobbed, and drove the light sea-foam before them for ever above his head?

Perhaps it was only the expression of a broad human feeling. I think most men would like to have their graves made beside the sea. The sea is so grand and glad, compared with the charnel-house. The spirit itself might haunt the spot—might dwell not unfitly along the margin of the infinite waters.

I see at this moment the place I would choose before all others. The mountains look on the muir, and the muir looks on the sea; and between the two there is a long level beach of smooth-beaten turf dashed with gorse and fern. A single rocky island lies along the horizon, its angular peaks strangely steeped and softened in the violet light. When you lie among the gorse, with only a loose sod between you and the dead, and look through its green leaves and its golden blossoms, the radiant blues of the sky and sea absolutely startle you with their dazzling purity. There "prepare thy grave."

"Come not to me again; but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood;
Whom once a day with his embossèd froth
The turbulent surge shall cover."

We made her grave on Lido, and there, among the coarse reeds and grasses, salt with the sea-foam, she rests quietly enough, let us hope. For the trial was too much

for Catarina. The excitement had sustained her during the day; but when it was over she sank down, stunned and shattered. Not all Lettice's kindly nursing availed. The unhappy girl was utterly worn out. She never recovered consciousness. During the night she moaned and shivered occasionally, as though the brain still retained in a dim way the impression of the fatal blow: when the light of a new morning dawned over Venice the vexed and bruised spirit had escaped from its pain. Lettice drew the lids over the fixed and glassy eyes; and kissed her dead sister with a sister's tenderness.

XVII.

Thou hast great allies ;
 Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
 And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

IN the spring of 1848 I again visited Italy. The lucid azure of the sky, unlike the biting blue of the north, the warm haze that rests along the hills, the intense repose and lustre of light between the white heaven and the blue sea and the Happy Islands, the thin and delicate Campanilli, the villa by the water-side in its cypress grove, the lake with its cool depths of shadow, the trailing tendrils of the vine, the water-pitcher below the Egerian fount, homely yet poetic, as though a reminiscence of some old Etruscan pattern—it is Italy to the core.

Nor does the human "action" vulgarise the landscape.

The yearling babe lies fast asleep in the cosy wicker-basket on whose handle are strung the beads and the Crucifix. The little flower-girl, demure and large-eyed, with her heavy necklace, and earrings of real gold, and

old-fashioned in her mother's cloak and bodice of many colours, waits under the ruined portico. How pretty is the grave timidity of the little matron as she lets the flowers drop from her lap in her embarrassed forgetfulness! How the young, fresh, exquisite life—fresh as the leaves in her lap or the wild geranium which springs greenly from a rent in the marble—contrasts with the antique decay of Etrurian civilisation! Look at that group beside the fountain. The orange head-dress of the young mother gives a still riper glow to the warm southern complexion and the lavish oriental grace; a black-eyed child, its glossy raven hair in tangled curls, leans against the knee over which is spread the wonderful blue and crimson mat of the matrons of Perugia; on the rocky ledge overhead a flock of wild goats pass one by one—a venerable patriarch in the van, who ever and anon drops his white beard over the precipice, and listens complacently to the whispered hymn from the valley where the husbandman, up to the ears in yellow corn, prunes his vines.

That was Italy as I knew it years ago—Italy as I found it on my return.

But there was a change; the old sense of peaceful and enduring quiet was disturbed. All along the roads as I passed through the northern provinces, men, armed with rude old-fashioned weapons, hurried from inland valleys and sequestered villages to join the army that was emancipating Italy, and hurling the barbarian from her rich plains back upon his barren hills.

The War of Independence had begun.

I am a Conservative: the Conservatives in 1848 supported the policy of Austria. I think they committed a grave mistake.

“ I love no peace which is not fellowship,
And which includes not mercy.”

It is impossible that that unwieldy empire can continue to

hold together: such a *ménage* of conflicting interests must break up within the next ten years.¹ When that revolution arrives, the policy of order in Europe will receive a shock such as it has not yet felt. Had they known their true interests, the Conservative statesmen of '48, instead of attempting blindly to restore the old monarchical landmarks, would have striven to place the new governments upon a stable and permanent footing. An overgrown and artificial empire like the Austrian cannot be a Conservative institution; on the contrary, it is a perpetual menace to Conservatism. For what can be more damaging to the policy of order than the existence of a sovereignty which, from the internal conflict of interests that will not assimilate, is perpetually in danger of being destroyed? When any rational opportunity to abolish the incubus and raise up in its place living peoples and definite nationalities presents itself, such an opportunity should be eagerly taken advantage of. The Revolutions of 1848 furnished the opportunity. Had England and its statesmen been equal to the occasion, we should now have had, instead of an empire more menacing to the cause of civilisation than to the cause of revolution, a number of individual states resting upon historic distinction and national temperament,—the best guarantees that can be exacted for the preservation of order and freedom.

But no Englishman then in Italy, whatever his politics might be at home, could resist the contagion of the popular enthusiasm. Though he might consider the end aimed at impracticable and visionary, still to him at least it was a Holy War.

That martyr-war is finished. It has failed; and we scoff at the men who died that they might be free. But

¹ These observations apply, of course, to the Austria of 1854, when Lombardy and Venetia were still Austrian provinces.

it matters not: *they* know that there is a heaven for those who have nobly and truly failed, and it sufficeth them.

The war as a whole was not conducted with ability, or genius, or war-craft; it was confused, illogical, wanting in unity, as all popular movements must be; but it was a splendid *spectacle*.

For it was perhaps in all modern history the noblest proof that has been given to the world of the moral terror which the wrath of an aroused populace can produce. There is something august in the generous madness, the divine frenzy, the passionate unselfishness, of a *possessed* people. The coarse organisation of the Croat was at length touched by this silent, unarmed ire. It awed him: it paralysed him. White-handed women repulsed the trained infantry of Austria: children rushed upon the bayonets, and snatched their muskets from the hands of soldiers. The barbarian stood unnerved before the avenging spirit he had roused.

To the Englishman there was something of artifice, theatrical, melodramatic, in the character of the war: to the Italian it was quite natural. Danger and death tested its genuineness; but it changed not to the end. The arm of a noble Venetian was being amputated,—“I would give the other for Italy;” “Cannon-balls,” said another, “do not touch those who carry on their foreheads the name of the Deliverer,” and he passed unharmed through the iron hail; another, a wounded Milanese, wrote along the walls with his own blood, “Courage, my brothers,” ere he expired; still, with his last breath the patriot shouted, “Viva la Costituzione!” “Viva l’Italia!” The women gave their jewels to the public treasury; and, says the quaint and admiring chronicler, “adorned themselves with the more noble ornament of Italian independence.” Theat-

rical, certainly, as it seems to us; but generous, noble, most unselfish. We must not grudge our sympathy, even though Englishmen, as a rule, die grimly.

This dramatic grandiloquence communicated itself to the acts of the governments. They were the heirs of an august antiquity; and they wrote, as though they fought, in the presence of the republic. General bulletins and orders of the day are filled with historic and poetic reminiscences. A municipal proclamation reads like a page of Plutarch. Plain public documents are illuminated with sarcasm, mockery, eloquence. "The country," exclaims Cæsare Correnti, from Milan, "responds festively to the uproar of bombs and cannons: the enemy sees that we can strongly combat, and cheerfully die." "Your cannons," writes Mazzini to the French general, "are thundering this day against our walls—your bombs are raining down upon the Holy City. France has had the glory this night of killing a young girl of Trastavere, who was sleeping beside her sister." Somewhat artificial the last, no doubt; still not unbecoming the successor of Rienzi.

But even while I lingered among the autumn woods of Cadore, this sudden outburst of passionate life had been as suddenly stifled. Radetsky and his troopers recovered from their panic, and fell like a hail-cloud upon the Lombard plains. The drama was played out—the lights extinguished—the rhapsodists silenced or in the police-office; while the audience had gone home, and by their cheerful firesides were already beginning to doubt whether the brilliant *Fata Morgana* on which they had gazed was a fact or a dream.

Still Venice, the last rampart of Italian independence, held out; seated among her barren Lagoons, she defied the enemy; and her grey-headed general had said, "While Venice is free, Italy is not lost." I did not believe that such recovery was now possible; the blow, I felt, could

not be retrieved for years to come; but I longed to see the liberated city, "Venice, so splendid in arts, so illustrious in history," animated by her antique valour, re-living her ancient life. So passing easily through the Austrian lines, I hired a fishing-smack at the little village on the sea-shore below Fiume, and after a tedious day's labour amid the intricate passes and the armed forts of the northern Lagoon, I once more entered Venice.

XVIII.

A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying glory smiles
O'er the far time, when many a subject land
Came to the winged lion's marble piles,
Where Venice sat in state, throned on her hundred isles.

TO my surprise and gratification I found Sedley domesticated at our old hotel on the Grand Canal.

"I am glad you are come," he said; "the last six months have been the jolliest I ever spent. They are famous fellows, our officers; youngsters from the best Lombard and Tuscan families, who fight like devils. Good whist-players, too, many of them: we have had some capital rubbers in our picket-house outside Malaghera, under the very noses of the Austrians. I command a company in virtue of a commission granted me by that thorough old trump, General Pepe. I must introduce you to him and to Manin."

Through Sedley I speedily became acquainted with those who directed the operations of the war. Pepe I considered an experienced and sagacious commander: "type of a citizen-soldier," Manin called him—and the appellation described him well, for I never knew any one

in whom the shrewdness of the citizen and the valour of the trooper were more effectively blended. Manin himself was a man of glittering parts, which he used to dazzle the multitude, while a keen and penetrating intellect lay in wait beneath. He was said to be attached to the Radical party, but I do not think he was Liberal at heart. If he was, he belonged to that almost invisible minority of the party whose counsels were at once moderate and sagacious. The representative of a great ducal house, he shared the sentiments of the patricians. It was he who took from the arsenal the old banner of St Mark, and raised it in the name of the Republic. The action was significant of his true political position. He did not care one farthing for the abstract principle of a democracy, but he longed to restore the historic *prestige* of the oligarchy to which he belonged. Still, he was the child and darling of the multitude, who followed him like dogs through the streets, and hung with open ears on his ready and intrepid eloquence. Manin was thus that curious but not altogether unintelligible product, an aristocratic tribune of the people.

Both Pepe and Manin were penetrated by a sense of the greatness of the undertaking which had been thrust upon them. Throughout the rest of Austrian Italy it was insurrection; in Venice it was war. For months all the operations of a regular campaign, conducted by the most experienced generals of the empire, were directed against the Lagoons; met with military sagacity, defeated with military skill. It was a prolonged contest on equal terms between two armed States; not the desultory and capricious outbursts of slaves against their tyrants. It was calm, sagacious, statesmanlike.

To Manin the charms of the situation consisted in the assertion of Venetian independence. The thirteen hundred years of freedom were *not* finished, for he himself had

restored the Republic which his grandsires defended and adorned. Had his rule lasted another year he would have governed, not as member of a triumvirate, but as Doge of the Venetian Senate. He would have sailed past Lido in *Bucentaur*, and wed the Adriatic. *That*, I truly believe, was the goal of his historic ambition.

Pepe, on the other hand, beheld in Venice the key of Italy. "While Venice is free, Italy is not lost." The importance of "the glorious and classical Lagoon" in any war of Italian independence had been long previously foreseen by him. It was one of those commanding positions the possession of which frequently determines at one blow the fate of a campaign and of an empire. With Venice in the hands of the enemy, the backbone of the Austrian line of defence in Lombardy was broken—the Austrian army in Italy cut off from its Carinthian and Illyrian depots. When Venice revolted, the army of Radetsky, instead of being merely the vanguard of the whole imperial organisation, became a detached and isolated force in an enemy's country.

And Venice, from the peculiarities of its position, was almost impregnable. It could not be assailed from the land, so long as the forts of the Lagoon remained in the possession of its defenders; nor from the sea, for its narrow and intricate channels, bristling with innumerable, wasp-like batteries, would have rendered *that* a most hazardous operation even for a great maritime Power to attempt, which Austria was not. Its very weaknesses are, in fact, its safeguards, and have been since the time of Attila. It is not on the land, so that it cannot be approached by an army: it is not on the sea, and is consequently secure from naval attack. Nothing can overcome these impracticable mud-banks, except the starvation of their defenders.

But effectively to starve the Venetians was a difficult process. The shallow and dangerous lee-shore of the Lido

prevented the Austrians from maintaining a vigilant surveillance. The whole of the islands on the Lagoon from Chioggia to Massarbo, with their vegetable, corn, and fruit supplies, were available to the besieged. During my stay at this time we passed as freely from one end of the Lagoon to the other—a distance, I suppose, of thirty miles—as we had done on my previous visit. Thus the Lagoon possesses all the internal resources of an independent state; and had it in 1848-49 contained a military garrison alone, for which its supplies would have been ample, Venice might have held out to this day.

Sedley, who wished, as he said, to see a regular “scrimmage,” had volunteered to accompany his friend, Colonel Ulloa to Malaghera, the fort on the mainland opposite the city, and connected with it by the arches of the aqueduct—in fact, the key of Venice. He was stationed here when I arrived, and he quickly persuaded me to accompany him, and take an active part in the “scrimmage,” which he enjoyed with his thorough English pluck. The Austrians were beginning to understand the vital importance of this position, which Pepe, on assuming the command, had at once detected. Their trenches were nearing our walls, and night after night our parties sallied out to destroy their approaches and drive them back upon their lines. Between the city and the fort we spent a time of pleasant excitement. Ulloa was delighted to have Englishmen about him, on whom he could depend, and we found him one of the gentlest and bravest of men. He was, moreover, a first-rate officer, as the Austrians learned to their cost, when in less than twelve hours he silenced the fire of the batteries which it had cost them many arduous months to construct.

XIX.

Hyperion arose ;

* * * * *

Then with a slow incline of his broad breast,
 Like to a diver in the pearly seas,
 Forward he stoop'd over the airy shore,
 And plunged all noiseless into the deep night.

IT was a cold starlight night towards the close of January, and we were gathered round our picket-fire in Malagherra, trying to warm our benumbed toes and fingers as we best might. The Austrians had constructed during the previous night an enclosed trench, which it was considered most important to destroy, as it directly commanded the fort. Midnight was selected for the purpose, and Sedley and I were to take part in the sortie. The men and officers with us were picked men,—men who had shown during the siege that they were made of the right stuff.

The bells of Venice far off over the sea were ringing through the frosty air the first hour of day as we crept one by one out of the fort. No word was spoken, and we glided like ghosts through the reeds and brushwood that extended from our own gate to within a hundred yards of the enemy's line, and afforded us a convenient and secure cover. When on the skirt of the wood nearest their line, a momentary halt was called. Before us stretched the redoubt we had undertaken to capture or destroy,—a low earthwork notched with embrasures for cannon, which, however, had not yet been brought up. It was so close to us that we heard the soldiers within it conversing together, and the refrain of a rude German hymn that one of them sang. The ruddy light from the watch-fire

played upon the motionless form of a sentry, in his white greatcoat like a snow statue, so brightly that we could trace the outline of his features when he turned his face towards us.

It was impossible that we could advance any nearer without being discovered; so we were ordered to quit our cover simultaneously, and advance as quickly as we could. The moment the first man appeared the musket of the sentry we had observed was discharged, and one of our party dropt. Sedley and I shouted out our cheerful English "Hurrah!"—infinitely more cheery than the sharp and snake-like hiss of the Italian,—and the whole of us rushed pell-mell, every man for himself, upon the redoubt. The garrison had been in some degree surprised, but we were still half-a-dozen yards off when a line of fire seemed to run along its face, the sharp crack of a score of rifles answered our defiant challenge, and the balls sang over our heads with their deadly whistle. Another of our men fell; but in the comparative darkness the practice was necessarily ill sustained and directed, and the volley failed to arrest our progress. Almost ere we knew where we were we found ourselves in a hand-to-hand struggle with the Magyar bayonets, and in another minute the bastion was our own. The whole affair was so confused and sudden that I do not believe any one of the combatants could have described its details. So I shall not try.

The moment we had established ourselves, our sappers set to work to destroy the fortifications. This was necessarily a work of some time, and before it was finished the party we had driven out returned, backed by a powerful reinforcement. A tough fight took place; though greatly inferior in numbers we gained a certain advantage from our position, and we held our grip firmly: for it was of course vitally important that our miners should have time to finish their operations. One by one the men fell around

us, and our ranks had been desperately thinned before the officer in command gave the order to retreat. We did so in comparative order, carrying our wounded along with us, and quickly reached the shelter of the fort. During the night the fort-guns—they had been levelled on the position the previous day—kept up a constant fusilade, and prevented the Austrians from reoccupying or restoring the works out of which we had driven them. Our mimic battle made quite a noise in Venice at the time; Sedley and I were elected members of some Order of Valour, and General Pepe wrote us a congratulatory and classical epistle,—which I still retain.¹

¹ This is, of course, a fancy-picture; but judging from an animated narrative lying beside me of the fighting in the Shipka Pass last year, it would seem to bear a tolerably close resemblance to the real thing;—

“About 2.30 A.M. I awoke. There was a stir in the trenches; dark figures, with a white band on their arms, were moving out over a breach, purposely made, in the parapet to the west. A group of officers of the reserve were standing by, giving a whispered ‘Allah be with you!’ to the men as they passed out into the darkness, which was only made more apparent by the occasional flash of the mortars. Four hundred yards along the slope of the hill bring the column to the foot of the rock, which looms dark and frowning, but as yet silent, above them. Here they quietly divided into three parties—the right going along the face of the rock to the east, with the intention of mounting on that side, where it is more broken and less steep; the centre party commencing to scale straight up the face; and the left and smaller party going up the wooded ridge to the west. The right party was the first perceived by the enemy. First a single shot, then a patter of musketry, fast growing into a roar, came down the wind. Almost simultaneously the centre column, which was silently mounting the almost perpendicular face of the rock, was discovered, and a heavy fire poured down on them from the ledges of rock above. The attempt at concealment was now useless, so with a wild ‘Allah, hallah, hallah, hoo-oo!’ which found a hoarse echo from the throats of the men in our trenches below, the storming-party sprang up the rock, helping each other, pulling, scrambling up over dead and wounded, but not firing till the first stone parapet had been gained. The ridge of rock and the parapet of the fort to the left were one sheet of flame. The Turkish buglers, perched in nooks and crannies of the rock, rang out the ‘Advance.’ The startled Russian gunners poured a storm of round-shot and canister at random into the darkness, and the wild ‘Allah, hallah!’ as repeated charges were

Next morning I visited the hospital where the wounded men had been carried on our return. I was much struck by the constancy which the poor fellows manifested. Many of them were maimed and crippled for life; but I heard no complaint: they bore their pain joyfully, gladly, like martyrs. And who dare say that the cause for which they bled was a whit less sacred than any for which martyrs have died, and saints been blessed? But you, poor fellows, have not been calendared; you died for freedom only: and those who do not know that in its liberal air alone the Christian virtues bloom, and are not yet satisfied that it can ever be altogether decent to tolerate those who disagree with the established order of things, though that order be the vilest and most soul-enslaving tyranny, eye you with a certain fastidious suspicion, and even doubt the genuineness of the red blood you shed.

made was wafted on the wings of the north wind far down to the plain below. Gradually, but very slowly, fighting every foot of the way, the Russians retired along the top of the crest of the rock, here very narrow, making a stand behind the piled-up stones and the natural traverse of rock which here and there crossed the ridge. At one place they got a slight respite, as a cry arose in the darkness that the men in front were our troops on the right. The only way to find out was to charge, so on they went; but they were Russians. This was their last stand here, and, with a loud 'Allah!' the Turks drove them from it, bayoneting, shooting, and hurling those who failed to make their exit by other means over the face of the crest, which terminated in a precipice some 80 feet high, on to the rocks below."

It is interesting to know that this graphic and vivid description (one of many that might be quoted) was written by the gallant Scotsman who led the Turks in their desperate assaults upon Fort St Nicholas,—Alister Campbell, son of my dear and delightful friend, "Auchindarroch."

"He had himself laid hand on sword,
He who this rhyme did write;
Till evening mowed he with the sword
And sang the song at night."

Is there no unappropriated "Victoria Cross"—that symbol and seal of romantic heroism—for such a deed of splendid if fruitless daring?

Around one bed two or three soldiers were gathered. Its occupant was dead. He had died, they told me, almost immediately on being brought into the house, and before he could be undressed. A ball had entered his side, and his death, the surgeon said, had been caused by internal bleeding. He was a man I had frequently noticed; for he was conspicuous even in Malaghera for his rash and reckless daring. None of his companions in the ranks knew anything of his history: but that he was tired of life and desirous to die, was, they said, evident from the day he joined. He had succeeded in his design at last, certainly: but his good (or ill) fortune had been till then wonderful: he had made a hundred escapes which seemed to their minds little less than miraculous.

The eyes were closed, and the brow was pale and stern; and there was even yet an expression of effort upon the half-closed lips, as if his last breath had been drawn with pain. All the lower part of the face was covered with a bushy growth of beard and mustachios, the dark colour of which contrasted with the languid pallor of the skin.

I looked on him with a certain feeling of curiosity; and as I looked, the conviction that I had seen the face at some previous period flashed across me. Though I had met him occasionally during the siege, I had never felt this conviction before. Was it that death had brought out some latent child grace, some old boyish feature, which the experiences of his later manhood had effaced? But though I puzzled myself about it, and tried hard to arrest the flitting impression, I could not succeed in identifying the stark body lying before me with any one I had known in life.

A soldier came up to me as I stood by the bedside. "Signior," he said, giving me a small volume stained with blood, "this was found in his breast. Perhaps the Capitane might like to look at it."

I thanked him and took it with me. When I had completed my round and reached my quarters, I remembered the volume, and looked into it. It was a small pocket copy of the *Divina Commedia*. It opened at the story of Rimini; the two small pages which preserve that dreary tenderness and that immortal pain were almost worn away. Many of the leaves, too, were clotted and pasted together with blood—the heart-blood of one who had died in battle; and it was with difficulty I succeeded in opening them. On the title-page, in a small and exquisite hand, was written the single word *Catarina*. I knew the writing well; I had seen it often. The soiled sheet of a letter in the same character, folding a fragment of yellow hair, dropt out from between the pages of the *Inferno*. It was only a brief note; but could they have been affected by the sense they carried, the faded characters would have stood out in letters of fire. They were burning with tenderness, alive with passion.

At length I knew that it was Agostino. The letter clasped the chain which I could not connect before. The dead soldier was my ancient friend, the monk of Lido,—the priest who had been an actor in that tragedy in Venice of old.

And what had been his life during the long remorseless years that had passed since we met, and which were now at length closed? Had he consumed his heart on those bitter pages of the *Inferno*? or had Beatrice looked upon him from the bosom of the Unspeakable Love? Was the fair child's smile ever before his eyes, or between his heart and the phantom face had a grim spectre risen up, and endowed it for ever with wrathful energy to distress and madden? Was there MURDER between him and the Past? I never knew. He died, and gave no sign.

I hurried back to the hospital that I might again look

upon his face, and make sure that my suspicion was correct. When I arrived the bed was vacant. I asked one of the medical attendants what had been done with the corpse.

“It was removed an hour ago,” he answered. “Six of our men died during the night, and they have put them in one grave on Lido.”

L'ENVOY.

Thy pole-star be yon shrine ;
Where high Superga from the campaign springs
A vanquished exile sleeps, 'mong victor kings,
Most honoured of his line.

WE have left Venice, and as the bells of the churches on her scattered islands answer each other through the night, journey on toward the west. For here, where Verona in the lap of the Alps guards the rich plains of Lombardy, ends our Italian pilgrimage. There is a great storm up yonder in the Tyrol—serried columns of foam-like mist hurry along the sides of the Helvetian mountains—a mysterious cloud hangs low down upon the valley, and out of it come smothered and muffled sounds as of voices among the hills. To the old Italian these mountain recesses, with their mysterious clouds and tempests, formed the barrier between his sumptuous refinement and the uncouth and barbarous nations who lay beyond the pale of his civilisation. This is now changed.

The Italian has become the slave of the barbarian, the Goth has inherited his liberty and his culture. Beneath a wintry and inclement sky, and upon a barren and inhospitable soil, have arisen a humaner culture, a more powerful and generous liberty. Our age is somewhat intolerant of the past, and is often not unwisely content that the dead should bury its dead. But surely it will one day attempt to repay the debt it owes to Italy and the Italians ?

NANCY'S TRYST

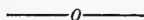
A REMINISCENCE OF DEESIDE

Long have I roamed through lands which are not mine,—
Adored the Alp, and loved the Apennine,
Revered Parnassus, and beheld the steep
Jove's Ida and Olympus crown the deep;
But 'twas not all long ages' lore, nor all
Their nature held me in their thrilling thrall;
The infant rapture still survived the boy,
And Lochnagar with Ida looked o'er Troy.

—BYRON.

NANCY'S TRYTE:

A REMINISCENCE OF DEESIDE.



WE have had death on the premises—old Donald, the gamekeeper, gardener, coachman, and poacher-in-ordinary to my host the Laird, has shaken the dust out of his last pair of shoes, and left a world of which he never thought much. Donald did not belong to what is called the Gushing School. He was a confirmed grumbler—not indeed venturing to impeach the arrangements of Providence (which in his view had been fixed from a remote period), but by no means desiring to conceal his impression that, generally speaking, his fellow-creatures were a set of arrant bunglers and knaves. The Laird had fished him one autumn morning out of a wet ditch, where he was standing up to his knees in frozen water, watching a flock of wild geese that were feeding in a neighbouring field. Instead of having him up for poaching, the Laird, on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, made him his keeper. He proved a capital servant; his only fault being that his knowledge of march fences was always of the vaguest; and that the Laird, when out shooting under his keeper's guidance, frequently found himself

in the choicest preserves of his neighbours. But there was a dash of the gypsy in Donald's Celtic blood. He was shy, reserved, *dour*. He did not understand what "gratitude" meant; he actually bore a grudge against the Laird for getting him out of the ditch, into which, both literally and metaphorically, he had sunk. For Donald had seen better days. It was said that in his time he had had wife and child. What accident, or train of accidents, had made him a castaway, I did not know. But Donald underwent his reverses like a Stoic, or rather like the Fatalist, which he was. In theological matters, Donald belonged to the strictest sect of the disciples of Calvin. It was preordained that he was to become what he had become. So that he bore, or could have borne, the great trials of life, which wear the heart-strings of less robust natures, without murmur or complaint. What was he, that he should challenge the immutable decrees of the Almighty? But accepted in this spirit, his trials did not tend to soften his character. He took them sternly and sourly, and though he never accused his Maker, he made himself very unpleasant to his fellow-creatures. He dug the garden, he groomed the horses, he pruned the pear-trees, in the spirit of a martyr, and under protest. You might have fancied from the expression of his mouth that he was always consuming crab-apples. Occasionally, however, his habitual sullenness seemed to thaw. The baby managed him as she thought fit; he could not resist the unclouded eyes and the frank imperiousness of her childhood. With his gun on his shoulder, too, the spirit of the poacher revived. To the bottom of his heart he was a sportsman; and when he was tramping across the muir, he sometimes forgot that the world was, upon the whole, a failure and a blunder,—especially if birds were abundant, and the dogs worked well. The dogs were his speciality: he managed them with admirable tact; he was their guide,

philosopher, and friend, and they were his confidants. To them alone, while engaged in their feeding or cleaning, he frankly confided his opinion upon the way in which his fellow-men contrived to mismanage the universe. He grumbled and growled like one of themselves. He would tell Dash that he had as little sense as the Doctor or the Parson, and Juno that she was vainer than a woman. In early times there had been a vein of humour in Donald—and a vein of humour is often the salvation of a man; but this vein, in Donald's case, had long since petrified into a mere fossil.

Donald had been ailing for long. His "rheumatics,"—the fruit of forays after wild-duck in the winter moonlight,—were very hard upon him. His imagination, indeed, had given his tormenter bodily shape and presence. He spoke of it as of a visible enemy; he had a special commination service which he fired off against it at brief intervals—minute-guns, in the shape of very particular ecclesiastical curses, they might be reckoned. A chronic warfare had for long been maintained between the Commodore—the Laird's younger brother—and Donald on the subject of "thorough draughts." He constantly averred, with a kirkyard wheeze, that the Captain's system of ventilation—the Captain was an ardent sanitary reformer, and had a passion for open windows—would be the death of him. It was with grim satisfaction, consequently, that he felt his end approaching. His blood was on the Captain's head, and he had verified, besides, the accuracy of his views—two special sources of comfort. Day by day Donald grew more crusty, and more of a cripple. At length he was confined to his bed. For many months his assistant, Angus Riach, led a dog's life. Donald insisted on maintaining a general superintendence from his sick-bed; and a dying Nero or Caligula could not have been more imperious and implacable. Then he grew thin and

worn—a mere skinful of bones. And one night, about midnight, while the Commodore (who is a bad sleeper) was sitting by his bed, he went out quite suddenly. It had been obvious, indeed, for some days, that he could not last much longer; but the closing scene, somehow, took us by surprise. They had been discussing the breeding of young setters,—Donald defending his own plan of up-bringing, and condemning that practised in a neighbouring kennel, with his habitual acuteness and keenness,—when, without any warning, his sight failed him, his speech began to wander, and he lost the thread of his discourse. But he died, so to speak, in the field. To the last, the old sportsman was among his dogs. “Juno, my lass, the scent disna haud to-night,” were his last articulate words.

About a week after Donald had been laid in the churchyard, we were sitting with the Commodore in the sanctum, where he keeps his birds, bulky rolls of cavendish such as they smoke in the navy, his scanty wardrobe, his big Bible, an odd volume of Sir Walter’s novels, *The Lady of the Lake*, his hammock, a chest containing garden-twine, tinder, nails, needles and thread, a bowie-knife, bees'-wax, sweet-oil, and other odds and ends. The day was wet and dirty, and we had been smoking industriously for hours,—upon the whole silent, and devoting our minds chiefly to the contemplation of the weather. “Would you like to hear an old story?” the Commodore asked us at last. “It happened lang syne; but Donald’s death somehow has brought it back to my mind.”

We expressed our willingness to listen, and the Commodore commenced,—I retain his own North-country tongue where it seems to add force to the story,¹ but it is not necessary to represent it with entire fidelity.

¹ And what force it could add to a story all who remember Mrs Cunningham of Morton’s fine, strong, high-bred Doric vernacular, will be ready to testify.

“Donald and I were early cronies; he was constantly about our farm-town afore I went on board the Wasp. He used to take me along with him when he gaed to the hills, and what I am about to relate happened on one of our sportin’ trips.

“There’s a great change in the country,” continued the Commodore, “since I mind it first. In those days we could shoot from the sea-shore to the Grampians, up the whole valley of the Dee, without seeing a keeper. I was only a bairn at the time, for the century was barely begun; but Donald was a strapping lad, one of the best shots, and one of the neatest legs in the country-side. His temper, however, was not to be lippened to; he could be as glum and dour as a nor’-easter when he liked. Well, we started from the Lowlands one fine morning in September, meaning to be away for a week, Donald carrying an auld musket, that had been ‘oot’ in the ’45, across his shoulder, and whiles gien me a lift when my feet gat sair and the ground was stiffer than ordinar. We soon left the low country behind us: it was a different place from what it is now; there were only casual patches of corn and neeps, such as you see among the outlying crofts on the hillside before you get fairly among the heather; not a field was drained, and the snipe and wild-deuk were rising like laverocks among our legs. We soon got upon the muir, however, and a fine day’s sport we had: I say ‘we,’ though it was Donald who filled the bag, and I only got a sittin’ shot at a white hare whiles. The first day we were content with grouse and black-cock, and we had a heavy bag by the evening, when we came to a private still in a deep glen ahint Pitfoddels,—weel kent to Donald. We stayed with the smugglers for the night, Donald happing me up in his plaid among the heather, and leaving me to look at the stars, while he himself and his smuggling friends tested the strength of the brew. It was the first

time I slept in the open air, and it seemed like the beginning of a new life to me. Though September, the air was heavy and sultry, and the thunder growled and muttered a' night among the corries of Cloch-na-bane. Then ever and again a white flash of lightning dimly disclosed the hail scene up to the very summits of the mountains; and just as I was fa'in' asleep, a herd of red deer, terrified by the flashes, swept past me—like a troop of startled ghosts. Next morning we bathed in the burn which fed the still, and the bit willow-wand which served me for a walking-stick got us a breakfast of splendid red trout in half an hour. I dinna believe the trout thereabouts had ever seen a fly before,—at least they rose to a rough cast of Donald's busking as freely as if they had been busked by Phin or Mrs Hogg. All day we travelled up the beautiful valley; sometimes low down in its heart, beside the clear waters of the rapid Dee,—sometimes high up among the crags (for Donald had promised to shoot an eagle for the auld Laird), and getting glimpses, on one hand, of the great hills at the head of the pass—on the other, of the blue sea, and the yellow sand, and the green woods from which we had started. Never a human soul did we meet, savin' a shepherd or a lad poaching like ourselves; but before the sun gaed down Donald had shot a royal stag and a golden eagle; and so—the next day being the Sabbath—we fixed to bide wi' a gudebrither of Donald's, who was shepherd to the then Laird of Feugh, and had a sheiling aboon Cairnbannow. There never was a lovelier Sabbath-day: we sat oot afore the door, the men smoking their pipes and talking over the news till it was time for kirk; and then we started across the hill to Glen Tanner, for it was the Sacramental Sabbath, and auld Doctor MacAlister was to fence the tables, and a young lad from the King's College (the son o' a neighbouring laird) was to preach his first discourse. So there was a great thrang in the kirkyard:

from every sheiling, on hillside or glen, the folk cam' troopin' in,—stalwart lads, bonny lasses, and grey-headed patriarchs, wha minded the '45, and had been hunted by the red-coats after Culloden. It was the last Communion that some of them gaed to at Glen Tanner; for a hard winter followed, and there was a sair thinnin' among the auld carles. However that might be, little was thocht of it then; for it was a day to mak' the auld feel young, and there was a deal of daffing among the hill lads in their brown kilts, and the lasses in their tartan snoods, afore we gaed into the kirk. Oot o' a' sight the comeliest lass there was Nancy Roy. She was the lily of their valley, and as good as she was bonny. I have seen sweet faces and lithe figures since then; but I think yet that Nancy was the very prettiest girl I ever saw in my life. They were a' proud of her, up hill and down dale: and it used to be said that the sang which begins—

' Oh, Nancy's hair is yellow as gowd,
And her een, like the lift, are blue'—

was made for Nancy Roy. She was her very image, at least; yellow hair, blue eyes, a saft skin, a sunny laugh, the nicest, sweetest, deftest little woman, with the maist astonishin' ankles, which showed to perfection under her short coat o' shepherd tartan. But before I go on I must tell you something further about Nancy.

“She was the daughter of Duncan Roy, the Duke's foreman at Craigdarroch. His cottage stood on the river-bank, just about a mile below the cradle. But you'll no mind the cradle; the brig at Coil-a-creich was biggit afore your time. Weel, the cradle was a contrivance for crossing the river; a rope was thrown across at a deep narrow passage—the Thief's Pot, they ca'd it, anent the Gal-lows Hill—and fastened to the high banks on baith sides.

On this rope a wicker-basket was slung, and the man who wanted to cross placed himself in this basket, and pulled himself along the rope, hand over hand. It needed a strong arm and a steady head; for when you were half-way across, the basket swung about like the branch of a poplar, and you were fifty feet above the water, which ran there like a mill-lead. Howsomever, the country folk had been content with the invention (which was worked precisely like one of Manby's rockets) from the beginning of time, and there was no other way of crossing, unless you chose to walk a good sax miles to the ferry above Craig-Yowzie.

"Now Nancy had lived ever since she was a bairn amang the hills, and a nicer Hieland lass you'll no see on a summer day. But she had been in service for a half-year wi' an aunt o' her ain,—her mither's half-sister—wha belonged to Burnness. Her husband had been a merchant-captain, and when he was drowned aff the Skerries on board the Jolly Brithers of Largo (which he partly owned), she just stayed on in the little house where he had left her. It stood close to the sea, so that, when the day was warm, Nancy, who was as fond as a fish o' the saut water, could be up to the waist in a jiffy. Weel, she was bathing one day with her cousin, Lisbeth Gordon, when on a sudden she was drawn into a strong current or swirl, and carried aff her feet. Baith girls skirled like scarts; but Lisbeth could not come near her cousin, and so she behoved to wade to the shore as fast as her fear and the tide and her weet petticoat wud let her. It looked very black for Nancy, for she could not swim, or at least, if she could, the tide was ower strang for her bit legs. However, as it happened, Evan Caird,—he was a ship-carpenter then, a nephew of his dee'd in the kirk-town in the spring,—was passing to his work at the time—perhaps he had been taking a keek at the lasses, laughing and splashing together like twa young

seals—and just as she had risen aboon the water for the last time, he got her under his oxtar, and the next minute was swimming briskly to the shore. She was quite white and gash when he laid her on the sand, rubbing her hands and trying to bring her back to her senses; but he thought her, in spite of her blue lips, and the water dreepin' from her yallow hair, the very sweetest angel he had ever seen—in the Bible or oot of it. He did not get lang to look at her though; for Lisbeth had run to the house, and brought the neighbours. The auld woman turned him aff just as Nancy had opened her eyes, and thanked him with a blessed smile,—turned him aff wi' a flea in his lug, as they say, for I reckon that they considered it maist improper for a lad to bring a young lass to the shore, wi' naething on but her petticoat.

“But it would not do; for, though Nancy blushed a bit when she neist met Evan Caird, she kent weel that he had saved her from the fishes; and her heart went out in pure maiden thankfulness to bless and welcome him. He was just the lad to win a girl's fancy—frank, free, honest, of the blue-eyed, light-haired, light-hearted Scandinavian kind. So it cam' aboot, or ever Nancy returned to Craigdarroch, she had plighted her troth to Evan; and the half of the broken sixpence which she wore neist her heart was the gift of her first lover.

“Duncan Roy, who had lost his wife at little Hetty's birth, was sweir to part with his daughter—his ewe-lamb, he would call her, as he stroked her lang curls. However, like a wise man, he saw that what wud be, maun be; and the upshot was that they were to be married in the hinder end of the year—the same year it was that I first saw Nancy at Glen Tanner. Shortly before this time, however, Evan had got a place in the excise, and was now a revenue officer—for, being a smart, serviceable lad, he had been marked out by the inspector at Burnness, and was

readily appointed, when a vacancy occurred, to a good and weel-paid post.

“ Now, at that time—not very many years after Robbie Burns had been in the excise himself, and ye ken how *he* liked it—the gauger stank in the nostrils of the country-folk. Wherever you fand a mossy burn, you might tak’ your Bible oath a still was not far off. Every man in the Hielands, gentle and simple, was a smuggler by nature or education. In the low country the gaugers had the upper hand. The smugglers had certain well-kent^d roads, by which they conveyed their brew from the hills to the sea-coast. Thirty or forty Hieland ponies, each wi’ twa kegs slung across its back, attended by a score of hill-men, might aften be met on the roads at orra hours, and in out-lying glens; and mony a fecht took place when the excisemen happened to meet them. But few gaugers ever ventured ‘aboon the pass.’ It used to be said that nane, at least, ‘cam’ doon.’ However that might be, it was certain that the trade of brewing went on briskly, and that few cared to meddle wi’ them that brewed. You may believe, consequently, that there was some stir in Glen Tanner kirkyard that September Sabbath, when it was seen that Evan Caird, the gauger, had come wi’ Nancy. There was a deal of angry whispering and muttering among the lads. The glede fluttered the doos; it was not fair, they thocht, to bring the hawk into the howlet’s nest. However, nothing unchancy came of it at the time. Neither Nancy nor Evan noticed what was said. Love is a tyrannical divinity, an absolute monarch; whiles, doubtless, it makes a man scent danger like a whutret, but aftener it steeks his een. They were a handsome couple; and Nancy looked so fond and proud of her joe that it was little wonder the redshanks glowered at the south-country lad who had gathered their sweetest flower. ‘Deed she was a winsome lass,” quoth the Commodore, kindling at

the recollection; “her breath and her cheeks were just made of roses, you would have thought. And she was active and mettlesome as a kid—mettlesome wi’ youth and health, and the pure glow of a maiden and honest love.

“But to return to Donald and myself. Donald had forgathered wi’ Duncan Roy at kirk (he was an auld freen’ o’ Donald’s), and had promised to come across in the gloaming to Craigdarroch. The clachan was five mile down the glen,—so that by lodging for the night wi’ Duncan, we would be weel forrit on our return road. Weel, we went round to Donald’s gudebrither’s for the gun and the eagle and the horns and the ither traps; and syne after dinner we walked down in the cool of the afternoon to Duncan’s, where we fand them at supper. Donald had been in ane of his sulky humours ever since he saw Nancy and the gauger together; not a word had he spoken on the road, except answering me wi’ a snap, when I spoke to him. However, there was a deal of lauchin’ and daffin’ at Duncan’s (for Evan was a blithe, good-humoured chiel, and Duncan liked his joke), till Duncan got down the big Bible for the Sabbath evening reading; and then we gaed to bed,—for they keepit early hours in the country lang syne—early to bed and early to rise.

“Now, you maun understand that I was only a bairn at the time—a sturdy loon, doubtless, or I could barely have tramped alongside of Donald. Donald was sent to sleep in the stable-loft among the straw,—for there was only a but and ben, as it’s called,—and it was designed that I should sleep wi’ Donald; but Nancy said that it was unkind to turn a bit callant like me oot to the rottans; and she made me up a bed in a hole in the wa’, aff her ain room, where she and little Hetty slept in one bed. I was quickly tucked into the sheets, for I was tired and stiff; but somehow I could not sleep. It was a sultry night;

there was not a breath of wind nor a cloud stirring in the haille sky; there had been a drouth for weeks. I could hear, through the open window, the blackcock crowing, and the salmon louping at the Black Linn, and whiles a whaup went skirling across the muir. So I tossed and turned till I was sair. At last Nancy cam' ben to her bed; but as she was undressin', Hetty took to greetin', so she got the bairn into her lap, and sang her to sleep wi' a saft Gaelic ballad, for she had a sweet voice. While she was still singing saftly—croonin' half to her ain thochts and half to Hetty—I heard her name whispered outside. I kent it was Evan, for she went and stood beside the window, and they talked together for lang, murmuring the delicious murmurs of early love, and cooin' like a pair of cushey-doods in the wood. Evan had orders to meet his officer at the station next morning, and he had gude thirty miles to travel during the night. They had parted ben the house, but Evan could not leave till he had seen Nancy again. In the end, when they had said 'Gude nicht' for the hundredth and last time, they parted for gude, Evan stepping across the muir, and Nancy lookin' after him through the darkness, till, minding where she was, with a little start and flutter (like a teuchit rising from its eggs), and after a short, whispered prayer (for she still said her prayers aloud, as she had been tocht—Nancy had grown a woman, and had a woman's love in her heart, but she kept some o' her bonny bairn-like ways), in which I could hear Evan's name, and a tender supplication that he might be preserved safe from all evil and harm, she slipt into the cosy nest—beside her sleeping sister."

Here the Commodore paused for a moment, and then resumed.

"I think it must have been about an hour after this that I wakened with a start. I was shivering all over; I had been roused suddenly out of a confused dream, and

my wits were scattered. The moon had risen—it was close upon the last quarter—and it threw a ghastly and forlorn light upon the hillside, and the black clump of willows anent the Linn. I looked up, and there, near the middle of the room I saw Nancy,—standing, like a ghost, in her white night-gear,—her long yellow hair hanging confusedly down her back. She had turned towards the window, and with one hand had pressed her hair from off her face, as if to let her listen freely. She came towards me—for, wondering and frightened, I had sat up in bed. ‘That cry—did you hear it?’ she said; and she looked at me with a white face, and eyes which were full of a vague fear. ‘Did you hear that cry? I thocht it was Evan’s voice.’ Then, seeing that I was nearly as scared as herself, she forgot her ain fear, and set herself stoutly to quiet me before she returned to bed. ‘I must have been dreaming,’ she said, blushing a bit. ‘What a goose I am, to be sure!’

“In the end I fell into a sound sleep; and the sun was shining briskly when I opened my eyes. The room was empty, but I heard a voice close to the burn (which joined the Dee fifty yards farther down) singing a blithe nursery sang. I got up, and looked out. At the burn-side I saw Nancy, who was a keen housewife, tramping clothes in a tub, after the fashion of the country lasses. Hetty, wrapped in a tartan shawl, and basking and crowing in the morning sun, was lying, not far off, among the white pebbles on the bank. It was a quiet, lovely morning; the laverocks were singing in the lift, and all over the hills I heard the bleating of innumerable sheep, for the shepherds were bringing their flocks down to the lower pastures. Donald was not yet visible, so I scampered off to the river, carrying my clothes with me, and getting a smile from Nancy as I passed, and plunged into the clear, deep water. We were born—the Laird and I—beside the sea,

and we took to the water freely: when we were the merest bairns we could dive like ducks. I was half-way across the river, when I noticed something black whirling in a swirl. I swam near it, and managed to lay hold of a blue Glengarry bonnet—as it proved to be. I swam to the shore, and, quickly dressing (for a boy's toilet is quickly made), shouted to Nancy that I had caught a queer fish. She came down to where I sat—a perfect Hebe. Her round arms were bare as well as her white feet and ankles, and she looked so nice and fresh and happy and innocent that even a boy could see that she was, as Mr Coleridge has said, 'beautiful exceedingly.' I think it struck me then for the first time; and putting the bonnet behind my back, I said that I would not let her have it till she gave me a kiss. 'You saucy bairn!' she said, with a bright, pleasant laugh; and then she stooped down, and, throwing her arms round me, pressed a kiss upon my cheek. It was the last time that Nancy leuch for mony a day; I doubt if ever she leuch freely again. I held up the cap in boyish triumph; in a single moment her face was as white as death. I shall never forget that look. She shivered all over for a time, and then fell with a sick cry on the ground. I raised her head. 'What ails you, Nancy?' I managed to gasp out—for that pale, despairing face had terrified me again, as it had terrified me in the moonlight. 'See! see!' she replied, pointing to the front of the cap, but replying more to her own thoughts than to my question; and there, beneath a heather-sprig, I saw the initials 'E. C.' worked in red worsted. It was Evan's cap. She had worked the letters (so they told me afterwards) on the Saturday night, while Evan sat clashing with Duncan about the Admiral's last great victory. He was clashing wi' Duncan, but his frank, honest, blue eyes were fixed on Nancy—as she weel kent.

"As she could not rise, I was fain to run for help.

They were soon about us—Duncan, Donald, and the rest of them. They carried her hame, and pit her in her ain bed. For mony days she lay like one in a dream—only at times pressing her hand upon her head with a weary moan that went to the heart. It was better for her, perhaps, that her mind gaed as it did; for she was barely in bed when ane o' the farm-loons spied a bundle, as it seemed, floating among the water-lilies, outside a clump of rashes. He cried to us, and we ran down to the bank. It was the body of Evan Caird—a pitiful sight! The eyes were fixed and staring, the water was dripping out of the lank brown curls, and there was a bitter scowl upon the brow and about the lips—as if his last thoct had been of vengeance, and his last word a curse. I had never seen death before; and the destroying angel had made that night a fearful piece of work wi' Evan Caird.

“They thought at the outset that he had fallen by mischance into the Linn; but a word of Nancy's set them upon a different tack. ‘The Cradle!’ she had moaned more than once as they were carrying her to the house. And the rights of the matter, so far, were quickly settled. It was found that the cradle was down. One end of the rope had been frayed by the rock, and had, doubtless given way when Evan was crossing. He had been thrown into the river, stunned by the fall, and drowned in the rapid tide. That was the story. But auld Fiscal Tamsan tell't me lang afterwards that it was clear to his mind that Evan had not been killed by a chance shot—he was a murdered man. The rope, he said, had not given way—*it had been cut*. He examined it next morning, and he saw the marks of the knife. There were lang precognitions, as they ca' them, and twa or three lads were clapped in jail: but there was little evidence, and they could not try them. But the Fiscal didna doubt that it was the work of the smugglers. They had fancied Evan was upon their track,

and learning somehow that he was to cross the river that night, they had waited for him at the cradle. When he was swinging in the darkness, the deevils had run in, and cut the rope."

The Commodore paused at this point of his narrative to replenish his pipe, and then proceeded.

"Donald and I gat hame neist day. The eagle was stuffed; and there he is yet, as large as life. The rest are a' awa. Duncan lies in the kirkyard at Glen Tanner. 'But what of Nancy?' you ask. Well, the poor lassie's heart was broken; but, indeed, it's uncommin difficult to dee of a broken heart—especially in the Hieland air. She was a changed woman when she rose from her bed; but she lived on. I was with the Wasp at Malacca, sax years afterwards, when I heard, in a letter from the Laird, that my poachin' freen' Donald had married Nancy Roy. A year later I heard that she was dead. It was said that she had gone oot o' her mind, and had—shortly before her confinement—tried to cut her husband's throat one night with his ain razor. At least Donald escaped from the house, his hands bleeding, a gash in his cheek, and a scared look in his face. However that might be, she never recovered her wits, and dee'd in her first confinement. The puir bairn was mercifully taken with its mither: and now Donald himself has left—the last o' the lot."

"Did it never occur to you," I inquired, after a pause, "that Donald might have been in some way implicated in Caird's death?"

"Wha ever put such a notion into your head?" retorted the Commodore, sharply. "No, I had no suspicion—at least, I never suspected him till the other day. But, shortly before his death, I went into his room. He was muttering uneasily; and though for a bit I could make little or nothing of what he said, at last I distinctly heard the words 'Evan Caird,' followed by a deep sigh or moan,

and some Old Testament words, which sounded like a prayer for mercy, in respect of some great evil done or suffered. Then he roused up, and recognised me. He looked so miserable that I said if he had anything upon his mind he should see the minister. But Donald was wild at the notion. 'Hoot, na!' he said; 'the parsons are empty wind-bags—tinklin' cymbals—not dividing the word of the Lord to edification.' Then I said that I hoped, at least, he had repented of any ill he had done. 'Wha speaks o' repentin'?' he answered, in a loud voice, his mind beginning to ramble; 'I want no repentance. Have we not been chosen or disowned from the creation of the world?' Adding, after a pause, 'Wha shall lay onything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: wha is he that condemneth?' So he died, and made no sign. But when I recollect that Donald, as I have been told, was an early lover of Nancy—rejected for Evan Caird; that it was impossible to ascertain where he might have been during the night when the murder (if it was a murder) was done; that his wife had either heard him confess, or otherwise come to suspect that he had done her a grievous injury,—I sometimes fancy that what you say is possible. He may have met his rival on his road to the cradle, and, yielding to a swift, devilish impulse, have hurried him into eternity. He was often sulky, as I have said: but I can mind that the neist day, as we walked down the glen, he never opened his mouth."

"Nonsense!" I said; "Donald did not look like a murderer."

"Why," responded the lawyer, from the serene height of a protracted acquaintance with human nature in the criminal courts, "it's my experience that murderers look very much like other people. We raise an imaginative barrier between the murderer and the rest of the race. But, in truth, there is no brand upon his forehead; and I

am not sure that the man who takes his neighbour's life is necessarily worse than the man who takes his neighbour's character. But there is one point in your narrative," he continued, turning to the Commodore, "which I do not quite follow. Was it possible that the girl could have heard the cry which we may suppose her lover uttered when he was precipitated from the cradle?"

"Well, I don't know: the cradle was not more than a mile and a half, or two miles, from the cottage, and the night was uncommin quiet. It is barely possible that she may have heard his cry: but I think not. The cry, at least, could not have wakened her. It was another cry, I suspect, audible to the inner ear only,—though connected, perhaps, by some fine law of sympathy—some mysterious and invisible train of association—with the actual peril of her lover."

Thus the Commodore, not knowing that our latest poet had written, or was to write—

"Star to star vibrates light; may soul to soul
Strike through a finer element of her own?"

A PASSAGE IN THE MINISTRY

OF

STEPHEN HOLDFAST

"I think you rather misunderstand him," I pleaded. "There is nothing, indeed, necessarily base or wrong in defeat. But the man who is worsted should learn to hold his tongue: at all events, should not indulge in windy declamation and noisy appeal to the Immortals. The gods will right him if they see cause; but the charlatan has no faith in the gods. A mere Polish wail or shriek of defeat is always meretricious."

"No, my friend: the vice has struck deeper root. It is the gospel of force, pure and absolute,—an unrighteous scorn for failure as synonymous with weakness and inefficiency. Let the victor be crowned, be he a Herod or a Borgia—while the pale ghosts of the unburied and inglorious dead (not without a mocking gibe in passing) troop sadly to Hades. Victorious rights! Isn't it the rights that are not victorious that civilisation has taught us to have in honour? Who except the Red Indian and the Australasian gold-digger, is content to own the divine authority of might, without a blush? Italy in chains, Italy languishing in Austrian dungeons, is as precious to me as Italy in her triumph. Her sons knew what was before them. They knew (what innumerable patriots have learned) that Freedom is a perilous and pitiless mistress. *Spes et præmia in ambiguo; certa funera et luctus*. Yet, knowing this, they chose to die like freemen, rather than live like slaves. And are they not to reap their reward? Is the patriot's bloody grave (save only a bitter jeer from Sauerteig) the only meed he can earn?"

The Lady's mild eyes assented. It was plain that she believed, ardently as the poet, that Duty, not Might, is the mainstay of the universe;—

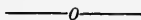
"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient Heavens through thee are fresh and strong."

I knew that there was an answer: I knew that the same teacher had said in his quaint way, "My friend, it was not Beelzebub, nor Mephistopheles, nor Autolyceus-Apollo that made this world and us: it was Another." But I do not care to argue when the thermometer is over 70°: it heats one unpleasantly. So I did not reply, but I turned to Arthur Clough's little volume of poems, and repeated a page of his musical hexameters;—

"Whither depart the souls of the brave that die in the battle;
Die in the lost, lost fight, for the cause that perishes with them?
Are they upborne from the field on the slumberous pinions of angels
Unto a far-off home, where the weary rest from their labour,
And the deep wounds are healed, and the bitter and burning moisture
Wiped from the generous eyes? Or do they linger, unhappy,
Pining, and haunting the grave of their bygone hope and endeavour?
Whither depart the brave?—God knows: I certainly do not."

—WHAT IS TRUTH? A DIALOGUE.

A PASSAGE IN THE MINISTRY OF STEPHEN HOLDFAST.



I.

THE congregation of St Lazarus were dispersing. St Lazarus was the fashionable place of worship in Hazeldean. St Dives had no shrine there. He had been left out in the cold, and Lazarus was clad in fine linen, and fed sumptuously every day. There were no poor in St Lazarus—all the seats were strictly reserved. The church had been newly erected, and was considered a fine specimen of pure pagan. A dim religious light was admitted through the painted windows where rosy cupids—cherubs, I mean—were pluming their wing-feathers and stringing their harps. The first spring bonnets bloomed in St Lazarus. When the worshippers knelt, there was a soft silky rustle like the murmur of leaves. A delicate bouquet of narcissus and violet ascended with the prayers of the congregation.

The Reverend Stephen Holdfast had been a soldier in his youth. As a boy he had led a British column up an Afghan pass, and had contrived to return unhurt—after a

fiery dash, such as nowadays wins the Victoria Cross. But peace came, and a man whose whole soul thirsted for work grew tired of the helpless monotony of military life. So he returned home and entered the Church, the only profession in this country, as it seemed to him, in which there was any real work to be done. He was at the time of which I am writing just five-and-thirty, but he looked old for his years. It may have been the fever he had at Lucknow, or that supreme quarter of an hour amid the flash of fire and the rain of bullets which had aged him; but, at all events, the spare, bronzed, attenuated face and figure might have belonged to a man ten years older than Holdfast. He had been at first simply a laborious parish priest, striving in his vehement way to save a soul here and there out of the black abyss of crime and poverty which lay below his feet; but, as he worked, the finer and deeper chords of his nature were touched, his soul opened out, and his thoughts upon life and death and the mystery beyond death, assumed, unconsciously to himself, strong, vivid, and musical expression.

“Intent to trace the ideal path of right,
More fair than heaven’s broad causeway paved with stars.”

St Lazarus, which had been sparsely occupied by a few fashionable families, began to fill. An eager crowd, Sunday after Sunday, listened to the unpremeditated eloquence of a man who was clearly in earnest. But as he spoke the old traditional creeds seemed to pulverise. This was a man who, like the Italian poet, had looked into the Unseen, but who, in that dim and perilous journey, had found only one stay on which his foot could rest—the Love of God. That a Father’s love filled the void, that a Father’s smile lit up the darkness, that a Father’s voice welcomed the children who strayed into the mysterious gloom which lies around our confined visible life—of that,

and of little else, was he distinctly assured; and though he continued to yield a passive assent to theological maxims and propositions, only in his discourses upon the Fatherhood of God did he attain that vein of high and almost piercing eloquence which charmed and subdued a not uncritical audience. At such times his animated eye (and the eye was the animating feature of a face almost sombre in its intensity and severe regularity of outline) would seem to pierce through the veil, and his hearers listened to words which came from another world—the world of a man who had entered into an invisible communion. But, unhappily, as his eloquence grew, his orthodoxy waned. He had at first regarded the stock doctrines of his Church with indifference; he had signed articles and formularies without question or curiosity; but as the central feeling of his spiritual life increased in clearness and urgency, he began to regard these not with indifference merely, but with aversion. If they were true—founded upon that eternal fact which lies outside the region of sight, was it not strange that they could rouse no conviction of *reality* in his soul; that, on the contrary, as the sense of his dependence on, and relation to, his Father in heaven became stronger, they seemed to fall away from him, to turn more artificial and fantastical—mere arbitrary fancies painted by human weakness and superstition upon the darkness? Of this mental tumult and disquiet some hint had already reached his hearers, and among the more stolid of their number (the aboriginal inhabitants of St Lazarus) whispers of “unsoundness” had not unfrequently circulated. The congregation at this moment was, like its minister, in an eruptive state; and even the dullest began to feel dimly that there was thunder in the air, and that the bursting of the storm could not be long delayed.

II.

THE series of discourses on the Christian's Progress which the Reverend Stephen Holdfast preached at this time became very famous. That they contained some expressions fitted to flutter the Evangelical dovescots of Hazeldean cannot well be denied by any one who peruses the manuscripts now lying before me; but at the same time, I should hardly have fancied that they would have excited much popular interest. They are obviously the production of a man who is in revolt, conscious or unconscious, against the orthodox formularies; and as these formularies are metaphysical in statement, the weapon of offence is metaphysical also. The writer hits rather wildly at times, it must be confessed (he had been bred a soldier, you must recollect), and the animated tone of a combatant may be heard, I fancy, in several of the most impressive passages. It would lie beyond the scope of this history to reproduce at length these *too* famous discourses; but the reader will fail to understand the constitution of Holdfast's mind, or his remarkable capacity for turning things upside down, and rubbing people the wrong way (as one of his friends put it), if he does not look a little into the volume—when it is published.¹ Meanwhile, one or two extracts may be made, as illustrating in a general way what I have now said.

DOES IT PAY?

I remember seeing once at Venice—in the arsenal, I think—a morsel of bread preserved under a glass frame, with a label

¹ *Discourses by the Reverend Stephen Holdfast, with some Selections from his Table-talk.* (Edinburgh and London.)

attached to it, which bore that on the 15th July 1849—the 15th July when the protracted siege was approaching its close—this scrap sold for, I forget the exact sum, but a frightful famine price. A sermon by an Austrian moralist, and meant to inculcate a moral lesson! “You see what the love of liberty, what the hatred of despotism, costs. *This* is what you make of resistance to lawful authority, of rebellion against the powers that be, not apparently a very *paying* business.” So reasoned the Austrian moralist in his grim practical fashion, a fashion not altogether unpractised by moralists elsewhere. The dear loaf was the sole tangible memorial that he could find of that great fight on the Lagoons. *This* was the coin which the patriots had earned here in Venice; *this* was what virtue, self-sacrifice, heroic zeal for freedom could buy on the 15th of July 1849. That joyful spirit of devotion, that magnanimity of soul, that fine enthusiasm which breathed a spark of the old Venetian manliness into the slaves of the barbarian, whatever they may be worth in the next world, where moth and rust do not corrupt, clearly do not profit in this. A morsel of bread for a dollar!

“He was a rogue, and therefore he succeeded.” True sometimes, true often, yet not invariably true. The rogues are not always successful. The universe (or what Milton called “the divine decree”) crushes them sometimes. Like children who sport with a tiger, the heavy paw, which they are tempting and skilfully eluding, will be down upon them yet. And though the nations are mainly governed by the meaner and baser virtues, sometimes the might of love, the fire of charity, conquers the world.

THE LOGIC OF PERSECUTION.

Magna est veritas, et prævalebunt. In the kingdom of God it will. But we have got in the meantime into a sadly confused and disorganised world, where truth, upon the whole, seems to have rather a hard time of it, and enough to do to hold its own. Persecution, the modern philosopher says, is a mistake no less than a crime. It destroys the heretic, but it propagates the heresy. Not being an effective instrument we had better leave it alone. On this assumption the policy of toleration is too frequently defended. To build on such an argument is to

build on the sand. History discourses no such monotonous music. Persecution has slain the true as well as the false. The false, as well as the true, has triumphed, in spite of persecution. The martyr's blood has not always fallen upon fruitful soil: his dying appeal has been heard unheeded, and even his own disciples have denied the truth for which he died. We may be sure that the stake and the cross, sagaciously employed, are not ineffective. Most minds secretly acknowledge the power which the inquisitor wields; and few men, except the very few tempered of finer metal, have the firmness to resist authority when it comes arrayed in the majesty and terrors of the law—armed with fire and sword. Thus, in one sense persecution may be considered a not unsuccessful experiment; seeing that those who have employed it dexterously have often arrested, and not unfrequently extinguished, the spirit of revolt. Many a "heresy" has died in its cradle, which, had it been left to ripen unmolested, would have blown into a victorious creed, and a dominant church. An uneasy suspicion of this fact lies at the root of much of the intolerance we see around us. "If persecution be a success, let us be persecutors."

The feeling is very natural, and as respects the travesty of history against which it is directed, not perhaps unpardonable. It is well that a moral insurrection should force us, now and again, to sift popular misconstructions, and seek a securer basis of fact on which to rest our conduct and our convictions. In the present case our inveterate habit of making success the criterion and measure of truth is chiefly to blame. But a true doctrine of toleration needs no assumption of success. Intolerance is a crime and a mistake, simply because its fruits are bad. The moral results of persecution are worthless. The inquisitor is either resisted or obeyed. If the victim resists he is strangled, and, as has been said, the worst use we can make of a man is to hang him. When he obeys, it is only an obedience of the lip that he renders; the threat of the steel or the fagot cannot change a conviction in the heart; but he has submitted to an unworthy humiliation; his character is degraded, his self-respect is forfeited, his life is rendered false. The moralist who regards intolerance by the light thus cast upon it, will not lose his confidence in freedom, though history should assure him that Philip did not burn nor Alva butcher in vain.

VAE VICTIS!

I confess that the biographies of our obscure contemporaries, if they could be written, would be much more interesting to me than the biographies of their more illustrious brethren. The life of the barrister who was *not* made Lord Chancellor, the life of the curate who did *not* become Bishop of London, the life of the soldier who died a plain lieutenant, are lives that I should like to hear a little more about. Failure, which is such a very common yet intricate lesson to learn, surely deserves its Plutarch no less than victory. Let us elect a laureate to celebrate defeat! The victor passes on laurel-crowned to the Capitol; but he leaves the best men huddled into a trench on the battle-field! The real hero of the fight lies *there*. A smile from Mary on her scaffold is worth all the ribbons and garters that the prosperous Elizabeth can bestow. The energetic precautions of Tullus Aufidius (whom some have called a traitor) were rewarded with success: so let the colours be hoisted and the drums beat; yet one is glad to know that Coriolanus had time to tell him to his face that he was a liar,—

“Measureless liar, thou hast made my heart
Too great for what contains it.”

And how scathing is Timon's farewell,—

“So I leave you
To the protection of the *prosperous* gods
As thieves to keepers.”

(It would really appear, my friends, as if Shakespeare had had his own notions as to what did or did not constitute “success.”) Numbers of men of course fail who ought to fail, and men succeed who do not merit success; but I believe that upon the whole the moral of these unwritten biographies would be, “Neither prudence nor vigilance nor virtue can win success. The best men succeed; the best men fail. Be not elated if you win; be not humiliated if you are beaten.” Nay, it is quite possible that they might enforce a still wilder paradox. They might prove that failure in this world requires finer qualities than success; that the coarse and vulgar virtues are those that

wear best and tell most effectively in life. I do not say so—I do not think so, indeed; but, on the other hand, it is neither fair nor honest to tell our boys, “John Smith was steady and industrious, and *he* was made Lord Chancellor,—if you are steady and industrious, *you* will be made Lord Chancellor;” without telling them at the same time, “Jones was as good a man, but he never earned a single guinea.”

And so the subject would broaden into vaster relations. Unless the seed die, how can it be quickened? Unless you suffer defeat sometimes, you will never learn the heartiest and the kindest wisdom, you will never grow truly humble and thankful, you will never know the need of charity and the power of love. Of all things in this world, a career of unbroken triumph is the last that a sinful mortal should pray for. No man is strong enough to suffer uninterrupted and unmixed success.

THE RIPE WISDOM OF AGE.

When a man has passed his five-and-twentieth year the intellect does not grow much. We change, no doubt; but we change because we gain a richer experience, not in logic, but in feeling. The sorrow of life elevates and refines our perceptions. We look back with temperate pity upon the unsubstantial dreams of boyhood, and cherish, as more truly desirable than its vain deluding joys, our passionate farewells, our communion with the dead, our wider but sadder horizons. *These* teach us to yield up our mortal bodies to immortal death; *these* help to reconcile us to that separation of corruption and incorruption which, while the flame yet burns clear upon the altar, it is so difficult, so hard to realise.

Men, therefore, whose writings owe their fascination to “the wise, sad valour” which lies at the root of all true humour, and to the mellow autumnal hue which falls like the golden lights of harvest aslant the page; the moralists who take *Vanitas!* for their theme—Montaigne, Charles Lamb, William Thackeray,—appear to acquire a new force and faculty as they grow old. That tender sagacity and gentleness of touch which charm us so, is long in being learned; ’tis a second nature, scarcely quite formed until the hair is grey, and the brow furrowed.

FATE!

Are we our own masters, my masters? If we are, why are we so often prevented by aimless pique or objectless obstinacy from doing that to which our whole soul prompts us? When the very blessing for which we have prayed is granted, why do we turn from it and affect to wish that it had not been granted? A jest, an idle word, has changed the destiny of an empire. It was a taunt from Cassius that sent Cæsar to the Capitol. And it happens also in the lives of most men and women that a momentary impatience, a passing pique, an unaccountable perversity, renders the whole after-life barren, fruitless, and unblest. Our free will and our free reason are no better than philosophic watchwords; for constantly in the course of life we find that we have been the mechanical slaves of motives that cannot be sifted, that will not bear analysis. A trifle that cunning fate leaves in the way turns us aside from the engrossing desire of our hearts. A trifle at the time—but oh! how tragic the trifle, when threescore years of vain repentance have failed to redress the sorrow that has drained the springs of hope, and spoiled *one* life at least!

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE.

To the cynicism of our age there is only one reply,—“We are greater than we know.” No man, and no woman, perhaps, is altogether aware of what his or her motives in any one case are. Those that lie on the surface are not the only ones involved. The cup of cold water has been given; and though, as you think, you have ticketed all the virtues it represents, you will be taught some time that the most subtle—those that partake most of the Divine beneficence—have eluded your coarse scrutiny. That homely sense of duty—on what does it rest? Whence does it derive its unfaltering constancy? On the side turned to you there is nothing very admirable, as you say; but to be even meanly and basely constant is not consistent with the only elements your analysis has recovered. The chivalry of the hero, and the charity of the saint, may not be very different from the unromantic devotion of the sinner; but this happens, perhaps,—not because the gold in every case is counterfeit,—but

because it is tried in each. The deserted outcast rises to the level of a sacrificing charity, of a divine forgiveness, as well as the heroic and blameless king.

“And all is past; the sin is sinned, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives; do thou for thine own soul the rest.”

CHRISTIANITY IN THE CHURCHYARD.

I have called this social persecution, as practised among ourselves, vindictive; but I confess that I had formed no adequate notion of its intense bitterness until lately. The Bishop of Exeter has opened my eyes, and shown me that, like the hate of the Florentine poet, it pursues its victims from this world into the next. “It is necessary,” said his Reverence the other day, when consecrating a section of the churchyard of Tiverton, “that there should be a division, a palpable line of demarcation, in order that the Church may bury its dead apart from those who do not die within its pale. There may be in Tiverton, or elsewhere; a certain number of infidels, whose place of sepulture should be distinct from that intended for those who die in the Lord. It is a glorious thing for the Church that blasphemers and infidels are not permitted to lie in the same ground with Christians. There is a line to mark how far they may trespass, and when they reach that spot there is the gentle admonition, ‘Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.’”

That death levels all distinctions has been the theme of the Pagan, as well as of the Christian, moralist. Many of the noblest sermons on record, from Job to Horace and Holbein, have celebrated the austere impartiality of the grave. In it, the preacher asserted, all men meet on equal terms, and the dust of the slave mingles without challenge with that of his lord. “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master.” But the Lord Bishop of Exeter is plainly of a different mind. He, at least, will rot in strict exclusiveness. No unclean dissenter shall touch the hem of his shroud, or witness episcopal decomposition. His Lordship is at length appeased. These are the men who removed the

Catholic disabilities, who repealed the corn-laws, who admitted the children of Israel into Parliament, who had doubtful views upon Church rates, who attacked him in the *Times*, and ridiculed him in *Punch*; but he has got the whip-hand of them now. If but a handful of the unclean clay wander across the limits prescribed by law, it will be met by a gentle admonition from the right reverend worms, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther."

"Quid ultra tendis?" asks the antique moralist in his vein of scorn and pathos,—

"Quid ultra tendis? Æqua tellus
Pauperi recluditur
Regumque pueris."

Ay, what more would you have? Is it not enough? Does not the impartial earth suffice you?—Not so. The *æqua tellus* may serve indeed for the ignoble obsequies of a Pagan poet; but a Christian bishop, in the gorgeous Elizabethan periods of a still quainter moralist, "is a noble animal, splendid in ashes and pompous in the grave, solemnising nativities and deaths with equal lustre, nor omitting ceremonies of bravery, even in the infamy of his nature." And to such an one, of course, it does not occur that the spirit which has gone to God who gave it may fitly be left to the judgment of His tribunal, and that before the rash and impotent verdicts of mortal men rises up the divine admonition, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther."

THE UNKNOWN DARKNESS.

We have tacked together a number of rules by which we regulate our morality and our belief. We have built up paste-board walls between us and the desolate and unpeopled unknown which lies beyond the rim of our life. With these—laws, traditions, religions—we fence out the infinite.

Do not suppose that I undervalue our card houses. It is good that we have them. Without their shelter we should go crazy. The man who feels how deep the darkness is, will be the last to attack them. He will be afraid even to lay a finger on them lest they fall to pieces at his touch; he will breathe cautiously lest the thin partition should go down, lest the pale light should go out and let in the darkness.

He knows that these elaborate and artificial codes are too

positive to be credible, too scientific to be true. Can we digest into a system the infinite pulsations of the universe? That rare, subtle, and wondrous life which speeds like light through ether—how can we condense it into a chronicle or a creed?

Some golden words, rescued from the ages, have indeed been garnered into the barn. True or not, they help us as perhaps divine words only can help us. Passing from life into death, from the sunlight into the darkness, from these familiar faces and forms into an unfamiliar being whose manner and form and substance the imagination cannot grasp—some of these words do keep close to our hearts. Upon them we fix our eyes as the sun grows dim, and the reluctant soul is torn from the tenement which it sustains. They help, it may be, to assuage the physical and spiritual pain of death;—the pale terror of the Child of Time as he stands on the threshold of the eternal; the shudder of the mortal as it faces immortality; the deadly faintness which paralyses the heart as the cold airs out of infinite space strike chilly against the unclothed and disrobed humanity.

THE REVELATION OF GOD.

Christ is the manifestation of the supreme truth and goodness and beauty that in some mysterious shape lies behind this visible and sensible life—the flower, so to speak, of the unseen Eternity that has blossomed into Time. And God is the good and bountiful Father because Jesus is His Son. On this immense fact—the Fatherhood of God as revealed in Christ—I am content to abide. I ask not the why nor the wherefore. To my mind, indeed, this incarnation of divinest life in the raiment of mortality, is not more inconceivable, not more miraculous, than the incarnation of every flower which springs from the sod. To my mind the wonder of His resurrection is not more wonderful than the resurrection of the spring,—the wonder being rather how even for an hour the well-spring of His life could have been withdrawn, and that generous divine vitality paralysed. That these are truths I am profoundly assured: the legal fiction of the Atonement, however, is an entirely different matter; and I trust I am guilty of no disloyalty or disrespect when I say that it is one of those cobwebs which schoolmen, with plenty of spare time on their hands, have always been pleased to spin.

THE SACRAMENTAL SYSTEM.

Baptism was once the heraldic device of the Christian. It was a visible declaration that he had renounced the Pagan world, and had joined the host who had raised the banner of the Crucified. But as such it has now no significance whatever. In the case of a child belonging to Christian parents, it is an idle form; when administered to a mature believer it excites far other than impressive emotions. Nor is this the worst,—a form that survives the occasion becomes either worthless or misleading. And to those feeble minds who draw their religious nutriment from material symbols, it has become superstition and idolatry,—a badge of servitude,—an instrument of priestcraft. A few drops of water sprinkled upon a child's face can work neither weal nor woe: yet thus, we are told, a magical change in the whole spiritual constitution is effected, whereby an imp of the devil is translated into a child of God. The same objections apply to the Sacrament of the Supper. That last supper at which Christ was present, and that memorial feast to which year after year the survivors gathered,—that periodical celebration which drew the far-scattered believers together,—were touching, natural, and solemn meetings. But by degrees the friendly reunion became a theological institution. The true believer fed mystically or literally upon the flesh and blood of his Master. The weak believer, who was unable to share that mysterious rapture, eat and drank damnation to himself. I cannot wonder, therefore, that many who feel that they are at all times over-much under the dominion of sense, should hesitate to become partakers in a rite which has led to gross materialism; nor can I wonder, on the other hand, that those whose spiritual life is fed on spiritual manna should find that this bread does not satisfy the hunger, nor this wine allay the thirst, of the soul. Not thus are they united to the Father,—not by this road can they draw near to the King, Invisible and Eternal.

A PLEA FOR IMPERFECTION.

We ought not to allow the mystery of the existence of evil to paralyse our reasoning faculties. The conflict of good and evil,

so far as it strengthens, braces, and invigorates the soul, is a salutary and ennobling discipline. A sinless and angelic nature, which has never passed through the ordeal of suffering, nor been tried in the fire of temptation, cannot know the good of good nor the evil of evil. Without sin and misery and death, the ardour of the hero, the virtue of the saint, the faith of the martyr, could not have been called into existence. That there are many gross and sensual souls on whom this stern education is utterly wasted does not admit of doubt,—*them*, when the last spark of the ethereal flame is quenched, the fire of Almighty God shall consume like chaff. But numberless saints and heroes and martyrs pass through the smoke and the cloud into the high peace of victory and the serene light of God. Our grandest poet has lauded the strenuous virtue thus dearly bought,—“for we are purified by trial, and that is by what is contrary,”—contrasting it not unfavourably with the “excremental whiteness” of Paradise or the Cloister. “I cannot praise,” he exclaims in a memorable passage, “*a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.*”

A FUNERAL MARCH.

We are actors in a great and sombre tragedy. We are marching onwards—ever onwards—to Death. The Grave is before us. This is no light Bacchanalian dance on which we have entered. It is a solemn procession, marshalled by a Divine, omnipotent leader, conducting to a sure but mysterious ending. Why, then, O my brothers! why, then, turn it into a comedy or a farce? You may strive to do so,—you may drape it in grotesque attire, and play those fantastic tricks before high heaven that make the angels weep,—but it remains what God has designed it to be; you cannot escape from its grave conditions and its dire solemnities. When we know that each one of us has to undergo this cruel ordeal—this mysterious fate—why vex our souls with ambition? why weary our hearts with love? Be sure that we shall need every faculty we possess—braced and nerved as a warrior’s in battle—to meet with courage the bitter doom which most certainly awaits us. Let us rather

take hands, my brothers ; let us take hands, and, with resolved and sober mien, go forth to greet the inevitable—not without psalms, and lofty Misereres, and a chanted chorus, if you will.

THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

According to Milton, it was the rebel angels who discussed free-will, predestination, and the other constituents of that awful puzzle which human logic and human folly have created between them. Did the great poet intend to ridicule that wonderful Presbyterian Confession which devotes whole chapters to the discussion of these inscrutable mysteries? Its authors thought that they were doing God service when they claimed for Him an absolute arbitrary sovereignty,—the free-will of man being inconsistent with the omniscience of the Almighty. They were in truth measuring and limiting His divine energy by certain human standards, making Him subject to the conditions of their metaphysical reasoning and formal logic. They assumed that omniscience inferred the knowledge of the most distant future as well as of the most distant past,—of what is to be as well as of what has been and of what is. But on what is the assumption based? An omniscient being is a being who is acquainted with all that is and all that has been; but omniscience does not imply a knowledge of what is not, and until the future becomes the present the future is not. Let us cease to impose upon our conception of the Divine Spirit who moves the universe these metaphysical conceits, and we will rise to a higher conception of His nature. He is the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. He sustains the world which He has made. He brought it into being; it rests in the hollow of His hand. *We* know that the seasons will succeed each other in their appointed order, though we know not what a day may bring forth. *He* sees with larger other eyes than ours; but it cannot be said that He knows what has not taken place in the same sense as He knows the past and the present. The great laws which He has impressed upon the creation will not fail to work out His divine will; but when we affirm that it was not His intention to create a world in which every movement of the intellect and every impulse of the affections should be as stupidly mechanical as the beat of the pendulum, we do not limit His omniscience in any natural

or intelligible use of the word. To say that everything is fixed because everything is foreseen, is, on the contrary, to take away all freshness and living activity from the divine energy, is to make God the slave of a blind and iron law of necessity,—a slavery none the less complete because it is self-inflicted, or imposed at least by some such mysterious inscrutable elemental law as that which the Titan obeyed,—

“ He could not,—No, though a primeval god,
The sacred seasons might not be disturbed.”

III.

HOLDFAST used to declare that the Ivy Glen was the most charming solitude in the world. To it he confided his sorrows and aspirations—its gentle ministry strengthened and consoled him.

It was a wild winter day. Among the tree-tops the wind was at work. But to the leafy solitudes of the Ivy Glen only the echo of the tumult penetrated.

Ivy was the predominant, the engrossing, sentiment of the scene. The brook rattled briskly along, but the stones and pebbles upon its banks were encrusted with ivy. There were multitudes of strong firs and ashes, but the ivy had clambered up them and folded them in its sinister embrace. Before the ivy grew, gaunt precipices looked down on either hand; now, the path lay between green ivied walls. There were open spaces where the ivy crawled, adder-like, among the grass and reeds and brambles. There were dark caves whose sides were clothed with ivy, and where the ivy hung in festoons across the doorways. The ivy, in short, was everywhere, in the fancifullest, grotesquest, wonderfulest forms—here sportive,

delicate, insinuating, gentle, quaint as a child's dream—there coiled in massive, serpent-like folds.

“Huge trunks ! and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine
Up-coiling and inveterately convolved :
Nor uninformed with Phantasy, and looks
That threaten the profane.”

Holdfast paused beneath a tree which reminded him of the famous Laocoon group—the murderous ivy strand had pressed the life out of the trunk, and the misshapen branches were cast up to heaven, like the outstretched arms of the sufferers in their agony. The profound gloom of the early closing winter day in that deep solitude suited his mood.

But at last he brought himself to task—brought himself to think out the problem which had driven him to the seclusion of the Ivy Glen.

Of that problem, and of all that it involves, I do not here propose to say much—we shall hear of it anon. It is a problem which at the present day must be fairly faced—one which must be honestly and conscientiously *settled*. The formularies of the Churches were framed many centuries ago, at a time when religious ideas and the religious sentiment were—not in form only, but in substance—sharply opposed to those which now prevail. Most good Christians who now read the Calvinistic Confession of Faith will be disposed to say that in that remarkable document a majestic conception of Divine purity and excellence has been distorted into a gross caricature. Yet every clergyman of the Reformed Churches is required to declare that a “scheme” of salvation which might have proceeded from a sharp pettifogger was devised by the beneficent intelligence of the Almighty ! How could any honest man agree to such a declaration ? But, on the other hand (it

might not unreasonably be asked), is not the Church doing a great work in the world? armed with her authority, does not the Christian missionary bear glad tidings of great joy into the darkest places of the land, and withstand, as only the servant of a vast organisation can withstand, the gathering powers of vice, of crime, and of suffering? At such a time, can the good soldier voluntarily quit the post to which he has been appointed, or desert the faithful souls who have been intrusted to his care?

That was the problem; and Stephen Holdfast, on that winter day, settled it for himself as he best could with the light vouchsafed to him. When he first sat down, he had nearly resolved summarily to cut the knot; but his manlier instincts prevailed. "They shall hear the truth, or what seems to me to be such, for another season at least," he said aloud in the abandonment of the solitude. "I will not go over to the enemy. Let them put me away openly if they choose, but no one shall be able to say that I stole away in the night."

The wind had fallen, and he climbed up the steep banks of the glen until he reached the Highland road that crossed the shoulder of the hill. Beneath his feet lay a great city, and beyond it, under the setting winter sun, the blue sea shone. Still farther away, visionary mountain-peaks rose cloud-like into the silent evening. It seemed to him, as he paused for a moment on the summit, that he heard an invisible choir of voices utter an "Amen" to the mighty prayer or thanksgiving which, at the close of day, the creation addresses to its Maker. Then he went down the mountain path into the valley as the sun went down behind the snow-crowned peaks of Glen Lyon.

IV.

“VESTRY of St Lazarus *v.* Holdfast,” said a dapper little clerk, coming up to Mr Limpet, the junior counsel who had been retained for the Vestry. Mr Limpet was an Evangelical busybody. Though a man of strict piety (hence the retainer), he liked the world, and he liked even better to hear what was doing in the world. As he looked at you through his gold spectacles you saw that he was in a state of chronic curiosity.

The noble Hall—rich with legal trophies—was crowded, and there was some difficulty in arresting the seniors—Serjeant Puddle and Sir Godfrey Mallet, Q.C. Mallet’s name is still widely remembered—no man of higher intellectual endowments, or of more classical perfectness of speech, has of recent years adorned the Bar. But he was armed with a lavish faculty of scorn, and his descriptions (of his own friends even) could be on occasion more emphatic and vivacious than polite.

“I can’t come,” he said to Limpet, when the junior approached him. “I am in the very middle of my speech for Buggins, and that idiot Marley *will* talk about eternal justice! Eternal justice be hanged!” said the great leader, suddenly stopping on the floor, and confronting poor Limpet, who smiled feebly. “Give up eternal justice, my friend, if you are wise, and stick to the Judicature Act!—Yes, I’m just coming,” he said to a clerk who hurried up to announce that Brown against Buggins was called; and then, turning to Limpet, he added, “Whom have you with you? Puddle, is it? Well, you’re quite safe to pull through, if you can only get him to hold his d——d tongue!”

With which piece of advice (it was all the Vestry got

for the fee they sent him) the senior departed, and left Limpet to ferret out Puddle from a dingy bar, where he was stating a dilatory plea to a puisne judge (who had already mentally repelled it). Puddle was not exactly the sort of leader whom Limpet admired—for, to do the junior justice, he was scrupulously clean. I have no doubt that if, twenty years ago, you passed much of your time in the Great Hall, you must have known Puddle by sight. He was a loud, violent, blustering, incoherent sort of mortal, who had entered a gentlemanly profession on the hypothesis that it would make him a gentleman. The hypothesis had not yet been verified.

Then the two got into a cab and drove across to the Synod Hall, which Holdfast and his counsel had already reached.

V.

THE General Council of the Calvinistic Synod met in a building that was not improperly devoted to the purposes of controversy—a church. It was one of the old churches which had belonged to the Establishment in the days of its supremacy, and the speakers were in the habit of appealing to the scenes which it had witnessed and the testimonies to which it had listened—very curious scenes and very singular testimonies. Here in the old days persecution had been extolled and intolerance justified—here in the later time the sins of the fathers had been visited upon the children, and the Church which had invoked the secular arm to put its enemies to silence had been silenced in turn.

The President, or “Moderawtor” (as he is called), occupied a seat in the centre of the assemblage—similar

in position and style to that which is occupied by the Speaker of the House of Commons. The body of the hall was filled by members, the galleries were appropriated to the public (which was characteristically feminine), and to the divinity students of the United Church, who were sometimes rather noisy in their manifestations of welcome or dislike. The "Highs" sat on the right hand of the Moderator, the "Drys" on his left. The former, who in this Synod (and since the Union of the Churches) were in overpowering force, represented the extreme orthodoxy of the body, its narrowness, its exclusiveness, its fierce earnestness, its implacable devotion to the Calvinistic formulas. Dr Gregory sat at its head. He was the trusted leader under whose generalship the party had achieved so many of the victories which are more damaging than defeats. His fine, classical, cleanly-chiselled face was the face of a scholar, of a gentleman, and of a — fanatic. Velasquez has pictures of Grand Inquisitors for which Dr Gregory might have sat—pictures (the glow of lighted fagots lighting up the sombre background) which immortalise the courtly arrogance and sublime condescension of the mediæval priest. Dr Gregory certainly would not have winced when the fire was applied to the end of an obstinate heretic—to do him justice, he would not have winced had it been applied to his own. Most lovers of the fine arts admired this refined and thoroughbred ecclesiastic. They admired him as they admired a curious and well-preserved fossil. It belongs to a different world, we know; but then, what a capital specimen it is! The leader was a scholar and a gentleman, but those who sat on the benches beside him and behind him betrayed few signs of culture or refinement. There were pleasant old gentlemen among them —pleasant, shaggy, honest-faced gentlemen, with the bloom of the country upon their cheeks, and the air

of the country about their clean-starched linen and carefully-brushed black coats—but these modestly occupied the back benches, and listened in silence to the eloquence of their chiefs. Dr Gregory was supported on the right hand (as the reporters say) by Dr Butterwell and Mr Brass, on the left by Dr Downie and Professor Drumstick. The occupants of this front bench, however, were constantly moving about (as if they were not sufficiently conspicuous) and keeping up a fussy conversation with the clerks and the Moderator himself, whose gratified sense of dignity was not superior, one might observe, to an occasional yawn. The numbers of the “Left” were insufficient to fill the benches allotted to them, and they looked chilly, depressed, and conscious of defeat. Yet on the half-dozen benches immediately opposite the table were congregated a body of theologians, critics, and orators who would have graced any assembly in the world. The general feeling of depression did not appear to have infected the leaders,—the “broad basis” on which Dr Goodfellow delighted to rest his argument and his person had suffered no abridgment, and the Dean’s mirth-provoking laugh shook the Hall, and penetrated to the lobbies.

Holdfast and the counsel on either side were fairly seated at the bar when the Clerk rose and intimated that the case of The Vestry of St Lazarus against Holdfast would now be proceeded with.

“Let the libel be read,” said the Moderator; and it was read accordingly.

THE LIBEL.

“Mr Stephen Holdfast, bachelor of divinity, you are indicted and accused, at the instance of the Vestry of St Lazarus, that whereas the publishing of false and unsound doctrines at variance with the Articles of the Calvinistic Church, is an offence of

an heinous nature and severely punishable, yet true it is and of verity that you, the said Mr Stephen Holdfast, have been guilty of the said offence in respect that ;—

“(1.) In article One it is set forth and declared as follows :—
‘ It pleased God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the beginning to create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.’

“ But you, the said Mr Stephen Holdfast, maintain, and have maintained, on divers occasions, that God did not create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein, in the space of six days.

“(2.) In article One Hundred and One it is declared and set forth as follows :—*‘ All persons publishing opinions contrary to the principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation, may be lawfully proceeded against by the civil magistrate, who hath authority, and it is his duty to take order that the truth of God be preserved pure and entire, and that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed.’*

“ But you, the said Mr Stephen Holdfast, maintain, and have maintained, on divers occasions, that the civil magistrate cannot lawfully take order that heresy be suppressed, and that when he does so he is guilty of persecution and tyranny.

“(3.) In article Five Hundred it is set forth and declared as follows :—*‘ Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; are sinful, and cannot please God.’*

“ But you, the said Mr Stephen Holdfast, maintain, and have maintained, on divers occasions, that good works are not displeasing to God.

“(4.) In article One Thousand Five Hundred and Fifty-one it is set forth and declared as follows :—*‘ Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ; through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth. . . . Others not elected cannot be saved; much less can men not professing the Christian religion, be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess. . . . The punishments of such in the world to come are grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire for ever.’*

“ But you, the said Mr Stephen Holdfast, maintain, and have maintained, on divers occasions, that in Christ all infants are saved, and that the other comfortable doctrines set forth in this article rest on no sure warrant of Scripture, or words to that effect.

“ All which being found proven, you, the said Mr Stephen Holdfast, ought to be punished, for the glory of God, the edification of the Church, and the deterring of others from committing the like offence in all time coming.”

The discussion on what is called the relevancy of the libel was opened by Mr Erskine, who appeared for Holdfast, and who argued with great ingenuity that the passages selected from the sermons did not contradict the Standards.

The Church-lawyers, however (of whom there were a dozen in the Synod), maintained that the indictment was relevant, and Mr Thistle Down proposed a motion to that effect. An eruptive, irascible member used to declare that a speech from Mr Thistle Down was an insult to the Synod. The airy impertinence and easy swagger of a man of the world who had been kind enough to become a man of God, was more than the corrupt human temper could stomach. Mr Thistle Down undoubtedly felt that he was condescending when he mixed with the poor ministers and homely elders of an impoverished Church; and these in their turn could not help showing by their manner that they were quite aware that he had ten thousand a-year, and that religion and its Author were indebted to him for attending their meetings.

The Opposition, although they contended that the indictment was ill drawn, did not see their way to divide the House, holding that the matter belonged to the Law rather than to the Gospel, and that the opinion of the legal members must be allowed to settle the point.

Then Holdfast rose.

THE SPEECH OF THE REVEREND STEPHEN
HOLDFAST.

Mr Holdfast said: It is with a feeling of deep depression that I rise to address the Synod, and I know that I should have acted more prudently had I left my defence in the hands of my learned friend. But the time has come, as it seems to me, when it is needful that I should disclose, in the plainest and most explicit language, the motives which have induced me to remain in the Church in which my forefathers lived and died, and in which I was bred. That I have ceased to hold certain of the doctrines which the Church at one time taught, I am ready, with the utmost frankness, to own; and it will be for this assembly, by their vote to-night, to declare whether such liberty of opinion among her clergy is, or is not, admissible.

Let me say at once that, to the best of my understanding, I am truly attached to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. To me, belief in the eternal power and goodness of God, belief that that eternal power and goodness was manifested in the person of our Redeemer, belief in the fact of sin and of God's power to release us from sin, belief in the resurrection of the dead,—are as real as they can be to any of you. The libel which has been read specifies in detail the particular doctrines regarding which I am said to entertain opinions more or less inconsistent with the explanations contained in the Confession. The questions, the only questions, therefore, which I propose to discuss with this venerable assembly are these: In what sense and to what extent is the Church committed to the explanations of the Standards? To what extent and in what sense am I myself committed?

The theologians of a keenly speculative age threw their convictions about dogma into a written creed. These were the honest convictions of the age. That I am willing to admit. But since the creed was penned more than two hundred years have passed—two hundred years of wonderful change in the moral, spiritual, and material world. Is the National Church the Church of the dead or of the living nation? Of the living, surely; and while we may regard with interest, nay, with veneration, the religious manifestoes which our ancestors issued, and which answered the particular emergency and served the immediate

purpose, can you reasonably ask us to do more—unless, indeed, our own convictions assent? And if they do not assent, what then? Are we to relinquish our connection with your great missionary institute, and look upon it as an historical curiosity only—a monument to the dead?

I signed the Standards—I subscribed the Confession. I was neither doctor nor dialectician. I was a plain soldier, ignorant of the technical language of philosophy and theology, when I quitted the service of the Sovereign and entered the service of the Church. I only asked to be allowed to do some work, however humble, in what seemed to me the cause of God and godliness. Alas! (and yet why should I lament the change?) the time arrived when I learned, as all of us must learn, that there is something greater than good works. Yes; Truth is greater than good works. Far be it from me, most venerable fathers and brethren, to assert that I have found the Truth: but I can honestly say that since the day when I discovered that the search after Truth is man's noblest prerogative in this world, since the day when in her severe majesty she surprised me at my evangelistic work, I have sought her diligently.

I signed the Standards—I subscribed the Confession. It is possible that had I examined them seriously, I could not have done so with an entirely clear conscience. But even had I been conscience-free to sign them then, is it to be maintained that I thereby declared my intention to believe them always—thereby devoted my intellect and my reason to spiritual stagnation and lifelong incapacity? You tell me that I might have quitted the Church (cries of Hear, hear): but with my views such an act would have been one not merely of cowardice, but of treachery. It would have been a confession that in my opinion the Church's position was no longer tenable. But I did *not* consider it untenable. It would have been an admission, moreover, that in my judgment a Church cannot be *reformed* by its own members and office-bearers. I know that there are good men who hold that it is sacrilege to lay hands upon a single timber of the ark, however rotten. Only two courses are possible—acquiescence or desertion. You may believe, and remain; or you may cease to believe, and then duty requires you to go. But to my mind, Moderator, the obligations of a Churchman to the Church are similar in nature to the obligations of a citizen to the State. When loyal citizens become of opinion that the State should be

reconstructed, they do not hesitate to say so; on the contrary, they use every exertion to secure the reform which they consider desirable. Such men in so acting are not guilty of disloyalty: rather would they be guilty of disloyalty did they *desert* the State, because skill and patience and time and tact are required to achieve reform. *We* have sworn to maintain the Church as those have sworn to maintain the monarchy. They are not guilty of "treason" because they labour to bring the forms of the constitution into harmony with the necessities of the people—we are not guilty of "perjury" because we labour to bring the dogmas of the Church into harmony with the convictions of the age. The capacity for doctrinal development is essential to the existence of every Christian society; and the men who framed your Standards constantly recognised the fact. "We see not all things yet," said one of the noblest of their number; "but we trust the Lord hath yet more light to break forth from His Holy Word."

That, then, is my contention. You must declare to-night whether the ministers of this Church are free Christian thinkers, or the bond-slaves of an age which was confessedly more ignorant, more superstitious, more intolerant and unreasonable than our own. Yet why should I say so? For if you will but accept that definition of the liberty of the conscience which your own Confession contains, you must dismiss me uncondemned from your bar. "God alone," it declares, "is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines and to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."¹

There was a suppressed murmur of assent from those who sat on the left of the Moderator when Holdfast sat down.

Mr Serjeant Puddle followed. Of his speech what writer, acquainted with the English tongue only, can pre-

¹ *Report of the trial of the Rev. S. Holdfast for heretical doctrine and teaching, &c. &c.*

sent intelligible report? It was an Irish stew, or rather a Scotch hash. But of that remarkable oration Holdfast heard but a fragment. A mere pencil-scrap from Doctor Diamond had been handed to him as he sat down. "Andrew is sinking fast. Come at once."

VI.

PARTIES having, by a legal fiction, been "removed from the bar," the Synod proceeded to deliberate upon their decision.

Doctor Butterwell moved that the Synod find that the Reverend Stephen Holdfast had been guilty of heretical doctrine and teaching. Nature made Doctor Butterwell a comic actor: but he was unfortunately educated for the ministry. The humorist in him, however, was stronger than the divine, and even when addressing the Almighty he never forgot the footlights. His church was quite as entertaining as the theatre, and paid better.

The motion was briefly seconded by Mr Brass. To Mr Brass, Nature had not been generous. She had given him neither wit, nor intellect, nor imagination, nor common-sense; she had given him a loud voice only, but he made the most of it. He would speak on every conceivable subject, although he had no right to be heard on any. And he compelled attention as the bagpipe compels attention. There is neither sweetness, nor melody, nor sentiment in the music which the national instrument discourses, there is nothing but wind; yet is it impossible to drown that terrific blast. It was no use trying to silence Brass; the more he was squeezed the harder he bellowed.

Then the Dean moved (the motion being seconded by

Dr Goodfellow) that a verdict of Not Guilty be returned. The Liberal leaders argued on behalf of their friend with the prudent boldness of experienced debaters—trying to win to the last, though they knew that success was hopeless. The Dean, indeed, did not hesitate in this fashion to indicate with considerable plainness his objections to the Standard ;—

“The official confession of a National Church ought to be composed in what are called by artists the neutral tints. It should reflect the ripe intelligence of a Christian people. The subtleties of casuists, the fanaticism of partisans, should be excluded from its pages. How did the compilers of the Standard comply with these conditions? They did not comply with them—it was impossible that they could. The Calvinistic formularies were not put together during a period of peace; they were put together when the nation was in the throes of a great religious conflict. The Standard was penned upon the battle-field. It is the eloquent but heated manifesto of a victorious faction. It develops a particular theory of Christianity with unmerciful and intolerant satisfaction. (Hear, hear, and Oh, oh.) It was framed, moreover, at a time when there was a passion for system. The theologians of the age undertook to explain everything—they would not believe that there were any Divine riddles in the world which it was impossible to resolve. Thus we have in the Standard, not alone the central truths of Christianity, but all manner of logical and metaphysical applications. Nor is this the worst. It was framed at a time when the saints were the rulers of the earth, when the magistrate was the servant of the Church, when a secular monarchy was being abolished, and the *Civitas Dei* was being established. So it undertakes to rule the lay as well as the religious life, the State no less than the Church, the king no less than the priest. Such political economy is hardly adapted to the conditions of modern society! (Cheers and hisses.) Nor yet are the difficulties exhausted. A creed which was compiled three centuries ago grows obsolete, even in language. To read it is to read an old author, or an author with whose tongue we are imperfectly acquainted. We cannot enter into the niceties of his meaning; nor can we follow the train of his thought. Our means of communicating with him are imper-

fect, not merely from the change of language, but from the progress of opinion. We stand on a different platform. His philosophy is not our philosophy: his science has been undermined by the science of a more advanced age; his theories of government, if now reduced to practice, would herald revolution. In fine," said the Dean, "the systematising intellect of Calvin has directly or indirectly shaped all the Churches of the Reformation. On ours, perhaps, the forms of that imperious logic have been most distinctly impressed. Would rather that it had been inspired by the liberal soul of Luther, or the tolerant genius of Melancthon!"

Some cheering from the students' gallery, loud cries of "Oh, oh" from the benches behind Doctor Gregory, saluted the Dean as he resumed his seat.

The discussion might profitably have terminated here, but one of the advanced party on the back benches, the Reverend Abel Hawthorn, rose, and in singularly deliberate and impassive tones delivered a speech of such cynical audacity that the members almost forgot to interrupt him.

"It is not unnatural," the speaker began, "that the doctors of a Church should try, on occasion, to crystallise their theological convictions into a creed or a confession. To the student of religious opinion these monuments of its progress must always be interesting. If, like an old battle-flag, a creed could be hung away on the wall when it had become too tattered for further use (Oh, oh), no great harm would ensue; but, unfortunately, this cannot be done. Obsolete confessions are fortified by subscription and propped up by penalties! We are required to declare that theological propositions framed two centuries, or four centuries, or a dozen centuries ago, are propositions in which we entirely believe. A virulent vitality is thus given to the prejudices of certain ages and schools. With what result? With worse than no result; for what thoughtful man can deny that that clerical oath which we call subscription is at once worthless and mischievous? Worthless—as all oaths are more or less worthless. Oaths do not touch the dishonest. A dishonest un-

believer will affirm without a blush that he sincerely believes your standard of faith. Such a man passes unharmed through the meshes of the ecclesiastical net. But the oath alarms the timid, the sensitive, and the over-scrupulous conscience, and our best men have been driven and are being driven (as you well know) from fellowship with us, just because they are our best and noblest. (Murmurs.) On what ground," he continued, when silence was obtained, "can you defend this mischievous practice? Your Protestantism does not enjoin it; it is a practice, on the contrary, inconsistent with the cardinal principle of Protestantism! But I do not care to dwell upon theoretical anomalies—the practical demoralisation which subscription causes is the serious matter. Its direct tendency is to create an ignorant and dishonest clergy. How can it be otherwise? When you enforce subscription you virtually prohibit inquiry, research, revision. How can a man with a sword hanging over his head *afford* to undertake an honest investigation? But, putting vulgar dishonesty out of the question, does not subscription deprive even the sincere convictions of the clergy of any value in the estimation of the laity? A premium is given to induce us to shut our eyes, to close our ears, to drug and stupefy our reason. What worth can be attached even to the *sincere conclusions* of men so injuriously and unequally weighted? We cannot see truly if we would; the mist of self-interest rises between us and the truth; a resolute and wellnigh heroic effort is needed before we can rise to the platform on which the lay inquirer, who has not sacrificed his right to reason and to judge, stands with no effort whatever. He is a free man—we are slaves; and yet, Moderator, I cannot wonder that those of us who have given hostages to fortune should not be urgent to obtain emancipation on the only available terms."

The impression produced by this singular speech was so marked that it brought the leader of the majority to his legs. Dr Gregory had not intended, he said, upon this painful occasion to address the House. But the speech which they had just heard from their misguided young friend—Hawthorn was a man of forty-five—demanded an immediate reply. Mr Hawthorn had spoken lightly of the precious Standards of the Church—Standards which he

(Doctor Gregory) had always regarded with profound attachment and unutterable loyalty (loud cheers), and which were the exact voice of God's Holy Word. (Renewed cheering.) They were contending to-night not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities and powers of evil. (Hear, hear.) He did not mean to be personal, but he had no hesitation in stating that the speech to which they had just listened had been directly instigated by the Great Enemy of Evangelical Truth. He recognised the same agency in the speech of the Dean. Also in the speech of Doctor Goodfellow. They had one and all broken their ordination vows, and perjured themselves before God. It would hereafter be the duty of the Church to deal with them as well as with Mr Holdfast. He could speak much more strongly, but he had no desire to hurt any man's feelings. (Hear, hear.) He would only repeat, in conclusion, that though he didn't pretend to be prophetic, it was evident to him that the work which these individuals had begun and carried on so far had been begun and carried on under the sinister influence of the Great Enemy of the Church—that Enemy who had always set himself in opposition to the truth as it was in Jesus, and to the work of conversion—he meant Satan himself. (Much cheering.)

When Doctor Gregory sat down strangers were ordered to withdraw, the doors were locked, and the roll was called. There voted—

Guilty,	220
Not Guilty,	85
Majority for Guilty,	<hr/> 135

Doctor Downie then moved, that in respect the Reverend Stephen Holdfast has been found guilty of heretical doctrine and teaching, the Synod depose the said Stephen Holdfast from the office of the holy ministry.

The motion was duly seconded by Professor Drumstick.

Doctor Downie and Professor Drumstick had one point in common. Each was a specimen in his way of the rank growths which spring from the ecclesiastical soil—the parasites which fatten upon the corruptions of the religious life. The rotund, jolly, mediæval monk who entered the monastery because it supplied the best quarters, the best living, and the best drink going, has his successors in the modern world. But otherwise the pair were curiously unlike. Drumstick was sour, narrow, and fanatical, whereas Downie was soft as silk, a man who never abused a friend (except behind his back), and who thought it prudent, as a general principle, that the Church should keep on civil terms with the World—if not with the Flesh and the Devil.

Their speeches on this occasion were eminently characteristic. Downie dropt a fraternal (or maternal) tear over his “unhappy brother,” whereas Drumstick was stern as a Covenanting Whig signing the death-warrant of a prelatist, or as an old Hebrew prophet hewing the idolater in pieces before the Lord.

One last gallant effort was made by the Liberal party to save their friend, but it was of course unsuccessful.

“Is the panel at the bar?” the Moderator asked.

There was no reply.

“Let him be duly cited.” And thrice, at each door of the Hall, the Reverend Stephen Holdfast was called upon to appear.

Then the Clerk informed the Moderator that the Reverend Stephen Holdfast had been duly cited, but that he had failed to answer the citation.

“The Synod will now engage in solemn prayer to Almighty God,” said the Moderator, rising from his chair. The whole assemblage rose. Then Doctor Gregory, being called upon, shut his eyes, clasped his hands, and said—

“Ratify in heaven, O Lord, the act which Thy Church upon earth is this night about to complete. We have cut off from our society one who has sinned against Thy Holy Word, and incurred Thy just displeasure. It is in Thy cause, O Lord, that we have done this thing—do Thou bless and sanctify Thy servants. On him also do Thou have mercy—let not Thine anger visit him for ever. Let him not go down into the pit. Let him not be numbered with those whom Thou hast devoted to the everlasting torments and bitter pains of hell. Have mercy upon him, O God, have mercy upon him. And to Thy holy name be praise, and honour, and glory, world without end. Amen.”

Somehow the impression produced by this address to Heaven was not cheerful. It was obvious that the speaker had little expectation that his intercession, on behalf of Holdfast at least, would be attended to.

One has no right, however, to speak lightly of such a scene. When mortal men profanely and audaciously assume the prerogatives of Omnipotence, when they profess to stand in the place and speak with the voice of Almighty God, the effect is at once grievous and grotesque. And when we remember that the best, if not the greatest, man of the Church of Scotland in our generation, was prayed for in precisely similar circumstances in these identical words, what, except astonished silence, is left for reasonable creatures? “Thus we play the fools with the time, and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us.”

Then, amid an impressive hush and stillness, the Moderator, lifting up his hands to heaven, as the grey light of morning streamed through the eastern window (for the debate had not terminated till long after midnight) said—

“Stephen Holdfast, in the name of her King and Head, the Church of Christ, duly convened in General Assembly,

deposes thee from the office of the holy ministry." And taking a written paper from the Clerk's hand, he proceeded to read the formal sentence of deposition—

"The Synod did, by their vote, depose the said Stephen Holdfast, like as they hereby do, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the alone King and Head of the Church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by Him unto them, actually depose the said Stephen Holdfast from the ministry, prohibiting and discharging him to exercise the same, or any part thereof, in all time coming, under pain of the highest censures of the Church."¹

A short address from the Moderator followed, and the Synod was then dissolved with the usual formalities. And finally, before parting, the members sang, as their fathers in the old time before them had sung, from a period beyond the memory of man, the well-known verses from the 122d Psalm ;—

" Pray that Jerusalem may have
Peace and felicity ;
Let them that love thee and thy peace
Have still prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still
Within thy walls remain,
And ever may thy palaces
Prosperity retain."

¹ Slightly altered, it will be observed, from the original form of sentence in the Calvinistic Courts—*e.g.*, " Having God and His Holy Scriptures before our eyes, and speaking in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do by this our final sentence, which we give herewith in writing, condemn thee, Michael Servetus, to be bound and led to the place called Champél, and there to be attached to a stake, and burned alive with thy book, both in manuscript and in print, until thy body be reduced to ashes ; and so shall thou end thy days to give example to others who might commit the same crime."

VII.

WHEN Holdfast returned home he learned that Andrew Steedman—his old trusty servant and friend—was rapidly sinking. For many weeks, or rather months, Andrew had been wasting away—some fierce internal trouble had consumed his strength. *Now* he was but the shadow of his former self, and the dear, simple, kindly, honest face had grown piteously thin. Yet he remained to the last cheerful and confident and full of hope. Death surely would not prove too strong for this fine hopeful soul; and both he and his master—till this night—had permitted themselves to believe that the ravage of an incurable malady might for once be stayed. Alas! how many unanswered prayers go up every day and night to heaven! “O God, if Thou wouldst only withhold Thy hand,” we exclaim through our blinding tears, and yet the Lord does not listen. It is from the young that these prayers mostly proceed. Age is wiser—it knows that no prayers, no entreaties will turn Destiny aside from the path which she has marked out, and so submits, and bows its head silently.

The old family servant was a very fine type of character; but except in one or two big houses, he is now rarely met with. To this almost extinct race Andrew Steedman belonged. He had lived from boyhood in the service of the Holdfasts, and had thoroughly identified himself with them. He was their most accurate chronicler. He had taught the lads to handle gun and oar deftly, had seen them leave the family nest, and go out into the world. He had seen some of them wed, others he had seen buried; and younger generations had come in their imperceptible way, and grown up around

his knees. Thus he had passed into the Holdfast life, and had become one of themselves. He never thought of himself apart from them—never fancied that a day could come which would see them divided. He had received nothing more than the bare rudiments of education at the parish school; but he had raised himself by diligent culture and affectionate intercourse to be a true companion and friend. Until Stephen brought him to Hazeldean, he had never wandered far from the little sea-beaten island to which the Holdfasts clung as tenaciously as lichens; but all who came that way knew Andrew and his honest face and his kindly smile. For it was indeed a beautiful soul that was lodged in that somewhat homely form, and its admirable uprightness, ingenuousness, simplicity, and natural shrewdness and candour were calculated to impress the least observant passer-by. He was true as steel, and the most urgent temptation could not have moved by a hair's-breadth that habitual instinctive incorruptible honesty. He suffered sharp pain for months without saying a word to any living soul, working on to the end without weak murmur or repining, silently, honestly, courageously. This silent suffering was impressive, reminding one at times of the pathetic reticence of some sweet patient animal. The brown eye might be troubled, but no other token of distress was permitted.

The doctor met Holdfast at the bedroom door. "The end is near at hand," he said. "He will hardly last till the morning. Good night."

Of that last meeting I am not going to write. That it was very sad, very tender, and very manly, I can well believe. When Stephen was first told that his friend *must* die, the pain he experienced was about as keen as any that he had ever felt in this world. But by this time the blow had spent its first crushing force, and they were able to say "Farewell" like men who trust in God.

Through the short summer night Holdfast watched by the bedside of the dying man, who had fallen into a heavy sleep. The events of the past day had been entirely swept from his mind by this fresh trouble, and his memory journeyed back unconsciously to far-away earlier scenes, among which Andrew had been his chief companion. Recollections of wild winter boating among the wild fowl, of long pleasant summer days upon the moors, of the first sea-trout landed with his aid, and the first grouse knocked over under his guidance—so long ago that it almost looked like a dream!—of cheerful greetings when the holiday time had come, and the schoolboys found him waiting for them at the gate; of long talks as they drove home together beneath the stars which he had curiously studied in that clear northern sky; recollections such as these, and others of a different kind—traits of a character so finely and heroically simple, so utterly unselfish, so unostentatious in its manifestations, and yet so constant in its faithfulness and fidelity—came back upon him in swift and pathetic succession. So he sat, until, as the birds in the trees across the square began to twitter in the first light of dawn, the laboured breathing ceased suddenly, and with one or two faint respirations—mere vibrations of the air—Andrew passed away. Holdfast calmly closed the sightless eyes, and said in his heart, not with his lips, “Enter into the joy of thy Lord, good and faithful servant.”

He spoke as a minister of Heaven, unconscious, as it seemed, that the sacramental grace had been withdrawn from him, and that the Synod had deprived him of the power to dispense the mercy of God.

Dear old Andrew! He sleeps quietly now by the rocky beach of that restless northern sea; but even to-day Stephen Holdfast cannot look with tearless eyes upon his grave.

“It’s a bastely thing that death,” said a venerable Scotchman of our acquaintance. He was right. No amount of argument or experience can reconcile us to it. We can only say, with upcast eyes and clasped imploring hands, “Lord, Thou knowest that we are dust. If there be any seed of immortality within us, quicken Thou it.”

VIII.

FIVE A.M.—A lovely midsummer morning. Holdfast had left the room where the dead body lay, and had wandered out into the empty streets. He panted for fresh air; the close funereal atmosphere of the sick house seemed to suffocate him. The streets were still empty; the whole town was hushed, dreamy, noiseless; the most restless members of the Synod were in bed—even Brass and Drumstick were sleeping the sleep of the just. The air was fresh, but balmy; the vagrants who had bivouacked under the country hedges must have enjoyed the unusual warmth of the night—the sort of night for owls, and bats, and moths, and human night-birds. Clear into the smokeless air rose spire, and steeple, and crown—rose quaint gable, and ivied belfry, and frowning buttress—rose the jagged cliffs of the Lion, and the soft outline of the purple Pentland.

Holdfast, as I have said, had wellnigh forgotten the exciting scene where, on the previous evening, he had played the principal part. His mind was full of his old comrade, and of the incidents of those last sad hours when life was ebbing away. He felt very dreary. Friends he loved had proved false, and now there was one faithful, friendly heart the less in a world where friends were few.

Life had grown emptier, and the glorious flush of the morning, the splendour of the growing light, seemed only to make his loneliness more visible.

Early milk and vegetable carts passed him as he wandered on. The ruddy boys or girls who drove them looked dubiously at this unusual black-coated figure. Anon, as he descended into the crowded districts where the great industries are carried on, he began to meet occasional work-people hurrying to the works, and the newsboys with great bundles of papers for the morning trains. The bill-sticker was already abroad. There is a long dead-wall, shutting off the canal from the populous thoroughfare which runs alongside, which is a favourite field for the display of his art. A gipsy-looking lad was mounted on a ladder, with a brush and a huge pot of paste, industriously engaged in posting the sheets which announced the contents of the morning journals. Holdfast, listlessly gazing at this active Mercury on his ladder, saw his own name suddenly appear upon the wall. This was the bill, printed in alternate black and red lines; his own name he noticed was in red:

THE HAZELDEAN HERALD,

Saturday, June 10.

REMARKABLE TRIAL FOR HERESY—DEPOSITION OF THE REV. S. HOLDFAST.

THE GREAT COMMERCIAL CRASH.

INTERESTING DIVORCE CASE.

APPALLING RAILWAY SMASH.

&c. &c. &c.

Now, for the first time, he recalled what had taken

place. They had deposed him, then? This shameless public notice was the first intimation that he had received, and the blow seemed to make him actually giddy. He staggered as if he had been struck. He had had no food since the afternoon of the previous day—he had passed a sleepless, exhausting night—body as well as mind had been utterly wearied, and now refused any longer to obey this unreasonable tyranny.

* * * *
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The sun was high in heaven when he awoke from his sleep, or recovered from his swoon—whichever it was, he did not at all know. He was conscious of a slow, gliding movement; he felt that he was being carried along; he heard the ripple of water and a low murmur of voices, and the summer breeze which fanned his cheeks rustled among the sedges. He opened his eyes dreamily, and looked around him. A very old weather-beaten man sat close to where he lay, holding the tiller of a coal-barge in his hand, and conversing in a subdued voice with a little girl who had gathered herself up into the corner of the seat. He was very tarry, very brown, very wrinkled, and very weather-beaten; but there was a fine, simple, honest look in the face which indicated a certain homely magnanimity of soul, a look which the most sordid environment cannot sometimes quite efface, a look which Holdfast knew well, for it had belonged to Andrew Steedman. The little girl was of a quite wonderful beauty: she might have been a Seymour or a Howard, not because she was beautiful only, but because the beauty was of the most high-bred and pure-blooded kind. Yet before they noticed that he was awake, Holdfast had heard her address the old bargee as "Granny," and her grandfather called her "Dolly."

What did it all mean ?

By-and-by they saw that he was awake, and before long he had learned where he was, and how he had been brought there—the explanation being perfectly simple.

Coal-barge No. 25, commonly known on the Union Canal as *The Mary Anne*, manned by Isaac Waite and his granddaughter Dolly, started from the canal basin for the coal country at an early hour on Saturday morning, and shortly thereafter reached the spot where Holdfast lay. Isaac Waite was neither Priest nor Levite, but only a Good Samaritan in a limited line of business ; so he took the wellnigh inanimate body on board, and after a world of trouble, and various applications, hot and cold (Dolly proving very busy and useful—a model nurse), succeeded in restoring the circulation.

Old Isaac Waite, the owner of the barge, had been fruitful, and multiplied, and replenished the earth ; but his laudable efforts to obey the Divine command had not been attended with permanent success—had, on the contrary, been perversely thwarted by death, and disease, and strong drink. Of many stalwart sons only one now remained (who drove the old white horse which was attached to the boat), and he was the youngest, and as it seemed the most unlikely of the lot to live : of many blooming daughters, some had taken to evil courses, and the others had come to grief in a variety of ways. His little granddaughter, Dolly, had no relatives on the paternal side of the house (not even a father), and the Church had shown no acquaintance with her existence (not even to the extent of baptism). She had sprung up, fair, and sweet, and pure, from a very hotbed of corruption ; and in all the happy nurseries of Hazeldean there was no rosier lass of six than Dolly Waite. She was one of those exquisite little flowers which (asking permission of no Church) come straight from God in the most miraculous, unaccountable way. Dolly was

Isaac's pet and Isaac's torment. She domineered over him in a fashion that delighted his heart. And the idle gipsy life of the barge was full of charm to this child of nature. She basked in the sunshine. During wet days she kept to the cabin, or came up-stairs in a surprising little waterproof sailor's jacket all over with buttons, which made her look like a miniature midddy. When in Hazeldean, now and again, they lived in a dirty little lodging near the canal basin; but, except at such times, they were always on the move. They would start with the earliest light, and during the hot summer weather at least would sometimes continue to travel on through the cool hours of the night. There was a little platform at the stern where she would sit and help Isaac to steer, and busy her nimble little fingers with some piece of child's work, or make to herself posies of the hawthorn and laburnum sprays, or look up through the white clouds into the blue heaven overhead; all which she did with a charming natural grace not to be imitated by mere mortal men and women. They were wondrously happy—the two; and in spite of all his losses, no apprehension that this cherub would one day spread its wings and leave him entered into the old man's head. Ah! had he been told of a day—not far off, as it chanced—when this gay young voice would grow pitiful, and the trustful appeal to "Granny" would be unheard and unheeded by him, I don't think that he would have believed the messenger. For God is very good to us in spite of all that we say against Him.

That summer day on board the barge was never forgotten by Holdfast, though at the time it seemed to him less substantial than the stuff of which dreams are made. He lay upon the broad seat at the stern of the boat, with some light piece of sail-cloth covering him; and a miraculous little child, with fair skin, and blue eyes, and wavy curls, gravely discoursed to him in an infantile tongue,

which he occasionally understood, of the wonders of the life which they led: the men and women of the barges, the horses which leisurely propelled these floating homes, the perils of the locks, Peter the Skye terrier, and Paul the bull-dog, who lodged on board (Peter, it appeared, was blessed with uproarious spirits; Paul, on the contrary, was a thoughtful dog—a dog to whom the fact that he did not possess an immortal soul was often a matter of sad and serious rumination); the beautiful trees which hedged the canal from end to end, except at places where, through breaks in the greenwood, you saw the hills, or the far-away sea—"the thea," as Dolly called it once, when at a well-remembered spot she asked Holdfast to lift her up in his arms, and there below them lay that clear shining heavenly streak of blue water which some of us love better than even the woman (or women) we adore. So the long summer day passed drowsily away, just as the country on either side of the tarry barge passed—a day spent somehow in a land of dreams. Once Dolly brought him bread and sweet milk, and once old Isaac, noticing how faint he looked, insisted on his drinking a tumbler of some mixture or other, around which lingered an ethereal aroma (as it seemed to his dulled senses—it was whisky and water, I believe), all of which Holdfast accepted in a dim, passive way, as we accept what is offered to us in the lethargy of prostrating illness. The keen excitement of yesterday had been succeeded by a sleepless night, and his whole intellectual being had broken down. The strangest fancies took possession of him—the most grotesque shapes danced before his eyes. Fancy and fact mixed themselves up in an inextricably puzzling way. He fancied that a marriage and a funeral were going on simultaneously, and he knew that he had to take part in one or other as principal, but in which he was uncertain. The hearse, he observed incidentally, was

a rather shabby one-horse vehicle, and he did not feel very anxious to occupy it—whereas the carriages, as they drove up with the young blushing bride and bridesmaids, were showy and brilliant; and upon the whole he came to think—Poor devil! if he is to be married or buried, the marriage is perhaps the more tolerable. But it was the (almost comical) *illusoriness* of the bridal festivities that most impressed his imagination, so that at last a feeling of dreamy utter disbelief took possession of him, as though some one had said to him, “Marriage to-day, death to-morrow. The festal procession is a mere clumsy disguise and mask, and—to give the pageant the least touch of reality—the last carriage with the last guest should be—a hearse. Our friends are in wedding-favours to-day; let the sun sink once or twice, and they will come back to the house with funeral scarves, and those abominable black gloves which they use at funerals.”

At length, as the last rays of the sun streamed through the trees, a deep sleep fell upon him, covering him, as Sancho Panza said, all over like a cloak.

IX.

HERE my story, properly speaking, closes. But the reader who has come patiently with me thus far would have reason to complain were I to leave him at the particularly rocky piece of road at which we have arrived. I do not wish you to suppose that the story which I have related ended as a tragic tale should end. On the contrary, I am willing to own that I have carried you past the stormiest passage in the life of Stephen Holdfast. The thunder-cloud had burst with fierce vehemence, but

it left the air clear and the sky serene. Holdfast was at last a *free* man. The Church which he had offered to serve had parted with him, and he might go where he listed. He knew now that he might have been a happier man had he left earlier and of his own free will. For a great burden was lifted from off his life—a burden of which he had been hardly conscious at the time, but which must have been heavy and grievous to bear, to judge from the elastic sense of liberty and release which followed its removal. Hitherto he had never been sure of his position, and he had laboured with a breathless impatience resembling the hectic ardour of fever: there rose now (instead of that somewhat lurid light) a bright, steady, continuous flame, burning but not consuming. And (if for one sentence I may be permitted to borrow the conventional language of the clerical world) I may add that his work under its new conditions was “blessed.” He was no longer an ordained minister in any Church which priestcraft had invented. The consecrating oil had been carefully wiped away. But no sentence which man could pronounce prevented him from being a true servant of the living God, a chosen minister in the Temple of the Most High; nor from conducting, among the wretched dwellers in the dark caves and filthy dens of the great city, a free and spiritual service—a service without priest and without ritual.

For Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

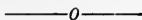
AMONG THE HIGH ALPS

BEING THE EPILOGUE

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high :—the power is there—
The still and solemn power of many sights
And many sounds, and much of life and death ;
In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
Upon that mountain : none beholds them there ;
Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
Or the star-beams dart through them ;—Winds contend
Silently there, and heap the snow with breath,
Rapid and strong, but silently ! Its home
The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
Over the snow. The secret strength of things
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee !
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind's imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy ?

—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

AMONG THE HIGH ALPS.



TO THE EDITOR.

A LETTER FROM THE BEL ALP.

THERE is unquestionably, my dear Editor, a singular charm about a chateau in Cloudland. It is something like living in heaven. All our days we have gazed enviously at the snowy clouds and the blue skies overhead, as at a world remote and inaccessible. And now the clouds are drifting along below our feet. We look, through a break in the thunderstorm, not at the stars twinkling in the firmament, but at the lights burning in the valley. The Philistines of the plains behold a blue-black veil of mist drawn lightly along the mountain-side; behind that veil, in the old time, the immortal gods were hidden. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* Olympus could not have been one-half so comfortable as the hotel on the Æggischhorn. The Bel Alp, with a famous philosopher discoursing largely over the sparkling pine-logs, is a more lively Walhalla. Pan is dead: and his place has been taken by the British tourist, Mr Smith.

“The goats may climb and crop
The soft grass on Ida’s top
Now Pan is dead.”

The sweet *un-reasonableness* of woman is never more manifest than when you meet her, like the herald Mercury, new-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill. Heine declares, in a charmingly graceful and characteristic passage, that he saw the young spring god, large as life, standing on the summit of an alp; and there is a whole covey of girls in the hotel just now, any one of whom might be taken, any day of the week, in the attitude of that blooming boy. With their petticoats gathered into a sort of beatified knickerbockers, these sweet girl-graduates of the Alpine Club prove themselves adepts on rock and ice. They have scaled every peak in the neighbourhood; and when you see them trooping home from the Sparren-horn in the gloaming—the alpenstock serving for bow and quiver—you think of Diana hunting with her nymphs, or stooping out of her cloud to clasp Endymion.

“Tell thee tales of love,—
How the pale Phœbe, hunting, in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies,—
How she conveyed him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night
To kiss her sweetest——”

But tales of love are scorned by our blue-eyed virginal climber; if you wish to strike a responsive chord in the heart which beats under the braces of her knickerbockers you must become a Tyndall or a Huxley; and enlarge, *purpureo ore*, on glaciers, and *névé*, and crevasses, and seracs, and moulins, and moraines, and berg-schrunds, and ice-tables, and ice-needles, and erratic blocks.

There can, however, be no doubt that the Bel Alp is one of the most delightful spots in this world (or out of it,

for that matter, so far as I know yet). It occupies what is called in advertisements "a fine airy situation,"—7130 feet above the sea. You have no idea of what a storm can be and do until you have felt it in this upper world. The wind actually *raves* round about us at such times. I use the word "rave" advisedly,—it is intended to signify that Boreas has entirely gone out of his senses, and is as mad as a hatter or a March hare. At any rate there is an ample store and a very lively interchange of ozone on our alp at all times, and that, I suppose, is what makes it so bracing. You feel the champagne in the air. You become electrical, and give out sparks like a cat. Even English dulness and stolidity cannot resist the infection,—there is a Scotchman here at present who has actually made a joke. (It has been sent home by parcel-post to the *Saturday Review*, with a request that the editor would ascertain whether it is a true joke, or only "wut.") The splendour of the mountain-peaks on the other side of the valley, rosy in the sunset, pallid in the moonrise, is enough by itself to drive an excitable man into a fit. There are moments when every one of us who can handle a brush rushes distractedly to his sketch-book. But the heavenly colour on mountain and sky is as intangible as the colouring of a dream. (And, by the way, pray remind me to ask Professor Huxley if there *be* any colouring in dreams. I suspect, for my own part, that dreamland, like moonland, has no positive tints, but only light and shade, and the grey mystery of an atmosphere "unquickened by the sun.") Then the turf at our feet is the most wonderful enamel-work ever put together, and the grass itself is like the grass in Paradise—that is, in Dante's vivid words, like emeralds newly broken. Add to all this the delicious pastoral music of Swiss alp or Scotch hillside,—

"The hum of bees in heather-bells,
And bleatings from the distant fells."

Yet, be it said frankly, a Swiss alp and a Scotch hillside are as different as possible. The lines I have quoted are Scotch to the core: they bring before us the hillside fragrant with heather and vocal with the bleatings of the black-faced. There are, of course, swarms of bees in a country like this where *fragrantia mella* is the only luxury for which you have not to pay; but there is no heather and few sheep, only the tinkle of innumerable cattle-bells. The scenery in Wordsworth's poems in like manner is strictly local, not to say sectarian. Even his mist is the mist of the Lakes, and of the Lakes only.

"Such gentle mists as glide
Curling with unconfirmed intent
On yon green mountain-side."

That is not the way in which a Swiss mist behaves itself—a Swiss mist exhibits none of the charming coquetry, of the maidenly indecision, which the Lake poet loved. Swooping down upon us as a *lämmergeier* swoops upon its prey, or flung aside in one breathless moment of delight, as when an Immortal casts aside her cloud, there is no leisure for the arch by-play which suits the other so well. Dip into Wordsworth anywhere, and you will find that he has entered too deeply into the spirit of his own mountains to have much understanding of the mountains of other people. He may comprehend Yarrow; but then Yarrow was his near neighbour.

"The grace of forest-charms decayed,
And pastoral melancholy."

"The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

No: neither of these (nor many others as perfect that might be quoted) are in the smallest degree characteristic of our Alp. The intense light, for one thing, is inconsistent with this tender pensiveness of the imagination. Then

the sleep that is among the lonely hills may fitly be enjoyed in the Lake country—the natural sense of repose not being driven away from these quiet solitudes by any disturbing influence. How different it is in Switzerland, where the tension on mind and body is seldom relaxed! We are in the midst of the mighty primeval activities of nature. The glacier cleaves its way through the valley; the avalanche is never silent. Sleep, indeed! Sleep at your peril! Nor do I think that even Byron himself struck the characteristic note of Alp or Apennine. The mystery of the Scotch hillside haunted his memory,—

“And Lochnagar with Ida looked o’er Troy.”

But there is one of Shelley’s shorter poems, which has been fearfully mutilated by the printer (some of it past recovery)¹ which, in four or five lines, presents us with a picture of all that is grandest, and noblest, and most peculiar in the scenery of the Alps:—

“There many a precipice

Frost and the sun, in scorn of mortal power,
Have piled;—dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower
And wall impregnable of beaming ice.”

Do not fancy, however, from what I have said, that Wordsworth is ever out of place. His scenery may be local; but the moral element is world-wide. The grave and lofty homeliness of his imagination, indeed, has somewhat obscured our perception of the supreme felicity of its presentation. Any casual reader will be surprised to find how much of Wordsworth has become proverbial, is in daily use, has been incorporated into the English language as presently spoken. Running the eye over his pages, we

¹ Shelley, however, has been admirably “restored” of late years,—my friend, Professor Spencer Baynes, having largely contributed to this happy reform by his well-known article in the *Edinburgh Review*.

find familiar phrases at every turn.—“But she is in her grave, and, oh! the difference to me”—“We feel that we are greater than we know”—“The light that never was on sea or land”—“The heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world”—“Sole-sitting by the shores of old romance”—“Plain living and high thinking are no more”—“An ampler ether, a diviner air,”—these, and countless others, we owe to the Bard of Rydal. This is the *curiosa felicitas* of speech: still it is a secondary, and not, as with Keats and Tennyson, a primary quality of the poem; and Wordsworth has been assimilated almost unconsciously—at least without direct recognition—by the English-speaking races.

What an afternoon! How silently the great peaks rise into the blue-black vault overhead! Yet even in this breathless summer-time we have a deliciously balmy breeze on our Alp. That is the advantage of a fine airy situation on the southern slopes of the Finster Aarhorn. Don't suppose, by the way, that I am an indiscriminate admirer of fine airy situations: a fine airy situation during a Swiss summer is one thing; a fine airy situation in your beastly and infernal climate (pardon the *Freeman-ism*) is another; the truth being, that in a country tormented by the devil in the shape of the east wind, shelter, adequate shelter, is the one thing needful.

And now, without further preamble—for the peaks of the Mischabelhörner are growing grey in the twilight, and the glow has faded out of the sky—here is the record of our rambles during the past summer (with its mere surmise or suspicion of a dawning romance that may be completed hereafter), which I promised to send you. *Euge et Vale!* or, as they say in the Gaelic—“May the Lord be long spared to preserve you.”

I.

THE CONSPIRACY.

THE Doctor was out of sorts; and his son-in-law, the "young doctor," as the country people designated him, decided that he must have change of air. The Doctor's youngest daughter, Nelly, had married John Markham, to whom the Doctor's practice had been made over, and John Markham had already made his mark in the profession. He was of a strong, rapid, self-reliant habit of mind, and no patient of his died because his medical adviser was slow, timid, or undecided. Yet his rapidity and decision were consistent with a very fine and accurate insight into the nature of disease, and a very cautious and deliberate judgment, and the right conclusion was thus arrived at with a suddenness which appeared like instinct. His manner to his patients was sharp, and at times, when he found that his instructions were being trifled with, even stern (he was not, as you see, a fine lady's doctor); but at home he unbent entirely, and was as frolicsome as a schoolboy during holiday-time.¹ He came across to my cottage one evening in early spring, his wife hanging lightly on his arm, and tripping in her elastic way at his side, and told me that they wanted me to join the conspiracy in which they were engaged.

"And that is——?" I inquired.

"To carry papa away for the summer," said Nelly; "and John says he will leave the last of his patients to die a natural death, and be papa's physician-in-ordinary for a month, and you are to come, and Freddy is wild about going up the Matterhorn, and everything is settled, except that papa won't leave his history, and we want you to persuade him."

So we started about the end of May—the Doctor, Mr and Mrs John Markham, the present writer, and Fred Hamilton, the Doctor's nephew of nineteen, son of a sister who had married and died abroad. Fred was in a state of riotous intoxication at the prospect of assailing the great Alpine giants, and had laid in a stock of blue spectacles and blue veils, wonderful

¹ The writer must have been thinking of the late Professor Syme when he sketched John Markham.

nails for his boots, a coil of Manilla rope, a haversack, an ice-axe, and an alpenstock. The ice-axe (which was fixed to the alpenstock) was always getting Freddy into trouble: it had a knack of tripping up its owner at railway stations and elsewhere; elderly French gentlemen hurriedly entering the carriage would sit down upon it (edge up) before it could be removed; and when we walked with it through the streets of Dijon, it aroused the susceptibilities of the party of order, as represented by a gigantic gendarme, in the cocked-hat of a commander-in-chief, who at a safe distance followed us home to our comfortable quarters at the Hotel de Jura.

II.

ON THE ROAD.

To cross the Jura range by Pontarlier and Neuchatel leisurely in the spring-time is one of the purest enjoyments I know. The train goes leisurely enough, it must be admitted, yet you will be repaid if you even linger behind it. The soft outlines of the dark fir-clad hills of the Jura are pleasant to the eye afar off, when you are still in the great plain of Burgundy; and when you come among them, the exquisite green foliage of the seedling oaks, the blue rocks striking through the turf, the villages in the glens below your feet, with their quaint picturesque steeples and high-roofed houses of a deep dark red or brown—such as Mesnay-Arbois—are things not quickly to be forgotten. And we, passing there in early June, were favoured with a special revelation; for when we had leisurely climbed up to the high table-land—a moorland woodland district, which lies as it were within the hills, a thousand feet above the plain on either side—we came suddenly upon millions and millions and millions of white lilies—the pale Narcissus—bending before the morning breeze, and scenting it with their perfume!

Then on the Swiss side, after passing the Fort of Joux and the frontier at Verviers, the descent into the Val Travers is simply glorious. The railway winds along the face of the mountain, and it seems at first as if we were hanging over the brink of a sheer precipice, with nothing between us and the bottom; but after a while this somewhat uncomfortable sensa-

tion wears off, and we find that we are being carried across torrents and through tunnels at a tremendous height above the plain, yet that all the time we are rapidly and smoothly descending towards the mouth of the narrow rocky gorge which opens on Neuchatel. Our day was perfect. Everything was seen at its very best. Such white clouds, such blue sky, such brown roofs, such hatfuls of flowers, such pines, such precipices! The richness of colour and the crispness of outline were worthy of an Italian valley.

And then, after we had dined, we sat on the terrace at Neuchatel, under the limes at sunset, and saw across the lake on the far horizon a crescent-like line of snow-white clouds. "Clouds," did I say? These are clouds which the breeze does not move, and which the whirlwind cannot scatter. These are the mighty peaks of the Central Alps, from Mont Blanc to the St Gothard.

III.

LIFE AT VEVEY.

THE Doctor was much amused by the kind of life that went on in the Grand Hotel at Vevey during the week we stayed there. At home the same sort of people would have made him indignant; but it is one of the advantages of travel that it turns us as it were into spectators, and, blunting that over-keen intensity of interest which we cannot help taking in the society to which we belong, replaces it by a philosophic and good-natured indifference. There were sharp Yankees, keen and thin as needles, and the stout British father and his pretty daughters, and polite Italians, and Polish counts, and Russian princesses. There were the inevitable old ladies who helped themselves unsparingly to every delicacy at *table d'hôte*, and seemed as if they were eating for a wager; and the invariable old beaus who purloined the newspapers, and furtively secreted *The Swiss Times* while they were engaged with *Galignani*. We lay upon the placid lake, and we read the Paris newspapers, and we listened to the band; and we had a boat which was called the "Boule Dogue," out of compliment to the English visitors; and the evenings were delicious; and there were fire-balloons and Bengal lights, and flirting, and fishing, and dancing,

and coffee, and ices, for those that liked them. There was a little Russian princess of about twelve, who fell violently in love with Fred, and would let him dance with no one else; and there was an old battered Major of Dragoons who sat next Mrs Markham at *table d'hôte*, and who admired her as much as if he had been the finest gentleman in the world (which I do think he was at heart, and in spite of his seedy coat).

But the feature of our life which most amused the Doctor was the American; and never a day passed without the arrival of an omnibus containing piles of enormous boxes (into any one of which you might have packed the wardrobe of a whole regiment of volunteers) belonging to the citizens of the great Republic. They were in tremendous force—men, women, and small children. Mrs Hiram Dodge, the rather too well known wife of the American Minister at Sorrento, was the greatest lady who graced the public table,—with the exception, to be sure, of the Tartar princesses, who, to do them justice, however, were as simple, unpretending, and good-humoured as if they had sprung from the democracy. Then a Boston beauty, Miss Lily Vanderloo, was the belle of our party, the undisputed star of the hotel. She had a marvellous fairness of skin, and a wonderful wealth of fair hair, which she twisted about her shapely little head in a bewildering fashion,

“ Like a clue of golden thread
Excellently ravellèd.”

All the men raved about her, but the favoured swain was a countryman of her own—the son of a New York millionaire, we were told—who leered at her in a way that was unpleasantly suggestive. The man was the very image of an emasculated satyr, and as such might have figured in Mr Hawthorne's book about the Faun. Fred, with the airy impertinence of youth, asked the beauty to dance with him (to the visible annoyance of the little savage from Moscow); and she did dance, and I fancy liked the boy, and his fresh spirits and rosy cheeks, for she told him that she would keep a waltz for him at the Fancy Ball which was coming off the week after; but, alas for Fred! this was his last evening at the Grand.

It was an exquisite evening—too exquisite for written words. Turn which way we would, it seemed as if every effect had been arranged by a consummate artist—the colours in the sky, the

shadows on the lake, the pier, the boats, the brown houses, the purple hills. To the rough taste of a northerner, the result was almost too faultless. One felt inclined to compare it irreverently to a picture painted on Dresden china. And Lily, hanging on Fred's stalwart arm, walked through the dark garden glades, and looked at the moon which was rising over Chillon, and very nearly turned the lad's head, I do believe.

Later in the evening, Markham and I, seated in the little aquatic arbour, were the involuntary auditors of a lively conversation about the forthcoming ball, carried on by a party of young men, who had sauntered down to the pier to smoke their cigars.

FIRST SPEAKER.—“Mrs Dodge tells me in confidence (so don't mention it) that she is going in the dress of her ancestress, Eva, Countess of Monmouth.”

SECOND SPEAKER.—“If she must be genealogical and aristocratic, why don't she go in the dress of her ancestress Eve?”

At which there was a general laugh.

FIRST SPEAKER.—“With or without the fig-leaves?”

SECOND SPEAKER.—“Oh, after the Fall, of course.”

At which *double entendre* there was another laugh.

THIRD SPEAKER.—“And the relationship to Eve, I expect, is more direct than to the Countess.”

They turned towards the house, and as they passed us we recognised three of the American Minister's wife's most particular friends. Such is friendship—at a Swiss Hotel.

IV.

THE NORTHERN PASSES.

THERE is a little-known mule-track which travellers going from the Lake of Geneva to the Oberland would do well to take—once in a way. It keeps to the north of the great mountain-range (of which the Diablerets, the Wildstrubel, and the Wildhorn are the most conspicuous masses) which separates the valley of the Rhone from Northern Switzerland. Leaving the railway at Aigle, we went up to the Hotel de Diablerets; then by the Col de Pillon to Gsteig; by the Kringen Pass to Lauenen; by the Trüttlisberg to An-der-Lenk; by the Hahen-

moos to Adelboden, and so to Frutigen, Spiez, and Interlaken. We spent a week on the road among these northern German-Protestant valleys; and we came to like the pleasant homely people, and the pleasant hospitable inns. They are off the beaten track, and are still simple, rustic, primitive, and unhackneyed. As we approached Adelboden we mixed with groups of plain honest farming folk on their way to church, who might have been taken elsewhere for douce shrewd pawky Calvinistic Scotsmen, and the vigorous but rather uncouth manner in which they sang their rough vernacular version of the psalm which declares that God's faithfulness standeth like the great mountains tended to increase the resemblance. The massive mountain-wall is somewhat flat as a rule: but the Wildstrubel and the Wildhorn are wild and romantic, and the path leads through shady pine-forests, and across pleasant pastures—over which crags and glaciers rise gleaming into the sky.

V.

THE HASLI THAL.

THE Giessbach does not throw itself over the precipice at one bound, as a waterfall is expected to do; but, like the roads of the country, descends in zigzags. Thus the white silvery gleam of its waters is discovered at unexpected intervals among the dark firs, and the effect is most successful. Lovely little Greek temples dotted about the mountain-side (one might say, if fancifully inclined), only instead of marble pillars from Pentelicus, snow-white columns of foam, and blue-green pines instead of the acacia and the olive. All day long we lay upon the high table-land (near where they have built the hotel) listening to the chirp of the grasshoppers and the murmur of the waterfalls; eating an occasional ice, smoking an occasional cigarette, and occasionally indulging in a mild fit of amazement at the delightfulness of this wicked world.

We rowed across the lake in the afternoon, and, landing at Brienz, were met by the ponies which we had ordered to convey us up the Hasli Thal, and through the Oberland—a pony for Nelly, another for the Doctor, a third for his books and our knapsacks,—while the rest of us, Fred, Markham, and I, went afoot.

The evening at Reichenbach was one long to be remembered. The hills above Brienz were blue and purple—blue above, purple below; overhead rose the dark woods and frowning heights of the Reichenbach, and the crescent moon visible that night for the first time; on the other side of the valley the base of the snowy Titlis range lay white and cool in a light compounded of moonlight and twilight and snowlight. We sat out very late in front of the hotel, talking of the morrow and all the wonders it would bring.

For we had not yet entered within the sanctuaries of the hills. But next morning we were to quit the plain, and climb the almost inaccessible cliff (as it seemed) that now lay in deep shadow behind the inn. And as we gazed, a single star of singular lustre suddenly appeared above the crags. On such a night (the western sky still suffused by the delicate orange of the sunset), only a star of the first magnitude could make itself visible. But to our excited imagination this was more than a star. One of the pale immortals who maintain their ancient empire among the Alpine solitudes had blazed out upon us through the twilight;—

“ And when he raised his lance,
Up Hesperus rose among the evening stars !”

VI.

THE UPLAND VALLEYS.

THE mule-path up the steep buttress of rock over which the Reichenbach torrent precipitates itself, is, with the exception of that between Brieg and the Bel Alp, the worst in Switzerland. It rather tries the nerves of a neophyte who does not know that these Bernese ponies can scramble up anything. But the ascent to the high table-land on which Rosenlauri stands is soon made, and then a new world is reached—a high upland valley, where the sweet mountain pasture is enriched with innumerable flowers, where there are cows and goats and mountain sheep and shepherds and *châlets*, and where the complete round of pastoral life proceeds three or four thousand feet above the level of the plain below. The early morning air was deliciously

clear, and the first view of the Wellhorn and the Wetterhorn—glittering pyramids of ice, rising from the dark blue of the pine into the lucid blue of the sky—was a delightful surprise, even to those of us who had been across the pass before. And the jagged peaks of the Engelhörner—reft and torn into weird and fantastic shapes—which rise directly from the path, threw a deep cool shadow about us, which added to the brilliant whiteness of the great mountains.

At the nice little inn at Rosenlauri we made a very agreeable addition to our party. Whilst breakfast was preparing they brought us the visitor's book. It was early in the season for the higher passes; and very few tourists, with the exception of one or two German students and Alpine Club-men, appeared to have preceded us. But among the arrivals on the previous day we found the names of "Colonel and Miss Dorothy Vernon;" and we learned that they had not yet gone on, and were to dine at the *table d'hôte* that day. During the afternoon we scrambled up to the Rosenlauri glacier by a path which is scraped out of the *débris*—the riven and serrated ridge of the Engelhörner rising magnificently overhead—but which the winter rains had almost entirely washed away. Nelly was assisted over the worst places by a boyish bright-eyed little guide we had picked up—Gaspar Bossli by name (so he spelt it at least, and he was very proud of being able to spell)—her own particular pony and guide, Lisa and Christian Richart, having been left to refresh themselves at the inn. On our way back, we came quite suddenly upon a young lady, who was sketching a clump of firs and rocks picturesquely situated on the margin of the rivulet. She was so engrossed with her work that she did not notice us; and we could only make out that her figure was slight and girlish, for the Swiss hat which she wore, of a Dolly Varden pattern, entirely concealed the half-averted face. Fred, without seeing it, was ready to swear that it was lovely. He was right. When we went into the *salle-à-manger*, we found a tall, erect, soldierly-looking old gentleman, with a mild eye and a white moustache (the very image of Richard Doyle's Colonel Newcome) seated at the top of the table, and at his side—Miss Dorothy Vernon. Such a sweet face! Such a frank, fearless, honest smile! Such a profusion of flossy, glossy, light-brown hair! Such bright eyes! Such rosy cheeks!—and yet redeemed from any suspicion of rusticity by the delicate life of the complexion! She wore no

ornament of any kind (except a high, scrupulously clean, quaintly-embroidered collar), but a face like hers—

“A face that’s best
By its own beauty drest”—

needs none.

Poor Fred! He could not keep his eyes off this astonishing apparition. Before the evening was over (and we all walked down by the side of the rocky torrent to the hamlet of Breitenmatt, where the shepherds were milking their goats) he was hopelessly enslaved.

Nor was the Colonel less successful with the Doctor. This mild old gentleman (who, as we learned afterwards, had done some of the hardest fighting in India against the Sikhs) was a man after the Doctor’s heart.

“My daughter and I are rovers by instinct,” said the Colonel, as they sat together next day in front of the baths—“natural vagabonds. Though I am seventy-six in August, I don’t feel the slightest inclination to lay up; and Dorothy delights in running about with me. So we wander leisurely over Europe—now in Rome, now in Naples, now on the Riviera, now among the Swiss mountains. We are keen sketchers, both of us, though Dorothy took to it mainly to keep me in countenance. Ah, life is very pleasant!” continued the Colonel, lighting up; “and I thank God that He still enables me to enjoy it. My daughter and I are always busy. We fill our sketch-books during summer among the hills, and we finish them during winter, when we make ourselves snug in our pleasant lodgings on the Corso or the Lung Arno.”

VII.

THE CRAGS OF THE WETTERHORN.

THE sun was still low behind the peaks of the Engelhörner when I started next morning to walk to the great Scheideck—alone. The rest of the party were to start an hour or two later (Fred hearing that the Vernons were to join us, rather unceremoniously threw me over), and I promised to wait for them at the top of the pass. I did not regret my solitude. Never are

the great mountains so impressive as when we see them in the early morning, with no human creature near us. And at that season, the flocks not having been driven to the upper pastures, the *châlets* beyond Rosenlaur were untenanted, and I met no one until I reached the obnoxiously dirty little inn on the great Scheideck. The morning was very still. As I mounted through the pine-woods I heard the shrill cry of the marmot, and a brilliant kind of jay kept chattering close to me upon the trees. Ever and again tremendous explosions took place among the hills—like the rattle of musketry rising into the roar of artillery—the avalanches of the Wetterhorn. The lower precipices of that astonishing mountain were still in deep shade, but the snow upon the highest peak reflected the sunrise. It rose up in the sacredness of the dawn, in the profound serenity of the early morning, pure, virginal, inviolate!

“A privacy of glorious light is thine!”

The reader of Tennyson will recollect how habitually he attaches to such a scene the attribute of silence. “Three *silent* pinnacles of aged snow;” “the *silent* summit overhead;” “morn from his cold crown and crystal *silence* creeping down.” The imagination acknowledges the appropriateness of an epithet which describes with poetic if not with literal exactness, the effect which the pathetic loneliness of these pathless peaks produces upon the mind.

In charming contrast with the pale ethereal purity of the mountains, are the rich colours of the Alpine flowers which bloom at their feet. It is a novel sensation to gather our winter flowers on the 20th of June! The snow was still lying in heavy wreaths below the inn, yet wherever it had begun to melt, the flowers made themselves visible. Crocus, gentian, auricula, pansy, and (among the pines) the rich clusters of the Alpine rhododendron! Crocus, yellow and purple; gentian, blue; auricula, purple and red; pansy, purple; rhododendron, carmine;—with such wealth and glory of colour do these high solitudes charm the stray tourist who comes before the spring flowers fade.

I was searching for wild flowers when I reached the summit of the pass. I raised my head. The mighty wall of the Wetterhorn still rose grandly above me; but there, beneath my feet—four thousand feet below—lay the beautiful Grindelwald Valley. The snowy pinnacles of the Eiger and the Mönch—each kingly

as a monarch—glittered in the morning sunshine,—a long line of snowy heights fading away in the blue distance. It is a scene which, even in Switzerland, has few rivals.

Sublime! But it was not until we were descending into the Grindelwald Valley that the immensity of the power, natural or supernatural, which had reared that stupendous battlement, was distinctly brought home to us. A sheer wall of rock, without a ledge or crevice on which a chamois can find footing, rises up to a height of many thousand feet. It is roofed in, so to speak, by a perilously overhanging cornice of ice. The upper pastures, through which the road descends steeply along the very base of the precipice, are rich with flowers; there is a sweet uninterrupted tinkling of cattle-bells overhead and around; and cows and goats and sheep—game-like Alpine creatures—look curiously at us as we pass. Here, with all the sounds of pleasant pastoral life about us,—here at last we are truly “under the shadow of the avalanche.” It was none of the great passages in the Psalms which extol the power of the Almighty that came into my mind, as I looked up at that tremendous wall of rock,—it was that unique poem, by William Blake—“The Tiger”—which Charles Lamb has justly called “glorious.” I am acquainted with no other piece of writing, prose or poetry, which so vivifies the feelings which such a scene is calculated to excite. “O thou tremendous and unspeakable Power, these are Thy works, these terrible ravines, these cruel rocks! Does any law restrain Thy hand? Art Thou at once implacable and irresponsible? I am but dust in Thy sight,—wilt Thou crush me in Thy fierce anger and hot displeasure?” And as we ask these questions, we see the pale crocus at our feet gently freeing itself from the sod,—the delicate crocus, which some divine pity has preserved unharmed through the perils and severities of an Alpine winter eight months long; and we hear the tinkle of the sheep-bells and the bleating of the lambs.

Though not much of a climber, I can quite understand the passion of the mountaineer. To enter into the soul of the mountains we must mix with them, and this high and perilous converse is full of charm. We may look at them from the outside, and declare that they are grand and noble; but until we pass the portals of that austere snow-world, of those vast snow-fields which lie behind and around the great peaks, we cannot truly know them and love them. To the stranger who crosses any of

the passes which skirt its borders, that world appears impenetrable, impregnable,—a virgin territory not to be trodden by mortals. The precipice shows no ledge,—the glacier is a sheer buttress of ice. This mountain fortress, within which vast forces carry on an elemental warfare, cannot, it seems, be stormed. Yet the cunning hunter and the daring cragsman do successfully invade its most awful solitudes; and the members of the Alpine Club are as well known to the *genius loci* as the chamois or the lämmergeyer. Nor can it be maintained that the really splendid intrepidity and endurance which are shown in the pursuit are entirely fruitless,—a consideration which may recommend it to those who are always looking for results, and who will not admit that pure enjoyment is an end in itself. The Alpine Club-men—Leslie Stephen and his comrades—are the real road-makers of the High Alps. The great Oberland snow-field, for instance, is no longer an impassable barrier interposed between Berne and the Valais. These two districts, which a few years ago were able to communicate by two passes only, forty miles apart,—the Grimsel and the Gemmi,—have been brought close together by routes which are available to any active pedestrian with a good guide.

“That is the Gleckstein,” said an Alpine climber who had joined our party at the Scheideck, pointing overhead. “I shall sleep there to-night, and to-morrow I go on to the Grimsel.”

That night a thunderstorm, coming up the valley as the dark fell, broke over the village of Grindelwald, and spent itself among the mountains behind,—the lightning lighting up the Wetterhorn from its base to its summit, and the thunder echoing from valley to valley.

We sat out on the pleasant covered terrace of the Bär, and watched the advance of the storm.

THE DOCTOR.—“You recollect the lines in *Hyperion*—

“ ‘ There was a listening fear in her regard,
As if calamity had but begun;
As if the vanward clouds of evil days
Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
Was with its stored thunder labouring up.’ ”

MARKHAM.—“How our poor friend Hunter enjoyed these lines, and how he used to roll them out! I never hear them now without thinking of his pleasant face, his jovial humour, and his inherited delight in Keats. When I come across any new

piece of wit or poetry which seems good, I find myself saying involuntarily, 'I will show this to Hunter;' and then—and then—one recollects how it is, and that he, and ever so many of the old set, have gone away into the darkness outside. (I wonder how they like it?) Ah, well; but Keats was a miraculous creature."

THE DOCTOR.—"Yes,—Keats at least cannot be explained away. This apothecary's apprentice sits down with pen and paper before him, and the language and the idea shape themselves forthwith without visible effort or perceptible method into the most comely and perfect forms. There is the inevitableness of instinct about his work—no weakness, nor shortcoming, nor hesitation, nor delay—he works as nature works, when she fashions her shells and shapes her crystals. What a flash that was!"

A vivid flash of blue lightning, a tremendous peal of thunder, and a downpour of rain sent us inside. Nelly and Miss Vernon had already gone to bed, the rest now disappeared; and as Fred and I smoked a final cigar in the billiard-room, he assured me confidentially that we were in tremendous luck to have met such a splendid old gentleman as Colonel Vernon, and such a peerless girl as his daughter Dorothy.

VIII.

A WET DAY ON THE KLEIN SCHEIDECK.

It rained bitterly all night, and next morning when we met at breakfast it looked unpromising enough. The rain and the wind were coming down in furious gusts, and thick mists hung about the mountains and drifted across the valley. We loitered disconsolately about the hotel-door for an hour or two, and then we ordered the ponies and started for the Klein Scheideck, feeling that movement of any kind was preferable to this dismal inactivity. Dorothy, with her waterproof hood drawn over her hat, looked particularly nice; and Fred, walking by her side, appeared thoroughly to enjoy the rain. The pony she rode proved rather skittish this morning, and on one occasion actually made up its mind *to lie down*, side-saddle and all, with the view of enjoying the luxury of a roll in the wet grass. Fred was

fortunately at hand, and caught the young lady in his arms, just as the pony was in the act of turning over. The rest of us struggled on manfully. Impenetrable mists hung round the mountains above us. A stupendous invisible warfare was going on among these mists; but the avalanches did not come our way. At one point, indeed, the path lay through a great snow mass which had fallen from the Eiger during the previous week; and when we neared the inn we found that the road had been cut through snow six or eight feet deep, and was heaped up on each side to a great height. When we reached the final ascent we heard shouting overhead, and saw a human being gesticulating wildly. This proved to be the landlord of the little mountain inn on the summit of the pass, who was seeking to inform us that the usual track had been rendered impassable by the sleet and snow which had fallen during the night, and that we would require to make a considerable detour—which we accordingly did. We had come early in a very late season (one of the latest on record, I believe), and here, as elsewhere, we found the snow a considerable hindrance. Apart from such little inconveniences, however, the month of June is delicious among the Alps, and the inn people make you far more comfortable than they do (or can do) during the “season,” when hosts of tourists jostle each other over the passes, and there is a constant crowding and crushing, very trying to the temper and very fatal to peaceful enjoyment.

The rain ceased for about a quarter of an hour after we reached the inn, and the mists rose. But it was only a momentary gleam, and during the whole of the afternoon the sleet descended and the wind blew. But my recollections of that afternoon are by no means unpleasant. We had the whole house to ourselves, and we came actually to feel a kindness for the homely little inn, with its blazing wood-fire on the hearth on Midsummer day, and its warming-pans in the beds on Midsummer night. There was a stout, good-natured, and communicative Swiss girl who waited on us, who heaped pine-logs plentifully on the dogs, and made the *salle-à-manger* as bright and cheerful within as the day outside was cheerless and gloomy. This *salle-à-manger* (6768 feet above the sea) commands a view (when visible) such as is hardly to be seen elsewhere in Europe. It has two windows, and from the one we look down upon the peaceful Grindelwald valley, with its wall of unbroken rock from the Wetterhorn to

the Eiger; and from the other, on the Trümmletenthal, and the mighty flanks of the Jungfrau.

The great Painter,

“ who dips
His pencil in the gloom of thunder and eclipse,”

appeals to a wide audience; for there are certain stormy depths in every strong human soul which are stirred by the war of the elements. We may be sure that there is some defect in the brain of the man who cannot snatch a fearful joy from the tumult of the waves or the passion of the hurricane. “He could hold no communion with the storm,” is one of Miss Brontë’s charges against Graham Bretton. She herself must have been almost nervously alive to such influences, as may indeed be very clearly inferred from the wonderful sentence in the earliest chapter of *Jane Eyre*. “At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.” Such a feeling of *wet storm* as these few words disclose is highly characteristic of a writer whose enjoyment of nature must have been closely allied to pain. “It was a day of winter east wind,” she says in *Villette*, “and I had now for some time entered into that dreary fellowship with the winds and their changes, so little known, so incomprehensible to the healthy.” Taken together, these two sentences throw a vivid light upon the imaginative action of Miss Brontë’s mind. The spell of the imagination was very potent upon her; sometimes she invited it, sometimes she dreaded it: but it might not be disobeyed even when it tormented her. But we had no Jane Eyres among us, and it was with a feeling of positive exhilaration, I believe, that we heard the hail beating against the window-panes, and the wind roaring in the chimney.

Miss Vernon and Nelly established themselves at one of the windows, finishing some unfinished sketches; Fred hovered about them; the rest of us gathered round the pine-logs, whose aromatic flavour pervaded the apartment.

The Colonel had not been much of a general reader; but his acquaintance with some of the old English dramatists—Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and Shakespeare—was surpris-

ingly particular and minute. He was always ready with some apt quotation from one or another of his favourite authorities. Was it fire that we wanted? Then what could approach Melantius's address to Amintor in the *Maid's Tragedy*?

“ Amintor—

Think what thou dost! I dare as much as valour,
But 'tis the king—the king—the king, Amintor,
With whom thou fightest.”

Was it tenderness? Then where out of Beaumont and Fletcher could you find such exquisitely tender words as these?—

“ Those have most power to hurt us that we love;
We lay our sleeping lives within their arms.”

Was it nobleness of sentiment? What nobler than Zenonica's

“ Virtue is never wounded, but I suffer!”

The starlight suggested Lollia Paulinia,

“ When she came in like starlight hid with jewels;”

the day-break, such delightful passages as occur in that most sylvan and sunshiny of pastorals, *The Faithful Shepherdess*,—

“ See the day begins to break,
And the light shoots like a streak
Of subtle fire; the wind blows cold
While the morning doth unfold.
Now the birds begin to rouse,
And the squirrel from the boughs
Leaps to get him nuts and fruit.”

And so on, and on, and on, into the deep glades of the forest, where, “ under a broad beech's shade,” the great Pan lies asleep.

But that night we talked mainly of the Dolomites.

IX.

AMONG THE DOLOMITES.

THE Vernons had come from Venice by the Ampezzo Thal, and the strange magic of its mountains was still upon them. They told us their story in snatches as we travelled together, and it ran somehow thus:—

We left the outside world at Conegliano, where we engaged an einspanner which we kept till we reached Cortina. The country to Ceneda is as flat as a pancake; but Ceneda itself is a reminiscence of Venice—there are such charming little scraps of the old Venetian architects to be found in its streets and piazzas. We passed the first night at a small *albergo* near Santa Croce—a strange, uncouth, solitary house. But the landlady was blithe and buxom, and the charges were ridiculously small, and we slept in high old-fashioned beds in the attics quite comfortably, though Dorothy dreamt of brigands. The whole country thereabouts is *eerie*—stony, desolate, God-forgotten—the houses cracked by recent earthquake, propped up by huge wooden beams, and looking as if another shake would reduce them to utter ruin. Yet the little bits of water—even the Lago Morto—are wonderfully blue, and the people (the children and young girls especially being of a most rare and noble type of beauty) are surprisingly handsome. The true Venetian comeliness, indeed, is to be found now only in the valley which so long was part and parcel of Venice—certainly not in Venice itself, where the women are extremely plain. Next day we drove up to Cadore, where Titian was born, through a valley which the yellow turbid Piave has covered with mud and stones. It is not till one mounts to the upper valley from Perarolo—a tremendous pull—that the glory of the Ampezzo Thal discloses itself. But from Cadore till it joins the Pustherthal at Toblach, it is probably the most singular and striking valley in Europe. These grand Dolomite peaks, which rise up in weird procession on either hand—the Pelmo, the Antelao, Sorapis, Tofano, Croda Rossa—are not of this world. The architecture of Pandemonium!—at least of some primeval, disorderly, titanic force of which we have nowhere else in this orderly old world any other memorial. It is with a feeling of absolute awe that we see afar off, spectral in the sunset, these splintered, fantastic pinnacles,—a feeling which grows more vivid when we enter the mysterious valley in which such weird pranks have been played. Among these devils' rocks a witches' Sabbath might be held—no doubt was, before all the witches were abolished. Not till we reach Hollenstein, however, is the valley at its grimmest, Cortina itself, the Dolomite capital, lying in a fair and fertile strath. The mountains stand back and leave you room to breathe; yet are they not so distant, but that the boom of the great bell of

the campanile is heard in all their valleys. A child playing with matches in the barn had burned down Ghedina's Hotel, where the frescoes by the artist-son were really fine, and so we stayed at the Stella d'Oro "conditta dalle Sorelli Barbaria." The sisters are proud of their Venetian descent, and the house is daintily adorned with old Venetian furniture and old Murano glass, with the arms of the Barbaria figured upon it: still they are as attentive as if they had no noble connections, and the trout from the Misurina Lake, and the black-cock from the Caprile pine-woods were cooked in an unexceptionable manner. We were quite alone in the valley,—an enterprising Yankee—"Moses A. Dropsie of Philadelphia, U.S."—having left before we arrived. It is worth while to climb the southern heights to see the Marmolata—the Queen of the Dolomites—and the Civetta; but the walk across the Tre Croce to Landro is not to be surpassed. We had a fine spring day for our ramble,—waves of mist, indeed, were surging through the passes, and clinging to the higher cliffs; but mist, if not too densely opaque, rather adds to the strange glamour of these Dolomite mountains. Until we reached the summit of the pass, we found the mule-track free of difficulty (on *that* side it was exposed to the sun); but from the three crosses till we sighted the Lago Misurina, we waded through deep snow. On the summit, just beyond the crosses, several prodigious crags of Dolomite have been discharged from the mountain overhead—the Christallo—and there they lie like huge cannon-balls across the road. It is impossible to say how long they have lain there, for they are covered with vegetation—an aged pine, rooted in a fissure, springing from the most massive. We pass through a noble pine-wood; a deep trench lies at our feet, with a brawling stream in its depths; and on the opposite side rises the wonderful *cirque* of the Croda Malcora—a gleaming crescent of rock and snow down which the avalanches thunder. There is no human creature in all that spacious valley,—no one except ourselves and the cuckoo, whose friendly note that day amid these ghostly solitudes sounded remote and unfamiliar. You know the kind of day—one of those miraculous spring mornings among the mountains, when the mist is dry and buoyant, and penetrated with sunshine. The lower snow-slopes shone brilliantly in the transparent light, and ever and again the great peaks were translated from partially-veiled phantoms into

shapes of dazzling distinctness. In the evening we came down upon Landro, a pleasant, homely post-house, where stout little Baur and his comely motherly wife (you will find their portraits painted by Ghedina in the best bedroom) gave cordial welcome to the first birds of passage of the season. A great Carinthian hound (Luc by name) sleeps summer and winter outside the door. There are splendid black-cock among the woods up yonder on the road to the Drei Zinnen—one is shot next morning, and brought in for us to admire. All night the Christallo is visible from our bedroom window, reflected in the Dürren See—a spectral presence dimly revealed to us by the forlorn light of the waning moon, which we had seen, in its full glory, a week before at Venice. There is a break in the valley-line just opposite the post-house—made on purpose, it might seem—into which the Drei Zinnen fit with mathematical exactness; and the Drei Zinnen, the three weird sisters, are the consummate flowers of Dolomite architecture. And then, bidding farewell to our kindly hosts, and promising that we would one day return, we enter the deep trench that leads to the Pustherthal. The profound shadow cast by a wall of rock two thousand feet in height, comes down upon us suddenly; but the shadow creeps slowly up the opposite face, and the eastern peaks keep the sun-glow for long. We left them behind us still brilliant with carmine, rising effulgently into the frosty silence of the gathering night. And then away along the pleasant Pustherthal to the great fortress of Franzensfeste, and over the Brenner to Innsbruck, which we found in a blaze of glory by reason of a snowstorm which had whitened all the mountains round about,—these mountains from which in winter the wolves, they say, look down into its streets. A delightful land!

“Yes,” echoed Markham, “a delightful land and a delightful people. I love these southern Germans, so homely in their lives, so romantic in their aspirations and surroundings. The Tyrol is the home of romance.”¹

¹ One charming district of Southern Germany has not been touched upon in these papers—the lakes and valleys and mountains of North-west Tyrol and the Salzkammergut. Here is a route I can recommend—Calais, Brussels, Andernach, Heidelberg, Ulm, Augsburg, Salzburg, Ischl, Aussee, Hallstadt, Gosau Schmeid, Zwiesel Alp, Golling, Lend, Gastein, Bruck (where there is a first-rate hotel at the station opened this summer), Fusher Bad (a good centre for excursions along the northern spurs of the Gross Glockner—the

“Yes,” replied the Colonel, “the northern Germans, the Prussians in particular, are boors and bears in comparison.”

“We were persecuted by a party of them at Friburg the other day,” Markham went on; “but our friend here consoled us by suggesting that a people which can conquer the world is released from the restraints of common politeness.”

“Their unpleasantness,” the Doctor observed, “is only too manifest; but, after the worst is said, the triumph of Germany must remain a momentous fact to us all. It is undoubtedly a good thing to have in the centre of the Continent a great, moderate, sensible, domestic, hard-thinking, hard-hitting, patient, pacific, yet valiant people. It is an immense element of stability for Europe, and Europe still means the world.”

X.

THE VALLEYS OF THE WEISSHORN.

ABOUT a week later, having struggled from the terribly solitary inn at Schwarenbach along the shores of a frozen lake through deep snow, I found myself alone on the summit of the Gemmi. There is a picturesque range of rocks with which I am well acquainted on the north-eastern seaboard of Scotland. Though apparently inaccessible, the cragsman knows that there are one or two narrow tracks, originally made by smugglers, which can be traversed without much difficulty. But when you bring a stranger to the edge of the cliff, and point to the boat that is rocking on the surf far below, and looking back as you suddenly disappear over the face of the precipice, tell him, in an unconcerned tone, to follow you, the chance is that he starts back in consternation, and refuses to embark on such a madcap expedition. Somewhat similar is the feeling one experiences when the road over the Gemmi reaches the summit of the limestone precipice above Leukerbad. It is a vertical wall of rock not less than two thousand feet in height. The pines at its base are scarcely distinguishable, and Leukerbad looks like a toy-village. It is almost impossible to grand Vischbachhorn being in the immediate vicinity), Saalfalden, Lofer, Wimbachthal, Berchtisgaden, Konigsee, Rosenheim, Munich, Ratisbon, Nurenberg, Aschaffenburg, and then down the Rhine to the Belgian towns—Louvain, Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, and Oudenarde.

believe that one of the great Swiss highways is carried down this perpendicular wall. Yet so it is;—this giddy precipice is traversed by a road up which a lady may ride. Up and round and across a cleft in the rock, it wheels and turns and twists itself in an amazing serpent-like manner, showing infinite patience, pliability, and resource, appropriating every inch of foot-way, and though never actually failing, or truly retreating, ever ready, on the other hand, to shift its course when it is plain that further direct progress is barred. All honour to the men who made it—they must have been directed by a stout heart and an infinitely ingenious head.

As I stood upon the edge of the cliff, a few drops of rain fell, and almost immediately afterwards I heard a deep growl of thunder overhead. It was time to descend. But I had descended only a few hundred feet when I was nearly carried off my legs by a sudden gust of wind. My wideawake disappeared into infinite space, and I felt as if I must follow it. I had actually to hold on by the rock to prevent myself from being blown into the valley—it was like walking on air. The blast roared madly up that infernal chimney. An occasional flash of lightning lit up the cavern-like gloom. The nearest human creature was two thousand feet below. Daylight was failing; darkness was approaching. Let me die in the sunlight, I said, in the words of the old hero; and thereupon began to crawl cautiously along the steep and narrow footpath. The wind, luckily, fell as quickly as it had risen; but I had seen enough to assure me that a storm among the High Alps must be an event to be remembered.

We had a magnificent drive next day down the gorge of the Dala,—a trench driven by some Titanic plough. The rest of us got into a vast old-fashioned conveyance which the landlord of the hotel provided; but Fred was permitted to take charge of a light little wicker-work pony-carriage, in which Dorothy had installed herself. Fred was in a state of ineffable enjoyment, and I think Dorothy liked it too. They soon fell behind; and on arriving at Susten, half an hour after us, Fred's explanation was not very coherent, and Dorothy, if I am not mistaken, blushed rather more than was necessary, or than is usual with that sedate young woman.

At Susten, after a pleasant luncheon in the pleasant hotel where the Simplon diligence stops for five minutes on its way

to Italy, our party divided—the elderly gentleman and the ladies going on direct to the Bel Alp, while the rest of us made a dash into the southern valleys. With a sunburnt, tawny, wiry, talkative little fellow of a guide—Joseph Ticelli of Visp by name—to carry our knapsacks, we climbed up the steep mule-track that leads into the Val d'Annivers. Lord Lytton relates, in *King Arthur*, if I am not mistaken, the legend of a people which, in the centre of Europe, remained pagan long after the Cross had been carried to its remotest islands; and there is a tradition that the inhabitants of the Val d'Annivers, in their unknown and inaccessible retreat, were not converted from paganism until quite lately—three or four centuries ago. Before the mule-track was formed, it must certainly have been extremely difficult for the natives (except an occasional chamois) to communicate with the outer world. The rocks are quite precipitous, and the Navisanche makes its way through a profound and gloomy gorge into which the sunshine never penetrates—a mere inaccessible cleft in the rocks. Yet it is not surprising that the people were contented and unadventurous: for their valley is one of the richest and most beautiful in the Alps. We reached Zinal while the evening light was dying off the great mountains at the head of the valley, which had risen whitely before us through rock and pine during the whole afternoon. The inn at Zinal is cheerful and bustling, and they made room for us somehow or other; and early next morning we were afoot on our way across the Durand glacier to the Arpitteta Alp. The Arpitteta Alp is one of the great places of Switzerland. An amphitheatre surrounded on three sides by a magnificent range of mountains, such as some of us had seen in Skye among the Coolin Hills,—Corrie-na-Cree, for instance, of which, indeed, it reminded us not a little. But instead of the comparatively low range of the Coolins, here are some of the greatest mountains in Europe; and one—the Weisshorn—which for pure, severe, vestal beauty is chief among mountains as the Venus of Milo is chief among women. The splendid ranges of snowy precipice that run for miles along the horizon are the crags of the Weisshorn,—that peerless pyramid being, of course, its crowning peak. Along the whole of the mighty ridge that encloses us the chamois ranges; but the tremendous wall has been scaled by mortal men at two points only. That is the Moming pass, and this is the Trift Joch. The spirit of the mountains descends upon us as we press eagerly for-

ward. A sort of divine madness overtakes us. It is, indeed, a sublime spot,—every element of the picture adding to its impressive solemnity. The mute silence of the heavens! The pathetic seclusion of the gigantic forlorn cliffs! The pathless solitudes of the untrodden snow! The ominous echoes of the avalanche! How is it that such things touch us at times with a pang that is not pain, and yet is almost too keen and sharp for pleasure? Is it possible that in some such passionate ecstasy of the spirit we pass through death into the life beyond death?

“ Felicitous annoy as bitter sweet
 As when the virgin band, the victors chaste,
 Feel at the close the earthly garments drop,
 And rise with something of a rosy shame
 Into immortal nakedness.”

Next day we retraced our steps along the watershed to St Luc, or Luc, as the country people call it. It seemed at first as if the inn was closed; but after a little delay “Mademoiselle” appeared and gave us cordial greeting. We were the first visitors of the season, and the resources of the establishment were good-naturedly lavished upon us. Next morning we had an exciting tramp (for the season was late here as elsewhere, and the snow still lay heavily in the upland valleys) to the summit of the Bella Tolla, from which we again beheld, amid a wilderness of shining peaks—rising into the blue of the morning in pale ethereal divineness—the vestal cone of the Weisshorn. Once again its likeness to some pure marble figure unstained through all the ages was too obvious to be unrecognised by us. We slept at St Luc, and then fought our way across the Meiden pass. Though a high pass—9500 feet or thereby—Gruben in the Turtmann Thal should be reached in five hours from St Luc—it took us ten to reach it. In Indian file we marched across snow-fields, into which we often sank to the waist, till we reached the summit, where, in the brilliant morning sunshine, we breakfasted. Then with their axes Fred and the guides made an opening in the cornice of frozen snow that ran along the crest. We looked through. There lay our road. A steep wall of snow sloping down at a perilous angle, as it seemed to us, into the lateral valley below,—a thousand feet it might be. We had no rope with us—one of us had not even an alpenstock, only a ridiculously futile umbrella—the nails in our boots had been worn

down. We looked rather blankly at each other; but it was no good to hesitate. Away we went along the face of the slope, keeping our eyes mainly fixed upon our feet, which we dug into the snow at each step as we best could. At certain ticklish corners it was frozen hard as granite. An interminable series of zigzags brought us at length into the trough, and there for another hour or two, guided by the stone "men," which were visible at intervals, we had to wade through miles of level snow. But all the time the view was superb,—we were face to face with the Weisshorn, and the mighty glaciers which sweep round its flanks.

"Dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower
And wall impregnable of beaming ice."

Then, quitting the snow, we plunged into the Turtmann Thal, and racing through glorious pine-woods, and an almost tropical variety of ferns and flowering-plants, reached, late in the afternoon, the inn at Gruben, where, in the course of that and the following day (which was spent on the great Turtmann glacier) we ate up all the provisions in that secluded and charming valley.

"Well," said Markham, as we strolled leisurely Rhone-wards beneath the grand Turtmann pines (such pines are hardly to be seen elsewhere in Switzerland), "there is one blessing about a late season in the Alps. An ordinary mule-track is translated into a first-class pass."

XI.

AMONG THE CLOUDS.

THE Rhone valley is a pestilential swamp tenanted by frogs and flies. The highroad—Napoleon's Simplon—is the one bit of solid land thereabout; and it runs like a dyke through a morass. Ducks and geese are the only industrial products of the soil which appear to flourish. The frogs kept up a continuous croaking in the bright morning sunshine—enormous creatures, which plumped into the reedy water as we passed; and a water-hen rose more than once out of the forest of flags that hemmed us in. The physical and spiritual unwholesomeness of this

wretched valley—its flies, its priests, its waspish Ultramontane papers (published at Sion), its decayed towns, its tawdry saints, its mean ruins of a perished civilisation,—are peculiarly depressing; and we were greatly relieved when, after quitting Brieg, we took the track to the Bel Alp, and began again to ascend.

The road to the Bel Alp is surely the worst in the world. For the first mile or two it is a species of diabolical staircase, up which goats, mules, and Bernese ponies, however, contrive to scramble. This is succeeded by a level valley, with its village and its church, charmingly situated among pastoral Alps; and then the scramble begins again, until, after full four hours from Brieg, the platform on which the inn stands is reached. The inn is within hail of the high *châlets*, and hundreds of cattle are feeding in all directions, their bells tinkling as they move. A soft glow of pastoral light and peace rests upon the hillside, which is bright with flowers and merry with the laughter of children.

And each night and morning this mountain community behold a spectacle (if they care to look) of more than Eastern pomp. The mighty range of the Southern Alps is visible morning and night,—Monte Leone, Monte Rosa, the Fletschhorn, the Mischa-belhörner, the Weisshorn, and the Matterhorn. When we arrived the air was cloudless, and each solitary peak was drawn in faultless outline against the sky. Then came the sunset,—the most remarkable we anywhere saw in Switzerland. Soft snow pink of innumerable peaks against a background of deepest blue! This lasted for a time, and then the pink, fading away from the peaks (from all except the Matterhorn and the Dom, where it lingered longest), flushed the sky above them into stormy crimson, against which the white mountain forms stood out in spectral paleness! And for many minutes this extraordinarily brilliant fire filled the whole sky from east to west, from north to south, from the nadir to the zenith, so that we thought at last of Dante's lines,—

“ Fell slowly wafting down,
Dilated flakes of fire, as flakes of snow
On Alpine summits when the wind is hushed.”

Then we went into the snug little coffee-room where the British tourist, Mr Smith, enlarged for the rest of the evening to the Colonel (most courteous and most patient of gentlemen) on

the enormities of which French innkeepers were capable, of the inferiority of Swiss scenery, &c. &c. &c.

“Why, sir,” I heard him exclaim in a loud voice, as I started precipitately out of a doze; “why, sir, at Reichenbach, after I had got half-way up the abominable precipice, I came upon a notice warning me that it was private property. ‘Messieurs, the gentlemen, must pay one franc, or turn back.’ Of course I could not turn back, but paid my franc, and was allowed to look at the trumpety waterfall through a hole in the wall.”

The Doctor listened in grim silence, but the Colonel was as pleasant as usual. “Very sharp, indeed. It reminds me of an experience of my own in the Saxon Switzerland. We went to see the waterfall of the district. We could see nothing. So we asked a fellow, who was hanging about, where it was. ‘The waterfall?’ says he. ‘Oh, here’s the waterfall!’ And then he pulled a string, and down it came.”

Meanwhile Markham was deep in the transactions of the Swiss Alpine Club for the previous year. Nelly was gathering her paints and brushes together, and Dorothy and Fred were bringing a game of backgammon, which had lasted in a surprising manner during the whole evening, to a close. A game of backgammon, forsooth! My dear lad, do you recollect the German print in which the Devil is playing at chess with Faust for his soul, or some such trifle? This fair Dorothy is a far different antagonist, I admit; but you have just as little chance of winning as poor Faust. She has got your soul, or your heart (or whatever it is called), in her silken web, and you need not hope to escape.

But you don’t want to escape? Of course not; none of us do—till later.

“Late?” said the Doctor, drowsily, looking at his watch. “Half-past ten, and we have to cross the glacier to-morrow. We start for the *Æggischhorn* at six.”

So we went to bed,—Fred to dream of a pair of very singular blue eyes—

“Blue as Pandora’s,
When first they darkened with immortal life,—

and the rest of us to enjoy the dreamless sleep which is purchased by a mountain scramble.

But looking down once before the morning broke, in the pale

misty light of earliest dawn, at the glacier which coiled itself snake-like round the valley, I could have fancied that some strange, watchful, primeval monster was waiting in ominous silence for its prey.

XII.

THE MATTERHORN.

A TRUE Swiss Thal is a district *sui generis*, and the Nicolai Thal is one of the most characteristic. Leaving the main Rhone Valley at Visp, and reaching Stahlden, we enter a deep trench between the mountains. The near precipices on either side, grim masses of rock, rise to a height of three or four thousand feet. The mule-road is scraped along their sides, sometimes close to the brink of the torrent, sometimes a thousand feet above it. Once or twice, in the course of twenty miles, the rocks retreat and disclose a lovely green strath, where the mountain village nestles snugly. At Visp we are 2362 feet above the sea; at St Niklaus, 3869; at Zermatt, 5315; at Zmutt, 6365. The whole character of the valley alters as we rise. Its lower end is rich with unusual southern flowers, among which a brilliant lily, dusted with gold, is conspicuous; and gauzy, bright-winged creatures, the dragon-fly and the humming-bird moth, flit across the path; and lizards bask in the sunshine, and the hillsides are covered with vines. The upper valley is rich with flowers too, but they are the flowers which flourish beside the snow, in a region where even the pine has ceased to find nourishment for its hardy roots, and a barrier of eternal ice stretches from the Dent Blanche to the Matterhorn.

The fortnight that we spent at Zermatt was a complete success. The weather was all that could be desired. Fleecy shreds of cloud would continue to gather round the lower summits, gathering and dispersing again and again during each day; but, as a rule, the great peaks, without cloud or shadow, stood out from morning to night against the intense blue in intenser white. The wayside crosses, the rustic shrines, the open empty churches, the humble churchyards (not untenanted by English strangers who have fallen victims to the avalanche or the glacier), the simple Catholic *curés*, spending their lives, winter and summer,

amid these remote and secluded communities,—are features of the life of the valleys which cannot be contemplated without interest even by the passing visitor. There is not much art in this devotion, although we occasionally came across a carved Christ into which a certain rude energy had been thrown; and the Catholic zeal has even more than its average accompaniment of Catholic bigotry and Catholic ignorance. The people are little given to wandering (the lad who led one of the mules had never been out of his native valley), and their amusements are of the most primitive and uncouth kind. They are, in particular, so far as we could judge, a most unmusical people. On the Sunday forenoon a fellow stationed himself on the steps of a *châlet* near the hotel, and from a cracked drum evoked the most hideous noises. He was surrounded by a group of admirers, who sat at his feet or stood beside him for an hour at a stretch, evidently entranced by the atrocious discords. Then the flowers in these June days are a source of endless enjoyment. The delicate lily of Paradise waves in white patches all over the low ground, while the brilliant crimson of the Alpine rhododendron flushes the rocks and lightens up the pine-woods.

But to none of these is the unique fascination of the Zermatt valley due,—not to the novelty of its tropical Alpine life, not to the splendour of its flora, not to the singularity of its glaciers. The Matterhorn is the *genius loci*. That extraordinary crag colours the whole life of the valley. Ghostly under the stars—with peach-like softness of sunset bloom in the summer twilight—lustrous as a white sea-bird at dawn. It is quite alone—there is nothing at all like it anywhere round about. The wonder never diminishes. To that matchless pyramid, the pyramids of the Pharaohs are ant-hills. There it stands, sphinx-like, inscrutable, unaccountable,—some ancient, primeval, Titanic creature, stranded helplessly upon the shores of time.

XIII.

A SOLITARY SCRAMBLE BELOW THE MATTERHORN.

THIS morning, the rest of our party being otherwise engaged (sketching, botanising, book-making, love-making,—and love-

making among the Alps is one of the pleasantest of holiday pastimes), I start for the Hornli. I have already been there more than once, this being my favourite ramble from Zermatt; but the grandeur, glory, and beauty of the excursion repay the slight toil of repeated ascents. No guide is needed, and the moderate walker is thus enabled to enjoy one of the noblest and most impressive bits of the Alps in utter loneliness. There *are* times when one needs to be alone among the mountains, and such hours

“Of high communion with the living God”

impress themselves with peculiar vividness on the memory. Ignatz Biner, the good-humoured and talkative host of the only inn at Zermatt which faces the Matterhorn, has got the bread, hard-boiled eggs, and wine required for lunch packed away in a miniature knapsack; and slinging this across my back, I start directly after breakfast.

As I ascend the valley towards Zmutt, there is not a vestige of cloud in the whole sky, with the exception of a banner of mist which streams from the highest peak of the Matterhorn. The track along the Zmutt torrent winds through enormous rocks,—

“Confusedly hurled,
The fragments of an earlier world,”—

until, quitting the valley, it rises rapidly in a series of zigzags to the plateau, 8400 feet in height, on which the Schwarz See is situated, and from which the Matterhorn itself may be said to spring. The woods through which I pass are all aglow with the Alpine rose, and the path is covered with large ants, each hard at work, or pretending to be so. Here a host of them have seized upon an unfortunate caterpillar, and are pulling him in pieces; there a single sturdy warrior is dragging a dragon-fly wing through the pine-needles. Nelly, who has such intense sympathy with every living thing that she cannot bear to see even a wild-flower recklessly gathered, holding with Wordsworth that every flower enjoys the air it breathes, and that it is cruel to interfere with such pure and innocent enjoyment, hates these strong and savage hordes, whose relentless energy and angry industry are never at rest. Shaking myself clear of the wood, I reach the open, and, after a little more clambering, the plateau for which I am bound. At this early season it is little visited,

and during the whole day I did not meet a single creature in these upper regions. The summer had been long of coming, and the snow still lay in deep wreaths and patches, even on those parts of the pasture which were exposed to the full heat of the mid-day sun. I dipped my flask of Swiss wine into a snow-wreath, and sat down on a point of rock to enjoy the wonderful magnificence of the scene around me. Overhead towered the Matterhorn. There is no deception about it; the nearer we get, the bigger it grows. Mr Ruskin, I think, speaks of its defiant attitude: to my mind it shows no defiance; only calm, assured, sorrowful strength, and invincible tenacity. Monte Rosa, rising out of unfathomable fields of snow, fronted me where I sat—a truly royal domain. Between the two stretched the vast sea of snow and ice which, descending from the Lyskamm, the Breithorn, and the Little Matterhorn, feeds the Görner Glacier and its affluents. The splendid peaks of the Mischabelhörner range, the Weisshorn, the Gabelhorn, and the Dent Blanche, complete the circle. Below me I can see the houses of Zermatt, not bigger now than beehives, and the Görner Glacier pouring round the Riffel-berg in a mighty stream.

A delicious breeze blew from the Dent Blanche, but it was not cold; and the hours slipped away unnoticed. Then I went on to the lonely lake and the lonelier chapel. The snow lay deeply about them, and added to the pathetic solitariness of the place. I looked in at the broken window; I could see nothing, but I heard a faint sigh or groan. It was repeated more than once—a sob of eerie sadness that made my blood run cold. There were no marks nor footprints on the snow; if spirits sigh, this must have been a spirit. I went round to the door, which was on the latch, and pushing it open looked in. The church was empty and desolate, hung round with the tawdry trumpery in which the Catholic *curés* and peasantry delight, and which looked even more tawdry than usual in this high and solemn solitude of nature. No, there was no one within. I shut the door softly behind me, and stole away on tiptoe, fancying that I heard light footsteps behind me. "It may have been the wind," I said aloud, to reassure myself; "the wind among the mouldering rafters." So I waded along through the drift, while above, rising right into a snowstorm, towered the crags of that tremendous peak. A white ptarmigan which I disturbed went away with a hoarse startled cry.

The afternoon was closing in when I turned away, and, racing down the slow-slopes, on the brink of the Zmutt Glacier, reached the brink of the ravine, and saw the *châlets* of Staffel underneath my feet. There was no visible track, but I took to a nearly dry water-course, and so contrived to scramble down into the valley, passing as I descended through a wood of branchless and shattered pines, riven by lightning and thinned by avalanches, which Gustave Doré might have created. The agony of the dying trees was at once lamentable and grotesque. The Zmutt valley, from the Staffel *châlets* down to the village (where a frail wooden bridge spans the torrent at a giddy height), is the most lovely in these parts; and in this doubtful evening light, the young moon hanging over the white peak of the Rymfischhorn, it disclosed a more mystical loveliness than I had ever yet beheld.

XIV.

MORNING ON THE GÖRNER GRAT.

WE all went up to the Riffel Inn together. It is a sociable expedition, and we left Zermatt early to enable us to picnic, and sketch, and botanise by the way. The crispness of the air, the scent of the pines, the blue of the rocks, the crimson of the rhododendrons, the verdure of the pasture, the Scotch-like sparkle of the stream which no glacier has tainted—are enough in themselves to make any one happy; and when these are combined with a mountain landscape of surpassing splendour, and the fair face or faces of the woman or women we adore (the more the merrier), the unusual elation of spirit which even an Englishman has been known to exhibit in such circumstances becomes comprehensible. Before we get to Seiler's Hotel we are 8427 feet above the sea, and an enormous amount of disturbance must by that time have been removed from the heart as well as from the lungs. Black care may accompany the horseman who keeps to the plain; but let him mount a mule and climb to the Riffel, and he will find that the enemy has been dislodged from his seat on the crupper, and left below.

Miss Vernon's sketch of the Matterhorn, as seen from the slopes below the hotel, is one of the most effective in her sketch-

book, and she has slyly introduced in one corner the face of a bright handsome lad asleep among buttercups—Fred himself, who, on the previous day, had performed some tremendous mountain feat, and to-day, deputed to wait on Dorothy, actually began to doze before the sketch was completed. The outline of the sleeping face is full of spirit and character; but the artist has added, in pure wantonness, a pair of long ears—a liberty which Fred is inclined to resent.

“I owe you a pair of gloves, Miss Dorothy,” he says, maliciously, by way of retort, when he wakes up and recognises the portrait.

“Do you mean to insinuate, Master Frederick——?”

The evening was cloudy, but I rather think that the mystery and indistinctness of the twilight which filled the valley below us added to the strangeness of the scene. The clouds, the peaks, the snow, were so mingled together that we could not tell which was solid land and which was cloud-land. It was a wonderful, fantastical, visionary landscape, like the unsubstantial landscape one sees in dreams.

We went to bed early, for we had to start at daybreak. Deep snow covered the high table-land down to the door of the hotel; and though a path had been cut for some distance, yet the latter part of the ascent to the G6rner Grat lay over a snow-field which was now only practicable for ladies in the early morning. Some of us, scrambling through the snow to look upon Monte Rosa in the grey evening light, had found a rivulet flowing along the track: next morning the rivulet was silent, and its channel frozen into solid ice. During the night the mist had dispersed, and when we rose at 2 A.M. the stars were shining brightly in the frosty heaven. We left while it was yet dark, but ere we had gone far the whole sky began to fill with the soft reflected light of the summer dawn. We looked around us, and, lo! a vast circle of snowy peaks rose into the silent air. Far away over the Oberland we saw a belt of carmine, which gradually brightened and widened, until at last the Sun-god rose, and, touching one by one the mighty peaks at hand—Monte Rosa, the Lyskamm, the Breithorn—rested in one glorious sheet of flame upon the pure snow of the Dent Blanche and the shining cliffs of the Matterhorn!

It was great fun. English, Yankees, Canadians, all of us

enjoyed it like boys, the women no less than the men. We stayed a quarter of an hour at the Görner Grat, and looked down into the deep trench that separated us from the Monte Rosa range, and these vast fields of snow. Yet the great peaks as seen from here look rather flat, and are apt to disappoint the spectator who forgets that the Görner Grat itself is more than ten thousand feet above the sea. Then we retraced our steps, and slid down the rocks, and glissaded down the snow, the Canadians teaching the girls how to use their alpenstocks for this latter purpose, not altogether with success. And among the jolliest of the party was Colonel Vernon, who is seventy-six on his next birthday! All honour to the hale, cheery, gallant old soldier, who is as fresh as the youngest of the party, and who wears his years, as Mr Lushington his learning, lightly, like a flower!

“The Psalmist assigns labour and sorrow to those who reach my age,” he observes, as we re-enter the inn, “but I never felt younger in my life.”

“Oh you dear old boy!” says Dorothy, patting playfully the arm to which she clings, but with something like a tear in her eye.

XV.

MR CHALKSTONE AND MR SKIN FLINT, OF THE “ALPINE CLUB.”

WE met at Zermatt Mr Chalkstone, who is one of the luminaries of the Alpine Club. A singular figure was seated at the door of the hotel when we returned from the Riffel. It wore an old brown wideawake, with a white towel wrapped round the brim, thick leathern gaiters, and heavy boots with great hobnails, such as ploughmen wear at home. The nose and cheeks were peeled and blistered and swollen; the lips were cracked; the eyes were bloodshot. Altogether he looked more like a prize-fighter who had been hit hard in a tough fight, than an English gentleman. And yet Mr Chalkstone—for this was the eminent mountaineer—was a shrewd, pleasant, unpretending, and highly-cultivated scholar; and at home, no doubt, looked exactly what he was. But much mountaineering had

made him mad among mountains, and during two months of each year he presented the extraordinary (not to say revolting) spectacle which I have just described. He was accompanied by his friend Mr Skin Flint, another celebrated climber (unrivalled among *rocks*), and they joined us at *table d'hôte*, where we found them quite inclined to be sociable. They had made "a new Pass" from Macugnaga to Zermatt, which (as far as I could understand the matter) went clean over Monte Rosa, took twelve hours longer than the Weissthor, and was attended with such frightful risk that it was doubtful if it would ever again be attempted by any sane creature. To-morrow and next day were to be devoted to a little quiet mountaineering between Zermatt and Evolena, in preparation for the attack which they were meditating on the inaccessible precipices of the Matterhorn which rise from the Zmutt Glacier; and they invited Fred, who was drinking in the narrative with greedy ears, to accompany them. The Doctor would not at first hear of his going; but the lad looked so disappointed, that permission was ultimately accorded. He came back on the evening of the second day, so scorched and blistered that even Dorothy Vernon (who had come down from the Riffel) did not know him. But he was in tremendous spirits.

"Such a jolly lark it had been," he said. "We took no guide, for Chalkstone said that he knew every inch of the way. We started at two o'clock, and I yawned fearfully till sunrise—for, of course, I hadn't slept a wink. However, we got up to the moraine just as day was breaking, and there we smoked a pipe and had a pull at the flask. It's beastly walking among those big stones, and we were glad to get on the glacier. By Jove, that side of the Matterhorn is tremendous! it makes one giddy to look at it. We got on very tidily for a bit, until all at once there was such a deuce of a tug at the rope that it nearly carried me off my legs, and we found that Skin Flint had fallen into a crevasse. We could see nothing of him except his wideawake, but we held on, and he managed to scramble out after a while. An avalanche of ice came crashing down from the Matterhorn, but it didn't quite get our length, and we kept on till we came to a sort of island in the glacier, called the Stockje, where we took to the rocks. The rocks were easy enough, but when we got on the snow again at the upper end of the island, it was no joke. We sank knee-deep at every step, and I began

to fear we should never get to the Col. We had to creep along a steep slope of hard ice on which the snow was lying thinly: then we crossed three or four awful *bergschrunds* on snow bridges, and then scrambled up some perpendicular rocks, sharp and slippery, which cut our boots and took the skin off our hands. After dodging one or two avalanches which crashed down the *couloir* we were ascending, we reached the cornice of ice across the Col, and sat down to dinner on the summit of the pass—a leg on each side. For the last hour the fog had grown so thick that we could not see a yard before or behind us—so of course we hadn't much of a view; but that didn't matter, until it began to snow and blow like mad—and it *does* snow and blow at twelve thousand feet above the sea! It was no good staying there, so we made for Evolena through the mist as fast as ever we could, and by good luck reached the hotel soon after midnight. I have only got a small frostbite on one of my toes, but Chalkstone is in a regular funk about his nose, which is the size (and colour) of a lobster, and is off to see the doctor. Such a lark! I wish some of you fellows had gone."

We didn't appear to see it, and the Doctor was very savage and satirical for some time afterwards on the adventurous society of which Skin Flint and Chalkstone are such distinguished members.

XVI.

ADIEU TO DOROTHY.

It was St Peter's Festa when we got to St Niklaus, on our way back, and the village was overrun with country people, who seemed to derive much satisfaction from the fearful pictures of the damned with which the church is adorned. The bell-ringer at St Niklaus can have no sinecure. The church bells were always ringing. The chimes were the last thing I heard at night; I was wakened by them at four in the morning. These early matins and late vespers would be highly inconvenient in a country where sleep is much prized; but in Switzerland, with its bracing and elastic air, in spite of the enormous amount of exercise undergone, a few hours suffice for moderate people. We could not, however, help pitying an un-

fortunate Doctor of Music, who, having been smashed on his way from Zermatt in one of the carts of the country, was now lying in the inn, and whose organs of harmony must have been permanently affected.

The sky that night (or what we could see of it or imagine of it in our deep valley) was strangely impressive. There was no wind, but the clouds were riven into fantastic shapes, and heaped confusedly up against the western heaven in banks of lurid purple and wild vermilion. But the eye did not rest on these; for beyond them we beheld a realm of purer and sweeter light—a tranquil field of tender orange—the far-away sanctuary of the sunset.

We left the Colonel and Miss Vernon next morning at Stahlden,—all, except Fred, who was resolute to obtain one glimpse, however brief, of the Val Anzasca. So he went with them up the grand Saas Thal, and stayed all night at the little inn on the Mattmarksee; and next morning, under a cloudless dawn, beheld the glory of the Monte Moro pass,—the unveiled face of Monte Rosa.

There they parted.

“Good-bye, Miss Vernon—Dorothy,” said poor Fred, with a great emptiness in his heart.

“*Au revoir*,” said Dorothy; “we meet at Rome.”

AND SO Good-bye to Dorothy; and to you also, my friends, Good-bye. The special circle, indeed, for which these Essays were originally written has almost quite died out; and “Shirley,” to their successors, is but the shadow of a shade. But what a pleasant venture it was while it lasted! and into what rare good company it brought him! There was much true fellowship in that society,—much frankness, and simplicity, and friendliness. Nor was there wanting on occasion the excitement of

conflict—the “delight of battle;”—the fierce satisfaction which honest men feel when imposture is detected, when slander is refuted, when hypocrisy is unmasked. Yes, we are all fighters at heart; and it is probably the soldier who has had most fighting to do who is most loath to lay his weapons aside. But now, willingly or unwillingly, they must be put away, for we are come to

THE END.

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