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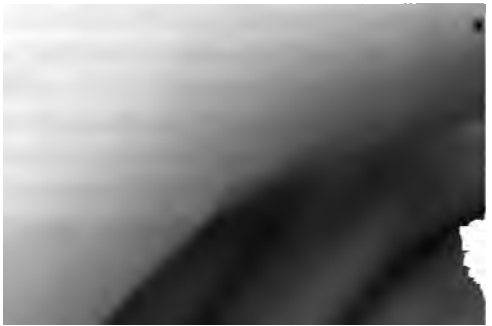
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# FOOLS OF NATURE

For the action of these influences is from a property the principles of whose origin we cannot comprehend. — GALEN.

No superstition can ever be prevalent and widely diffused through ages and nations, without having a foundation in human nature. — SCHLEGEL.

And hence in most cases of superstition . . . those who find pleasure in such kind of vanities, always observe where the event answers, but slight and pass by the instances where it fails. — BACON.

# FOOLS OF NATURE

A Nobel

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BY

ALICE BROWN



BOSTON:  
TICKNOR AND COMPANY

211 Tremont Street

1887  
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# FOOLS OF NATURE

and they were never short. She had fritters to fry, and they must be light and hot. Therefore there was nothing to do now till she should hear the rattle of wheels. The room where she waited was dark enough without the help of outside shade ; the walls were low, the ceiling smoky, and the great beams overhead dingy with age. Still, everything was so severely clean, from the middle-aged woman in her starched calico and white collar to the very floor, that the evident extreme age of the house seemed no ruinous, unkempt one. Miss Maria, as she stood by the stove, bearing her idleness a little impatiently, was of a wiry, absolutely alert Yankee type. Her crimped hair, the stiff little plaid bow at her throat, could not soften her in a line or huc.

Some one was pushing the heavy side door, which sagged so that even the daughter of the house could not always force it to obey her energetic will. She took the lamp into the entry, as the great piece of timber swung in with a sullen creak, to admit a slender, straight, girlish woman of seventy. Aunt Lomie always insisted that her figure was owing to the early use of the busk, and it was greatly to her mortification that her own girls, long since married, had declined to wear that article of torture.

"I brought you in some of our barberry," she said in a soft, even voice, like a skein of silk. "We begun on it to-day. I believe I put in more

sweet apple'n common, an' that made me think of your father."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," said Miss Maria, tasting at once. "So'll father be. He don't say he don't take to my sugar barberry, but I'm awful sorry I didn't do any in molasses. Seemed as if sugar'd be so much nicer that I done it all that way."

Aunt Lomie had taken a chair by the stove, where she sat bolt-upright, patting her knees softly and reflectively.

"Where's your father?" she said, breaking the silence, that was perfectly easy, since neither of the two felt a necessity for talking.

"Gone to the poor-farm," returned Miss Maria, something aggressive developing itself in her tone.

"He's all carried away with that boy, ain't he?"

"Seems so;" and Maria put all the emphasis of her sentence into the stove with an obstinate stick of wood.

"It does seem a pity, Maria, don't it, that he should be given to such folderol?"

After a silence, "Father can think and do just what he's a mind to, for all me. His ways ain't my ways, but they're better'n mine. He's got more goodness in his little finger than all the rest of the town in their whole body."

"You always would stand up for your father,"

said Aunt Lomie, looking at her with mild approval. "Queer you should, too, when you don't jine in with him."

"That ain't the question," said Maria stoutly. "It ain't what I believe or don't believe. I may be too ungodly to believe it. Anyway, I never shall badger father's life out of him. There he is now!"

Old Dolly's hoofs had a peculiar beat, and the red wagon a rattle all its own. Maria's quick ears caught both sounds before the wagon turned into the driveway, where it was now hurrying gayly along, hobnobbing with the frozen ruts.

"'Tis your father, sure enough. I guess I won't wait, he'd keep me so long talking, and it's our supper time, too."

When Miss Maria had closed the unwilling door on her visitor, she hurried back to her fritters, all alive at the immediate prospect of work. By the time Uncle Ben, as he was called by the town in general, had finished unharnessing and feeding Dolly, and given the cows their last fodder, the table was ready, and the lamp waiting in the little back kitchen where he was accustomed to attend to his toilet.

"Here we are. Mind the step!" came a voice full of loving quality. "Here we are, Maria!"

Maria had, so to speak, pricked up her ears at the sound of lighter steps beside her father's.

"I'll be buttered if he ain't brought the poor-house boy back with him!" she ejaculated under her breath.

"Here's Lenny, Maria," said the old man, fairly inside by this time. "Let him run right in and warm him. His hands don't need so much washin' as they do thawin' out. We kep' 'em under the robe, but they're pretty cold, — pretty cold!"

Maria, without a word, preceded the boy to the larger room, and, still silent, drew forward a chair. The child, a somewhat shapeless, stocky boy, stood still in the background.

"You can sit down," said his hostess ungraciously. Then she went back to her father. "Is he going to stay?" The voice was carefully modulated. There was neither displeasure nor reproach in it, yet Uncle Ben was quite well assured that Maria was not gratified.

"Well, now, if he wouldn't be a great deal of trouble, Maria," he began persuasively, from the roller towel. "Now really, Maria, he's goin' to be a wonderful medium; somethin' out o' the common course, and he'll never develop there. The conditions ain't right. An' he could help about the chores." But Maria had disappeared, as he found on emerging from the roller. "Oh, well, well, well," said the old man. "Sorry! sorry! Wish Maria'd see these things, but she don't, and you can't expect everybody to. —Willin' the old



man should have his own way?" he went on in his sing-song manner of speaking. "You ain't said much."

"I didn't have time to wait," said Maria dryly. "I had to go in and put on another plate."

Then the two looked in each other's faces and smiled the smile of perfect understanding, a momentary twinkle from Maria and a folding of wrinkles in the old man's face, — for all the seams there had been made by much smiling.

"Now, if you could get a test such as I've had time an' again," he went on, rubbing his hands at the fire, "you might begin to see your way to havin' faith. An' with Lenny in the house you may get a test."

Miss Maria set her lips firmly, and went on pouring the tea, having done which she drew up the third chair for the boy, and motioned him to take it. He obeyed with a shiver, suggesting a young robin out in the cold. Miss Maria had made an impression on him.

No one paid any attention to him during the meal, Uncle Ben contenting himself with heaping the child's plate, once giving him a pat on the head in passing. But when her father had gone out to shut the barn, Maria said her say. She emphatically set down in the sink the cups she was carrying, and then placed herself directly opposite the robin, who was again huddling over the stove.

She looked at him steadily, while he as steadily regarded his cracked, stubby hands.

"An' so you see things — spirits?" said Miss Maria at length, in a biting tone.

"I don't know what they be. How should I know? It's always a lady," said the boy, beginning to whimper a little.

"And you're going to get up a test to convince me, are you?" still regarding him as curiously as severely.

"I don't know what a test is. I don't care anything about it. I wisht I was back to the farm!" said the whimperer.

This protestation only served to disgust Maria the more. So he was a hypocrite also!

"Well, there's one thing for you to remember. Ever go to school? Ever learn anything? Well, you learn this! If you take it into your head to get up tests for me I'll take your head off; and if you ever tell my father a lie—say you see things when you don't, or say you've seen 'em when you haven't—I'll take your head off again. And heads aint like lobster claws; they don't grow on, once they're off. Understand?"

The robin evidently did not, but he was sufficiently impressed, Miss Maria thought; and her father coming in just then, she went on with her dish-washing.

"Been cryin', sonny? Homesick? Oh, that

never'll do! Never in the world! Folks have to make up their minds to things. — Maria, where's that old fox-and-geese board?"

It was in the corner cupboard, and Maria brought it without a word. The old man and his little friend began their game, interrupted only by the robin's nervousness. He watched Miss Maria too incessantly to show much generalship in his moves, and became so distraught that Uncle Ben sent him to bed, going with him to see him comfortably disposed. When the child had drawn the great comforters up to his ears, looking as if he felt himself in safety for the first time that night, Uncle Ben took the candle and paused to say, hesitatingly, before leaving the room, "You ain't seen anything since you've been in the house, Lenny?"

"No, sir."

"Nor heard anything?"

"No."

"Well, well, that's all right! It'll come, all in good time. I'll call you in the mornin'."

"Be you going to keep him, father?" asked Miss Maria, later in the evening, looking up from her rapid knitting. Her father had finished the county paper, and sat toasting his stockinged feet at the stove-hearth.

"Well, no; I ain't got so far as that yet. No, I do' know's I mean to keep him on'y till he gets a good place. But I mean to see he ain't starved as

he was up country before he come to the farm. Skin an' bone he was ; but he begun to pick up right off."

"Yes," said Maria dryly, "he don't seem to have many bones now."

"Fatted right up! I told 'em at the farm they'd better have his mini'ture took an' send it round to show folks how we treat our paupers. Maria, that boy begun to see spirits when he wa'n't more'n ten year old, when he was up country."

Maria was setting her heel, and bent over her work too closely to reply.

"He says he always sees a lady,—a lady in a cap. Somehow I felt as if it might be your mother."

Maria gave an indignant twitch, setting loose half a dozen stitches, but she did not answer.

"The trouble is, she never speaks, — ain't spoke yet, that is, — on'y makes signs. But he'll develop yet, just keep him where the influences are harmonious."

The next morning, before breakfast, Uncle Ben took the boy to the barn, but once inside the door, he did not set him a task. Putting down his milk-pail, he turned to the child eagerly.

"Anything yet, Lenny?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy in a whisper, looking behind him, to see if perchance Maria might be there.

"You don't say so! What?"

"The woman."

"Say anything? Now she did say something this time?"

"No, she didn't; only motioned. Put both her hands on her head — so—and shook it and cried."

The old man took off his hat in order to consider the better, and stood with the brim of it over his mouth.

"Yes, that's it! It's Aunt Peggy!" he cried at last triumphantly. "She died with brain-fever. Strange I shouldn't ha' thought o' her before. An' what else?"

"Nothing. Yes, there was. She went to the fire-place and kept putting her finger on the squares marked out on the mantel-piece. She'd count up to seven and then stop, and go over 'em again."

"Seven! Now I wonder what that meant. Seven year? No, she must ha' died over forty year ago. Maria wouldn't remember. Seven in the family? No, there was three. Sure it was seven, Lenny?"

"Course I am," said the boy, a little fretfully. "Didn't she keep me awake with her old count-in'?"

"Sh-sh! You mustn't say anything about them that's gone to the spirit world that you wouldn't want 'em to hear. But then it ain't right neither to treat folks in this world worse'n you would

angels. An' you see everything she was doin'? See the squares on the mantel-piece?"

"Why, there's a light round her, bright," said the boy, stuffing his hands in his pockets and thinking of breakfast. "There's always a light."

"So there is,— so there is. I forgot that. Now, Lenny, you be sure you don't hear nor see a thing you don't tell me."

When the two went in to breakfast, Maria, cutting bread at the table, detected news in her father's livelier step.

"Maria, he's seen Aunt Peggy!" said the old man, coming in and looking at her triumphantly across the stove. Miss Maria paused, with the bread knife in her hand. Leonard, just behind, noted the glittering blade with a sickening heart-thump, sure of his impending doom. But the ogress went on cutting. "Leastwise, I can't help feelin' as if 'twas Aunt Peggy. Seems to answer to her looks, an' what she died of. But there's somethin' about it I don't understand; seven, the number seven. Maybe she wants to tell us somethin'."

"Seven wise men of Greece!" said Miss Maria, grimly. "Maybe she wants to warn this boy here he'd better be careful not to grow up and make eight."

As the days went on, Leonard outgrew some of his first fear of Miss Maria. He took a cold,

which for the time being obliterated his ill qualities in her eyes. The nursing instinct was strong in her, and to take her ginger-tea and thoroughwort was equivalent to eating her salt. With his returning health, her severity also returned in part ; but though there were days when, as her father told of new visions, she was only restrained by principle from laying violent hands on the lad, she did not prove an incessant north-wind to him. He was a frank, well-disposed fellow. No one could help liking his absolute honesty and his gratitude for slight favors. Sometimes his truth-telling propensity was so apparent, even when it militated against his own advantage, that Maria had intervals of wondering if his vision might not be "an honest ghost." That was almost inconceivable to her. She had only as much appetite for the supernatural as would enable her to swallow a few scriptural doctrines,— not by any means all, and not enough to render her an eligible candidate for church-membership. She confined her belief in the unknown to a faith in the immortality of the soul, and in the incomprehensibility of the Holy Ghost. With Miss Maria the Holy Ghost stood for a sort of fetich, a mystic symbol to be pronounced by way of a charm with the names of the Father and the Son. Miracles she rejected, and only received Christ as a leader on the ground of his preaching sound doctrine. She would not have said he was

a juggler; doubtless she gave him the credit of honestly believing in his own miracles, but she pityingly ascribed to him the same sort of diseased mind with which she accredited her father in his belief in the manifestations of spiritualism. The whole subject she hated rancorously; yet when her father's finger touched it, she was tolerant, even cherishing him the more for his weakness.

"Everybody's got a crack somewhere in his head," she would say, when most kindly disposed towards Leonard. "I don't know what mine is, but I s'pose other folks do."



## CHAPTER II.

### THE PROFESSOR ARRIVES.

**L** EONARD was perhaps thirteen when Uncle Ben Adams took him home from the poor-farm that night. In five years he had grown into a clownish sort of fellow, with long legs and a superfluity of flesh, cheeks of apple redness and eyes of a china blue, in which pure honesty lay looking up at the world. Every one of the neighbors liked Len, he was so ready to do a service, so destitute of boyish freaks. When Aunt Lomie baked pies, she brought him in a turnover, a marvel of horrible richness; and if her sons went to caucus, or to town for the weekly supply of groceries, she was liable to send for Len to sit with her through the evening. Cap'n Sol, Aunt Lomie's husband, had died since we first saw her, and she, with the two giants of sons, kept up a peaceful little household.

Although Leonard had every educational advantage the town afforded, going to the district school through the winter with the other well-grown lads, he showed little inclination for books. Miss Maria hurled the abstruse truths of Colburn at him until he could prove, parrot-like, the feasi-

bility of a man's driving fifty and one-half geese to market, but the inner meaning of the problem never suggested itself to him. This was much to Miss Maria's scorn; she had herself been accounted a "smart scholar" in her day, and she still preserved her rewards of merit with much satisfaction. Uncle Ben was not disturbed by the boy's slight intellectual bent. In fact, his frame of mind showed a wavering balance between what he ought to feel and what he really did feel. It was, of course, a subject of regret that the boy was growing up to be accounted stupid; on the other hand, that very stupidity, a neutrality of mind which allowed it to be swayed by any and every influence, could only increase his ability for becoming a medium.

"Out o' the mouth of babes," said Uncle Ben, "it is ordained the great truths shall come. 'Tain't the wisest of us that learn 'em first. If 'twas, the great revelation'd come too soon, an' it's got to be worked out slowly, through much tribulation."

That Len had in five years made no advance in development as a medium, caused the old man no uncasiness. His patience was as absolute and grand as the patience of Nature.

"An' maybe 'tain't comin', Lenny, my boy," he would say, in the frequent talks they had on the subject. "It may be 'tain't you, after all, that's goin' to convince folks. But whether 'tis or not,

you an' I mustn't care. 'Twon't make any difference who the good news comes through."

Leonard himself would have been quite well satisfied to be sure that his evident ministry between the other world and this was not to come about. Even for so good-natured a boy, it was something of a bore to be asked every morning if he had had a spectral visitant the night before, and to be required to give advice the bearing of which he could scarcely comprehend. Mingled with the misery of having greatness thrust upon him, however, grew a sort of honest vanity in considering himself singled out from others by reason of an exceptional gift. He still insisted that he saw the old lady of his childhood, who was now familiarly known as Aunt Peggy; often, indeed, she talked audibly. It was somewhat strange that, although the whole town had heard that fact, no one set him down for a hypocrite. His little world passed over the foible, and if it had been called on to give the reason, would doubtless have excused him as not responsible, — as being a natural in that one direction.

Just now, in his nineteenth year, it was announced that Professor Riker would give an inspirational lecture on Spiritualism, as the circulars stated it, in the town hall. Uncle Ben, who had been for years in correspondence with various mediums and was the representative spiritualist of the town, had undertaken the management of the

whole affair. It was he who proposed entertaining the guest, undeterred by Maria's grim silence. That sceptic's housewifely pride, which was entirely independent of any bias of feeling, rose to the surface, and her most plummy cake and richest pie were in hospitable readiness for the guest. Uncle Ben met him at the station, and the fall twilight had begun to settle before Dolly compassed the eight miles of the return. Professor Riker did not ride past the house to the barn, but alighted at the front door. This circumstance alone was enough to arouse Miss Maria's scorn.

"Let father drive along to unharness by himself!" she muttered, standing well back in the shadow to take an unobserved inventory of the stranger's appearance. "If I was a man I'd be a man!"

And yet, under ordinary circumstances, she would have considered herself an offender against the laws of hospitality, had she allowed a guest to lift a finger in service.

He had knocked three times before she saw fit to go to the door, clattering the cups meanwhile to justify her inattention, even to herself. The stranger lifted his hat with a flourish, when he was finally allowed to set foot in the entry, extending a daintily gloved hand which Maria, pushing the door open, was too much occupied to notice.

"Miss Adams, I believe?"

"Walk in — and take off your coat — and your hat — and let me take 'em," said his hostess in jerks, as if the words had a bad taste in her mouth and she was anxious to finish the operation of ejecting them as soon as possible.

Divested of his outside apparel, Professor Rikor proved to be a well-made, broad-shouldered man of perhaps forty-two. His eyes were somewhat near together and his nose was inferior, but a long waving beard, delicate hands, and a superfine nicety of attire were sufficient to stamp him, among the many, as fine looking and a gentleman. Maria noted with contempt that his watch-chain was of many bands, and that he wore a large and dangling bunch of seals. For five minutes she was too incessantly on the wing to admit of falling into the trap of conversation. Finally she could make no more honest errands into the little back kitchen, and, with some shame at her evil humors, took her station opposite the visitor.

"You are not a believer in the cause?" said the professor, keeping up an incessant rubbing of his hands. Maria was sure it was to prevent the redness of cold from settling in them. Her heart hardened immediately. Why need he have chosen so unlucky a subject?

"No, I'm not," she said shortly. "It's the greatest humbug the Lord ever allowed!"

The professor looked at her with obtrusive pity.

"You'll come to it by and by," he said with great cheerfulness. "I perceive you have mediumistic qualities. Once developed, I have no doubt you'll be a burning and shining light."

The toad in the fable could not have felt himself more perceptibly swelling with pride than did Miss Maria in her indignation. Fortunately, her father's step was heard at this moment, suggesting the self-control which was the outgrowth of her love for him.

"Well, well, all right? Warm enough? Not tired ridin' in the cars? Terrible tiresome work, ain't it, makin' journeys? Uses my head all up for a week."

"Ah, well, I'm used to it," said the professor wearily. "I'm going about incessantly, you know. But this speaking from inspiration is wearing work. Sometimes I am afraid my poor head won't stand it. However, we intellectual people must expect to break down,—die at the top."

"Supper's ready, father," said Maria. "I don't see," she was unable to resist saying, as she poured the tea, "why it should tire anybody to be inspired. If the words come to you without any composing, I shouldn't think 'twould be anything great of a tax."

"Ah, you don't know," said the professor. He had always the air of commiserating one's igno-

rance. "It takes a great deal of nerve force to place one's self in a purely receptive state. My surroundings have to be harmonious. I am as sensitive to bleak winds as a flower."

Maria drank some tea hastily to cover an incipient sniff of disgust, and ended by choking herself.

"Yes, yes, now I can see how 'twould be," said her father, passing cheese and butter with an eagerness that was more than hospitable, his simplest services seeming to grow out of loving kindness. "Now it don't make no difference about us common folks, but I can see how 'twould with you. Great gifts you've got; and then you're educated up so!"

The professor, with a wave of his fork, indulgently deprecated the last remark.

"My wife doesn't always feel it," he said. "I don't blame her for it, but sometimes I have to say to her, 'Julia, can't you see I want to be let alone?'"

"Well, I should think she'd be glad enough to let you be!" said Maria, taking his cup rather forcibly to refill it.

"You *would* think so indeed," said the unconscious guest. "You would think she would see the necessity of helping on a great work by doing her little best. And there are times when I must be alone. Often, when I commit my lectures to memory, I walk the floor for hours."

"Commit your lectures! There's a mistake, then, father. You got out the handbills to say they were inspired."

"Oh, yes,— the thoughts, they are the result of direct inspiration," said the professor imperturbably. "But I have to formulate them a little, and reduce them to the level of an ordinary audience."

Again Maria was saved, by an arrival, from the open disgrace of speaking her mind,— this time Leonard.

"Well, well, sonny! where've you been?" said Uncle Ben, as the great fellow came in shyly, and began to dispose a part of his inconvenient person under the table.

"Aunt Lomie asked me to do the barn work to-night. The boys have gone down to see about buying Pete French's ma'sh."

"This is my boy, the one that's goin' to do suthin' yet, we hope," went on the old man. "Lenny, this is the lecturer."

The two pairs of eyes met, Len's shy and the other man's searching. The end was that the stranger, with flattering cordiality, held a white hand across the table for the boy's awkward grasp.

"You need not have told me who he is," he said, smiling at him. "I knew as soon as he came in. A spirit voice whispered, 'Great light! prophet! help him develop!'"



"You don't say so!" cried his host, laying down his knife, and leaning back in his chair in sheer delight. "Now you can't mean that! Maria, ain't that a test?"

"You can't expect your daughter to consider anything short of the ocular proof as a test just yet," said the professor, with an apologetic defence of her which seemed to Maria as sheer impudence, as it stood for charity in her father's eyes. "Scientists, with all the paraphernalia of philosophy on their side, deny us the right of existence as a sect: what should be expected of the unthinking multitude?"

"There's no call for you to use your lecture all up on us," said Maria, this time with intentional sarcasm, as they rose from the table. "Be a pity if it should be second-hand when you get to the hall, and your inspiration should give out."

But the professor was either too magnanimous or too obtuse to take offense.

At seven old Dolly was harnessed to take the family to the hall, all but Maria. Just before they went, she ventured on — what was rare with her — an open remonstrance.

"Father," she said, taking him into the back kitchen, "that man is a lying humbug, and you'd never see it if you was to live with him till he made you think black was white. And I don't want him bamboozling Len. The boy's head's

half turned now, thinking he's some great shakes."

"Now, Maria, le's leave it in the Lord's hands," said her father, his perpetual good-will to men mantling all over his face in a radiant smile. "His ways ain't our ways, an' the truth'll come uppermost. If Len's to help work it out, le's not be stumbling-blocks in the way, an' if he ain't, the Lord an' his ministers'll defend the boy."

Maria could say no more. She went back into the sitting-room with wet eyes, softened in spite of her judgment. Her father alone woke in her something like the maternal instinct. But there was some little relief in asserting her own right so far as to refuse to button Len's collar or tie his cravat, and to indulge in one other bit of belligerent resistance.

"*Would* you give me that flower and a geranium leaf for my buttonhole?" asked the professor, pointing to the flourishing window plants. "There is something harmonious about flowers."

"Here's the scissors," said Maria, passing them with the points bloodthirstily foremost, and the professor was obliged himself to cull and pin in his floral ornaments.

The lecture was scantily attended, and the audience was not too quiet during its florid eloquence. A few boys fell into a scuffle about the stove, and some one started that time-honored joke, a turnip rolling down the aisle, at which there was a general

titter. The town held Uncle Ben in high regard, except in his capacity of spiritualist; there he commanded only lightness. When the professor announced, at the close of his lecture, that he would proceed to give tests, a hush settled even upon the most sceptical.

"This room is filled with spirits," he began, "townsmen of yours, most of them; some, friends who have passed over into spirit life at a distance from here."

Several boys near the stove involuntarily looked over their shoulders, and then by common consent went into the front and more occupied portion of the house, making but a subdued clatter.

"Here's one who says his name is Peter Dana. He was hanged for the murder of an old woman. Says his mother was an Indian. Anybody know him?"

Glances were exchanged from large and wondering eyes. Uncle Ben almost hugged himself with delight. He would not pronounce his recognition first, however. That should be left for the sceptical.

"Half-breed Pete!" "That's him!" came in murmurs, until one voice took courage to speak. "I know him," when there came a chorus of corroboration.

"Says he's been a long while in the first sphere; hopes to go on; hopes you'll take warning by him."

The professor was standing behind his table with closed eyes, and hands occasionally waving before his face. He had turned down the lights, and in the uncertain dusk was surprisingly pale and unearthly. It was astonishing that the corners about the hall could look so dark to the boys who came to scoff.

"Somebody says her name is Mary, and she died of consumption. Ugh! what a pain it gives me in my chest! How she did suffer before she passed away!"

A woman's sob broke the stillness. Two women's voices exclaimed simultaneously, "I know her!" "She's mine!"

The medium paused for a moment and pointed in the direction of the first voice. "You're right, she's your Mary," he said decisively. "The other one is here too, but isn't able to communicate as well as your Mary."

The woman, the tears streaming down her face, had risen and bent over the settee in front of her, regardless of the pitying eyes upon her.

"What does she say? Tell her to speak. I must hear her speak!"

"She says it's all bright, all wonderful! no more pain! and she's always near you."

"The Lord be thanked!" said the woman, sinking back into her seat, and shamefacedly trying to suppress her sobs.

"There are three babies dressed in white. Oh, how they do hover over here, and how bright their wings are!"

There was more sobbing recognition, in the midst of which the medium opened his eyes with a start and twitch, ejaculating loudly, "Where am I?" Uncle Ben, triumphant and happy, drew him away from the circle of awestruck people who were desirous of regarding him, and yet exceedingly careful not to approach too closely.

"He ain't like us," said the old man in gentle apology. "He can't stan' things as we can, an' I'll warrant he's all wore out. Get Dolly round, Len, an' we'll be on the road home."

Arrived there, they found Maria and Aunt Lomie knitting by the table. Aunt Lomie looked at the medium mildly, as she might regard an animal born a scorpion and not able to help it, yet by no means to be taken into one's bosom. The professor asked leave to lie down on the sofa, and stretched himself at full length there, his eyes closed, the tips of his fingers together in the attitude of one whose

"— bones are dust;  
His good sword rust."

Once the great Maltese cat walked up and sniffed at his coat, whereupon Miss Maria called sharply, "Puss, puss! come away!" showing a laudable resolution that puss, at least, should not be con

taminated. When Uncle Ben and Leonard had come in from unharnessing, quite a brisk conversation sprang up, broken by the lurching arrival of the two Wasson boys, as they would probably be called to their seventieth birthdays.

"Thought we'd come in to see ma'am home," said Sam, drawing a chair to the stove and dangling his hat between his knees, while the other took quite the same attitude in fondling the cat.

"You needn't ha' done that,— both on ye," said Aunt Lomie, holding her forefinger on the needles to keep the place, and looking mildly over her glasses.

"Oh, it ain't all you, Lomie," said Uncle Ben. "I spoke to 'em myself. I give 'em some hope of a sittin'. He's tired all out now," nodding towards the sofa, and speaking in a whisper. "'Tain't to be expected he won't feel what he's been doin' to-night."

It was natural, after this, that the conversation should drop into whispers, and then cease altogether. When that consummation had been reached, the professor came to a sitting posture, and opened his eyes with a snap upon the company.

"You spoke of a sitting, Mr. Adams? Anything I can do for you is at your service."

So the table was cleared and the light turned down. Nobody had thought to notice Len since

he came in. Only when his finger-tips touched hers in laying them on the table, did Maria feel that they were clammy and trembling. This was his first experience of the common phenomena of spiritualism.

"Now if you will place your fingers lightly on the table, the little finger touching the next hand, and so on,"—a result brought about as soon as Sam Wasson could realize that the whole of his tremendous hand was not to be deposited on his neighbor's. Maria never refused to take part in a "sitting." It was the public sanction she was glad to give to her father's wishes.

The medium closed his eyes and waited; Aunt Lomie was preternaturally solemn; and Maria fixed so wrathful a gaze on the professor's countenance that Henry Wasson, chancing to meet it, burst into a strange and monstrous laugh, which he instantly suppressed, growing purple with shame.

"Henry, I shouldn't think you was grown up!" said Aunt Lomie.

"Oh, never mind," said the professor, opening his eyes for a moment. "It's merely nervousness. Give way to it, by all means, and it will be over the sooner. Your son is mediumistic, madam, very impressionable in his nature."

A longer silence, and nothing occurred.

"S'pose we should sing," suggested Uncle Ben.

"That would be well. Singing brings harmonious influences. And make yourselves as receptive as possible.

"Maria, 'Sweet Hour' or 'Nearer to Thee'!"

Maria had a high, clear soprano which had led the choir this many a year.

"Yes, father," she answered. It should be perfectly apparent that she complied to oblige her father only. When she struck into "Nearer, my God, to Thee," Sam's tenor and Henry's bass were ready. It was considered a great treat in Coventry to hear the cousins sing. Uncle Ben had a tenor voice. It cracked frequently, indeed, and became at some points a husky whisper, but he always sang on undiscouraged.

"I think," said the medium, after the singing had ceased, having proved of no avail, "I think I must tell you what they whisper to me. There's somebody here who is a real sceptic, and she breaks the circle."

Uncle Ben knew well enough who it must be. The look of genuine grief, which was heart-breaking to his daughter, stole over his face. Seeing it, Maria herself hung her head. In that minute of feeling herself the cause of his pain, she would willingly have bound herself hand and foot to spiritualism, if that could have been possible.

"Maria, I think's likely they mean you. P'raps you'd better set back a little till we get started!"



"Yes, father;" and Maria retired to the corner of the room.

"They say there's too much vitality in the room; it draws from the medium," went on the professor after another pause. "They are not able to manifest themselves when there is so great a flow of animal magnetism."

"That's you, boys, I'm afraid," said Uncle Ben, shaking his head with disappointment. "I guess you'd better set back a little too."

The boys pushed their chairs back somewhat sulkily, and went over to join Maria where she sat stroking the cat. There was a chivalrous pleasure in being her companion in disgrace. Henry shook his fist at the medium's back and deftly executed a grimace, at both of which Maria smiled and then did her duty by frowning.

"Ah, this is better. The air is clearer!" After a series of twitches and noddings, "No, no, it's of no use. The medium is exhausted and they won't use him to-night." Professor Riker came to himself, and Uncle Ben took his hands from the table with a sigh.

"Well, well, too bad! Can't be helped, though! It'll all come right another time. Boys, you're too strong by half, and Maria, she's got a doubtin' spirit."

"Miss Maria is a repellent force," said the pro-

fessor, "and a concentrated one, owing to her being so entirely individualized."

"The cat's foot!" said Miss Maria boldly, for her father had gone out of the room.

Aunt Lomie discreetly rolled up her knitting and drew her two giants away before they burst into loud guffaws of approval.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE INITIAL STEP.

**I**T was Maria's first consolatory thought, in the morning, that the medium must take his leave in a few hours; but it was not so to be. At breakfast her father announced, with a sort of apologetic delight, that the professor had decided to remain until the afternoon train. While Maria was about her work she heard a busy hum of conversation in the sitting-room, conversation always quenched by her entrance. That was not a suspicious circumstance; it was but natural that Riker should avoid wasting pearls within her sceptical hearing.

To enter the room when Len was admitted and the three sat in conclave, revealed the fact that Professor Riker was offering to take the boy away with him, "for development."

"It's a great offer," said Uncle Ben; "my old Adam seems to stan' in the way, that's all. Selfish, you know, we all are, an' I can't seem to make up my mind to partin' with the boy. Somehow I've been growin' into the feelin' that he was goin' to do for Maria an' me in our old age."

"True, my dear sir, true," said the medium. "We all have those impulses, which are, as you

say, selfish. But you wouldn't stand in the way of the cause? You wouldn't hinder Leonard from making his fortune and having his name printed all over the world?"

"'Tain't that; we've got enough to do with, an' after I'm gone Maria'd see that Lenny shouldn't suffer. An' gettin' his name up ain't no temptation. Why, you don't 'spose I don't know this great revelation ain't intended for us poor creatur's to make ourselves whole with! I ain't got such a miserable spirit as that. It's missin' the boy I mind."

"He shall come home two or three times a year; more, even," said the other, glibly. "Why, you won't lose sight of him! Think how safe you'll feel about him, knowing he is travelling about with me."

"Yes, yes, that's so. Lenny, how is it; what say? Do you want to go?"

The boy sat between the two, turning his gaze from one to the other as they spoke, his face showing only absolute awe and admiration when his eyes rested on the stranger, and a kind of boyish, blubbing sorrow in meeting those of his old friend.

"I like him," he said shyly, "and last night the lady come, and she said I was going away."

"That settles it!" said the old farmer solemnly, and at once; "with you he goes. 'Tain't for me to withstan' them that knows more'n I do. Now

'tain't because I don't have faith in you, sir, but I should like to know jest about what you'll do with him, so't I can say to myself, one day after another, Lenny's doin' so an' so."

"Well," and the medium, who was leaning back in his chair, put his hands in his pockets, "I shall take him about with me wherever I go. I shan't require him to do anything, but just place him wholly among spiritual influences, where he can develop unconsciously as a flower opens in the sun."

"Yes, yes!" said his host eagerly. "Like the grass-seed comes up in the spring; you know how that is, Lenny. An' when he develops, then you'll set him to work?"

"Yes; then he'll see people, and begin to make — begin to do good."

"The Lord grant it!" said the old man fervently. "The Lord bless the sproutin' an' the comin' up an' the bearin' fruit. Lenny, you don't know how favorable things are goin' to be for you. Now my spiritual experience was born out of great tribulation."

"Ah? How was that?"

"I was brought up strict. We used to hear hell preached every week, an' gran'ther'd mention it every mornin' when he prayed. Well, it sort o' wore on me. Long before I was as old as Len here, I used to be out hocin' near the road some-

times, and when one neighbor an' another'd go by I'd say to myself, He drinks; he'll go to hell. He ain't a professor; he'll go to hell. An' one day it come over me, Ben Adams, you ain't been converted, and *you'll* go to hell. That made it seem kind o' personal."

"Yes, I should think likely. You don't mind my using my note-book? Now go on."

"Well, I read Revelations till my hair stood on end. You know sometimes you can't help readin' the things that scare you, over'n over. It don't seem to me I slep' much. One night I was awake, starin' into the dark an' wonderin' if I should die before light, when it come into my head all at once, 'the angel rolled away the stone.' I don't know how it comforted me, but it did, an' I went to sleep sayin' it over an' over. The next mornin' when I got up it was bright sunlight, an' I went to the door an' looked right up to the sky an' says, out loud, Lord, if you punish me for it, I can't help it, an' I'll bear it; but as long as I live, I ain't agoin' to think one o' thy creaturs will be destroyed."

"But how did you get from that to spiritualism?"

"Well, I kep' thinkin' of them that had died, an' wonderin' where they were an' what they were doin'; an' a good many years after, I got hold of a newspaper with the doin's of the Fox girls in

New York ; an' that cleared up my mind, so't I ain't doubted since."

"How did your friends take it?"

"Oh, I kep' still an' thought the harder, till I got more light. The first circle I went to was over to Creighton, an' I got great tests. Look here, this is the first test I ever got: one night there was a spirit come that said his name was Bonnivard, an' that he'd been put in prison ; seemed to want to be recognized, but we'd none of us ever heard of him. When I got home I kep' studyin' on it, but I knew if I'd ever known such a queer name I should ha' remembered it. I went to the minister an' asked him if he knew ; an' he said there was a man named so died in Switzerland over three hunderd year ago. Now wa'n't that wonderful? The medium didn't know about him, an' we didn't ; an' there he come an' spelled his name out !"

The professor smiled, saying rather dryly, in that unctuous manner could ever be dry, that it was all very convincing.

"Well, it stan's to reason there should be a new revelation," went on the old man, after a pause. "'Taint likely the Lord would give all He'd got to give, an' stop there. 'Taint in reason He shouldn't keep any truth on hand by Him."

"So you are perfectly convinced, and never have any doubts?"

"No, I don't have any doubts, but I keep on lookin' into it all the time. Truth's a mighty queer thing, sir! You think you've got her, an' set down an' go to sleep; an' when you wake up, she's run away. Truth's a good deal like a puppy that ain't got wanted to you."

The stranger again used his note-book, behind the family Bible.

"No, no! an' I don't by any means think I've got at the whole on't yet. The Baptists have got some, an' the Methodists; on'y we've got the newest revelation, an' they'll come to it sometime. We ain't all on us ready for it yet. — But I guess Maria's ready for some short wood. No, Lenny, I'll go; I've got to speak to her."

"If you would allow me to suggest," said the medium, placing a detaining hand on his shoulder, "Miss Maria should not be told until Leonard is gone. I heard her say she should spend the afternoon away, — and I think she would object."

"No, Maria won't like it, but I shall tell her now; I can't be underhand with Maria," said Uncle Ben, and, going into the kitchen, he made the story short. The door between the two rooms had been closed, and it was from pity only that he lowered his voice. He was sorry for her.

"Father," said Maria, stopping short in rolling pastry, "father, you can't mean to do that!"



"Now, Maria, if you could on'y think 'twas for his good; if you could on'y believe 'twas the Lord speakin'."

"The Lord! The ——" began Maria, and then closed her lips, rolling crust energetically for a second. Then she put down her pin and wiped her hands on her apron, an action according well with her disordered frame of mind. "Father, I wasn't going to say anything more against him, seeing he was going away so soon, but that—that man in there is a humbug and a hypocrite."

"Now, now," said her father, soothingly, "don't let your heart be hardened to think such things of your fellow bein's."

"And you're responsible for Len, father. You've took him from the poor-house, and if he goes to ruin, who'll be to blame? And ruin him that man will! It'll be easy, too; some ways Len ain't more'n half-witted."

"He must leave father and mother, an' the Lord'll provide for him. It's hard, Maria, but we must give him up."

Maria stood an instant looking into the bare branches of the chestnut trees, where a flock of snow-birds were twittering. Then she took up her rolling-pin, and went stolidly to work. "All right, pa, I shan't say any more."

One question only did she ask, "When is he going, father?"

"To-night, with the professor. He seems to think it'll be better."

"Well, I've got half a dozen shirts to make him. He's got enough now, but they're wore thin. If he should wait a week, seem's if he could go fitted out better."

But the professor, on being consulted, thought it would be better not; in fact it would be impossible to leave him. In a week or two he should be on an extended lecture tour, and should want Leonard's company. Naturally he did not state that, if he should leave him, he feared Maria's influence. The day was a hurry of packing. Luckily the boy's clothes were in perfect condition, and his china-blue eyes danced when the professor casually remarked that he should buy him a ready-made suit when they reached town. No one but the medium made a dinner that day. Maria, remarking shortly that she must "see to the pies," left the table and was seen no more.

When Len was dressed in his Sunday best, looking more than ever like a fat-cheeked squirrel in holiday attire, she took him aside into her own room.

"Now, Lenny, if you don't have a good time — if it's hard — if he — (O Lord! I mustn't make him suspicious and miserable," she said to herself) — "well, if things ain't pleasant, — they ain't always, you know, — and you want to come home,

you privately put a letter into the post for me, and I'll send you the money to come with. And if you're sick, you send to me just the same, and I'll be there in a jiffy. Understand?

"Yes," said the boy, a suspicious choking in his voice. "I wisht I hadn't got to go. Do you s'pose he'll buy me a suit?"

"I don't know anything about suits, but, Lenny, did you say you didn't want to go?"

"I — I guess I do," said the boy, the glories of possible checkered trousers looming up before him. "I guess I'll try it." So Miss Maria hardened her heart to hope, and sped the travellers.

"You'll have to tell us where to direct to you," she said, loftily, to nobody in particular, when they had gone down to the kitchen. "I shall want to send Len some shirts. — Thank the Lord, they'll fit nobody but him!" she added, in not too low an aside, when her father left the room.

Riker was deaf to innuendoes. Perhaps if he had not treated her with such indulgent gravity, Maria might have been better able to endure him. She had her interview with him before he left, however, calling him back when her father and Len had gone out to the wagon.

"Now there's no need of thinking I don't see through you, inspiration and all. I do!"

"I am glad," said the professor, looking up from his glove-buttoning, with an expression of frank

innocence; "you can't find much to disapprove of."

"I know just what sort of a wolf in sheep's clothing you are likely to be. Now if any harm comes to the boy through you, you'll be sorry!"

"I certainly shall," said Riker, smiling slightly.

"I mean I'll make you sorry!" cried Maria, exasperated beyond bounds. "If there's any law in the land, I'll make you suffer! Oh, go along, go along; I don't want to talk to you!" and the professor lifted his hat and went, with the same grace which had encircled his arrival.

At the station, Uncle Ben, who on the way had addressed his remarks exclusively to the horse, pressed a dingy roll into Riker's hand. "'Tain't much," he whispered, "but you know you spoke of that suit for Len, an' you didn't get much for your lecture. Admission don't count up much, an' I want you to be paid; it's a great thing for us to have a speaker. — Lenny, I guess I'll go. Dolly'll want to get home!" and in an inextricable confusion of blessing and sorrow, he had clambered into the wagon and lashed old Dolly so suddenly at starting, that that sober animal threw up her heels in a very coltish fashion, before settling down to her ordinary gait.

That night Leonard slept in a room which seemed to him a marvel of splendor. There was no vacant place in Riker's own boarding-house, and

he had left the boy at a near hotel, where he called in the morning to take him to breakfast. Len was too bewildered to eat, but sat, with open-mouthed awe, watching Riker break his egg.

"Now we shall have to talk a little about business," said the medium, after his first roll. "How is it about this lady of yours? Do you see her often?"

"Almost every night," said the boy, whispering, in fear of disturbing the waiters.

"What does she talk about?"

"Oh, I don't know; all sorts of things."

"Well, now," said the professor, insinuatingly, "suppose I should fit up a nice room for you, and put your name printed on the door, Professor Sparrow (you're a professor now, remember; I've made you one). Suppose I should put up that black-and-gilt sign, and people should come and ask your advice?" The sign and the title were mightily taking; the advice struck Len as an unknown quantity. "Then they would come in, and you would shut your eyes and try and see the lady. You could see her almost any time with your eyes shut, couldn't you?"

"I don't know; I never tried."

"Well, you must try when you have your office. And you'll say to the people, 'I see an old lady,' and tell just how she looks; and when they ask questions of you, you'll tell them whatever she seems to say."

"But s'posin' she shouldn't say anything?"

"She must. You must make her," answered Riker, with meaning.

"But I don't know how I could," rejoined the other, distressed.

"Stupid!" muttered the medium, under his breath; but presently his lips parted with a very engaging smile. "I guess she will talk if she remembers you can't go on being a professor unless she does. Then, by and by, you might get to seeing other people, and giving them names in your mind, — not last names, but good, easy first names, such as Mary and John; and when people came to you, you could say, 'I see Mary,' or, 'I see John,' 'Mary wants you to know she is happy, and is waiting for you.' That's all easy enough, isn't it?"

"Is that all I've got to do?" asked the boy, his very cheeks shining with delight as well as fatness. But his face fell. "And what if I can't see 'em?" he said again.

"You must!" answered the professor, fixing a narrowed gaze on him, across the table. "Oh, you don't know what talents you have!" he went on quickly. "Why, I never saw a young fellow with such chances! It won't be three years before you'll be a rich man, and then you can go home to Uncle Ben and buy him a smart horse and build him a new house, and give that

lovely Miss Maria — bless her ! — a handsome silk dress.”

No wonder Len was quite intoxicated with joy.

“I shall be in again and give you something to do,” said Riker as he left him. “I’m going to find a room where you can live ; you’ll always go to your meals with me.”

In the course of the forenoon he was back again, bringing a set of printed slips which he proceeded to pin on some sheets of paper.

“Now,” he said when that was finished, placing them before Len, “I want you to learn these. You never went to school much, you know, and you must have an education. Learning these will help you to use good language when you go into society. Get one perfectly, and try saying it over with your eyes shut, before you read another.”

He left Len droningly reading them over to himself. One of the extracts is a fair specimen of the whole :

“I have been some time in the spirit land. I am beginning to progress slowly, and hope soon to enter another sphere. Dear friend, I am always near you.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT MISS PHEBE'S.

NEARLY a year after the fall when Leonard began his education in Boston, a boarding-house at the West End received an expected arrival. A young man and woman were shown into the hall, where they waited, somewhat uncertainly, while the trim maid-servant went, as she announced, to call Miss Phebe.

"It looks clean," whispered the girl. "I thought boarding-houses were always dirty."

"Didn't she show you into the parlor?" came a great fresh voice up the basement stairs, in advance of a very tall woman. "I declare, a new girl always acts as if she was just born, and hadn't an idea of how things went in this world! Glad to see you. I'll have your trunks carried right up," she went on. "I suppose a hackman wouldn't carry up a trunk if his eternal salvation depended on it. I'll show you your rooms now."

The girl's bedroom, up one flight, was a clean little nest of a place, opening into a larger sitting-room.

"Your sleeping-room is up stairs," said Miss Phebe to the brother. "I'll show it to you in a



jiffy." She stopped to run her finger along the mantel, and looked keenly at the member. "She *did* dust, then; I'm surprised. Strange that I can't teach a girl to turn the handles of the pitchers out," she added, giving the water-jug a twist in passing. "Supper at six, down stairs."

Before that time, Bernard, ready for tea, ran down to his sister's room, to find her sitting on her trunk, in an attitude of rather disconsolate meditation.

"Well," he said, closing the door, "what do you think, Sarah?"

"Everything is in beautiful order, — Miss Phebe is queer, — and I've got a lump in my throat." She rose with a little defiant toss at the last admission, and began brushing her dress.

"Oh, no, dear, no," said Bernard, putting a hand on her shoulder. "No, we'll have a good time. Be a man, Sarah!"

"So I will!" turning her head with a kind of resolute shame, to let him see the teardrops through which she was smiling. "There's a bell. Come. Oh, how I hate to meet the other boarders! I wonder if we have to be introduced all round!"

Miss Phebe was at the head of the table, and gave them seats near her. They had time to notice that she was a very bony woman with a long face, which irresistibly suggested a horse.

"Just give me a hint as to your name," she whispered in a loud aside. "Ellis?"

Sarah was conscious that she was being introduced to Mr. Mann and Miss Reynolds, and wondered afterwards if she had bowed in the wrong direction, and how Bernard had got through with it. Then there was silence, and a clatter of cups.

"I wonder how Miss Gale is," came an even voice from the other end of the table, belonging to a white face and very smooth, black hair; this must be Miss Reynolds.

"She's had a hard day," answered the hostess, solemnly. "Miss Linora's to be pitied, if anybody ever was. Mr. Mann, do you think she's having a harder time than usual?" The tone suggested the inference that Mr. Mann was responsible for the suffering absent one,—a tone which he evidently resented.

"I'm sure I couldn't say," he answered dryly, at which Miss Phebe looked at him with great severity.

Sarah glanced up too, to find him a young man, blond and handsome, but with an irritating weariness of face and manner.

"I wish that poor child had more friends, and I wish what she had would be true to her," announced Miss Phebe, apparently to nobody; adding immediately, "Sh-sh, she's coming!"

She was a little thing in a suit of dove-gray,

with a pale Madonna-like face, and smooth brown hair. Her mouth had a droop, her eyes were cast down, and their fringes were like shadows of a grief. Sarah longed to immolate herself at once in service as to a maiden dolorous. Miss Phebe left her own place to draw out the girl's chair, and seated her in it with a little pat on the shoulder. Miss Gale acknowledged the introduction to the two strangers with a sweet little smile and a lifting of her gray eyes. Then Sarah lost her timidity in watching Miss Phebe serve the new-comer, ordering for her a peculiarly strong libation of tea and a hot supply of dry toast. Conversation languished, and, the meal over, everybody withdrew to his own room.

Bernard had run up stairs, to go to his sister's sitting-room later. Busy in unpacking, Sarah heard a little rap which could be only his, and called "Come in!" without lifting her head from the trunk-tray.

"I wonder if I shall intrude," came a soft voice from the door. It was the dove-colored Linora.

"Oh dear me! Excuse me; come in," said Sarah, flushing brightly. "Everything is scattered about; only wait till I can clear a chair."

"No," said the celestial sort of visitor, putting her hand on the other girl's shoulder and arresting her. "No, I only want to say a word. I like

you so much ; I like your face, and your eyes are so good. You will be a great comfort to me."

Before Sarah could do more than laugh and blush a little, Linora had risen on tiptoe to deposit a kiss on her cheek, and was gone. When Bernard came in Sarah did not tell him. Everything about Miss Linora seemed so mysteriously confidential that she began now to feel herself in the secret.

"What shall you do in the morning, Bernard?" she asked, as they said good-night.

"Go to the library and begin to read. You won't be lonesome if I do?"

"No, for I shall go with you," with a little grimace which Bernard loved, for it never came except when she was at least moderately happy.

"Sarah, there's one thing," he said, coming back. "I wish you wouldn't tell any one I'm not your own brother."

"Of course not. Why should I?"

It had never seemed to weigh on Bernard that he was an adopted son, although he had been devoted to his second mother. Perhaps he was too jealously fond of Sarah to care to pass as a brother merely ; it was better to hold at once the rights of a brother and friend. There was no mystery about his parentage. Mrs. Ellis had offered to tell him all about it when he came of a suitable age, and he had refused, for some reason inexplica-

ble to himself. So she put the bare facts on paper and gave it to him ; a paper which he had never been tempted to read.

There was unlikeness enough between him and Sarah to suggest some freak of nature, if they had come of the same parents. Sarah was brown-eyed and brown-haired, with a stain of red on the cheeks ; Bernard's face was heavy, his head large, almost overtopping his slight frame ; his hair, a mat of yellow with a shade of drab, was combed back from the great forehead, and he had a way of throwing back his head when he walked which was suggestive of seeing only the sky. He was here to read in connection with a book he meant to publish for children, — stories from all the mythologies ; Sarah, because her mother had died six months before, and she had no one in the world nearer her heart than Bernard. They had heard of Miss Phebe through acquaintances, and here the two country mice were established.

Bernard went to the library in the morning, but Sarah stayed behind.

"Would you let me come and sit with you a little while this morning?" whispered Linora, as they came up from breakfast. "Or, if your unpacking isn't done yet, come to me." Sarah ran down to the little lady's apartments. These were two large rooms, running over with luxuries of furnishing and littered with *bric-à-brac*.

"Come to the fire," said Linora, drawing an easy-chair to the grate and placing a footstool beside it for herself, where she sat clasping her knees and looking up to Sarah with a childlike seriousness. "Now talk."

"But what shall I talk about?" said the other girl, not so much embarrassed now as amused.

"About yourself."

"I'd rather talk about you."

"No," said Linora, the corners of her mouth drooping again. "There's nothing but trouble when you come to me."

Sarah was thereupon angry with herself for her stupidity. It seemed coarseness at which Linora might reasonably be disgusted.

"There's one thing I wanted to speak of," she said, veering in haste. "Your name — how pretty it is!"

"Do you think so? That isn't all of it, though. Don't laugh, now; they named me Eleonora. Think of that, — little me! I knew you'd laugh."

"Who changed it?" asked Sarah, venturing to stroke the brown head.

"Well, they nicknamed me variously at first. Once it was Norah, but that's red-cheeked and Irish; then it was Leo, — for little me again! But when I grew up enough to realize the emergency, I took matters into my own hands. If you like the name, will you use it?"

"Why, if you let me." Linora gave Sarah's little finger, which she was caressing, a soft little kiss.

"Now how shall I entertain you?" she asked.

"Tell me about the people in the house."

"Well, there's Miss Phebe, — she's pure gold; there's Miss Reynolds, born to make mischief; and Mr. Mann, — I don't know what to say about Mr. Mann."

"You know him better than you do the rest," thought Sarah. "What does Miss Reynolds do?" she asked.

"Collects her dividends chiefly, and also collects personal items about her acquaintances. If she tells you I am an offspring of evil, don't believe her."

"Not I!" with another stroke of the brown head.

"About Mr. Mann," Linora went on, reflectively, her eyes filling with tears. "I don't know, — yes, I think I'd better tell you. Mr. Mann hasn't been quite kind to me. I was in great trouble when I first came here. He was, or I thought so, a firm friend. Why, he called himself my brother. But he changed. I have thought since that he only likes new people, new things!"

Sarah had one throb of compassion for her new friend, to ten of indignation at the recreant knight.

"Perhaps I'd better tell you everything, if we are to be friends," said Linora, after another pause

of gazing abstractedly at the coals. "Would it bore you to hear all about me?"

"Oh, if you could trust me as much as that!"

"Anybody would after seeing your face, my dear. You will find me sad so many times, that I'd rather you should know just why. My mother and father are dead, and my uncle has charge of my property; that's considerable, by the way. My uncle does not care for me, and it only bores him to have me with him; and as he is travelling most of the time, I drift about wherever I can. I heard of Miss Phebe through a friend of hers, — Mrs. Winter the singer, you know, — and I felt as if I could come here in her charge without a chaperone."

Sarah's assent was slightly perplexed; she had not been bred on the tradition of the necessity of chaperones.

"Once I had a voice, a contralto. It showed the most flattering prospect of developing, and I was going on the operatic stage. Singing was life; looking forward to my profession was my heaven!" She told her story well. Doubtless she had the dramatic instinct. "While I was studying, I met a young priest. I was interested in Catholicism then, and once I went to confession. We met often after that. We fell in love with each other."

Sarah scarcely dared breathe, fearing to disturb the sacred stillness of the air.



"Think what that meant for him! He could not marry. There were his vows on one side, his God, his sacred calling; there was I on the other. We gave each other up a thousand times; a thousand times we met and swore fidelity. Sometimes he gave up his priesthood and chose me. Then we were happy; but by the time I saw him again, his conscience had begun to gnaw him, and we had the same struggle to go through from the beginning. I was not strong. I could not help him give me up; I was too much a woman." Her voice failed in tears. "At last, one day, he swore it should end; he would marry me, and I was to meet him to have the ceremony performed. I went, and waited hours at the appointed place; finally a letter came that bade me good-by; he could not break his vows to the Church. I had gone through too much, and that last blow crushed me. I fainted, and, days after, when I tried to sing, my voice was — gone!"

Sarah sat speechless and still, clasping her hands in her lap. She was sure if she tried to utter a word it would only result in a sob.

"That is the end," said Linora at last, looking up pitifully through tears. "I have not seen him since. I lost my lover and my voice at one blow. What is there left for me?"

"If I could make any difference," said Sarah, timidly, after a long silence. "I know it sounds

presuming; but I could be trusted if I couldn't do any real good!"

"My dear, you're just the friend I've always needed," said Linora. In consequence of which assertion Sarah felt a thousand times more at home in her new surroundings by the time Bernard came back.

"What luck? Ship-ahoy!" she called to him as he came up, waiting at the head of the stairs.

"You never saw so many books in your life!" said Bernard, out of breath. "You must go tomorrow. But, Sarah, my book has been written."

"It has? What shall we do? Go on writing?"

"No, give it up and read. I don't want to work; I want to browse."

Sarah only told her brother that she found Miss Linora charming, and his own acquaintance with her amounted to little more than an interchange of the ordinary civilities of life. The two girls were almost constantly together, and Bernard wondered a little that Sarah was not more ready to go out with him. The wonder did not last, however; he was too busy among the books.

"You would scarcely believe me, I'm afraid, if I told you where I get great comfort," said Linora, one day. Almost their entire conversation had some bearing on her own afflictions. "In spiritualism. Yes, I was afraid it would shock

you. My dear, you don't know. I went first to ask about my voice. They gave me hope of its coming back."

"Oh, I am so glad! That is, I should be if I believed in it; but how can it be true? It shocks me; it is vulgar for people who have died to come back to tip tables."

"Ah, those are only the first coarse manifestations; we are beyond that now. I see! you have the common idea. What should you say if a medium should talk to you in the voice of your own mother and say things she would say?"

"Don't!" cried Sarah, with a quick backward motion of her hands, the tears springing into her eyes.

"Forgive me! I wouldn't wound you for anything. But go with me sometime; go to Madame Swift's."

They were standing at Sarah's door when Stephen Mann passed them on his way up stairs. Five minutes after, when Sarah was alone, some one knocked at her door. She opened it to find Mr. Mann, evidently a little embarrassed; it was the first time he had offered to exchange a word with her, beyond a good-morning.

"You must excuse me for overhearing you, but I couldn't help it. Are you going to see a medium with Miss Gale?"

"I haven't decided," said Sarah, telling a lie as

a species of loyalty. He was Linora's enemy, therefore he was hers.

"You may think I'm interfering, — it is interference; but I shouldn't advise you to go. In fact, I should advise you not."

"You mean if there were a question of your advising at all," said Sarah, biting, and feeling a little ashamed of herself in consequence.

"Exactly; but I mean for Miss Linora's sake, you know; of course I shouldn't presume to interfere with you. It excites her; it's very bad for her."

Sarah softened in spite of herself. Perhaps he was misunderstood, after all, and not as false as circumstances painted him.

"I see; and I didn't really mean to go," she said, smiling grudgingly. Ought she to smile, after all?

"And you won't say anything to Miss Gale? She might think I'd no business to feel interested."

"Yes, I see;" and Sarah withdrew into her room to wonder if she could play peacemaker. His face was marvellously changed by its smile; made radiant as some few faces are.

That night Bernard gleefully produced tickets to the Mozart Club. "Mann gave them to me; he's a member."

"I didn't know you were acquainted with him,"

said Sarah, looking at the tempting slips, and wondering if she ought to accept her enemy's favor.

"I've been getting acquainted while you and Miss Gale have been colloquing. He's a good fellow; handsome and musical, and all that. He's a tenor, too. Did you ever imagine an attractive chap singing bass?"

"An attractive chap may have no voice at all, dear raven!"

"'The raven is hoarse!'" cried Bernard, throwing himself into an attitude. "Sometime his voice will clear, and then, what melody!"

## CHAPTER V.

### TAKING A PLUNGE.

**A** NIGHT came when a celebrated man was to speak on immortality. Sarah had a great longing to hear him. Half her life lay in an unseen existence, where her mother dwelt. Her mood in these days was not her habitual one; her heart rose in brief flashes of cheerfulness, but her thoughts were too much with the dead. Something haunted her, which not even Bernard suspected. She was one of the people who love passionately, with pain; in whom conscience is often stricken because there has been no adequate expression of the love. There are such people, to whom love has been in some degree violated if the torch is not always flaming; as there may have been poets who grieve that the necessities of life call upon them to drop from singing to speech. Did her mother, — one of the perfect mothers, whose understanding was as marvellous as her silence was fine, — did she surely understand now, and had she always understood her child's longing to serve her?

When the evening came, Bernard yielded to a headache, and Sarah, in spite of his protestations, set forth alone. There was no one else to

go with her. This was one of the days when Linora betook herself to solitude in her room, and was supposed by the household in general to be devoting herself to grief.

Stephen Mann was drawing on his gloves at the door when Sarah reached it; it was natural enough to accompany her down the steps, and his way proved hers. Sarah had been in doors all day, and was eager for a walk. It did occur to her that Stephen might possibly drop off, until they reached the Common and he took her path. He was — a new thing to her — exceedingly animated; a sign, if she could have known it, that he was holding himself in leash.

“You are going to Kay Street? So am I,” he announced. “Would you allow me to find you a seat? Then I can put you in a car afterwards, and that will be pleasanter than finding one yourself.”

Sarah hesitated an instant to wonder if this would be proper in the city. It would in the country, and Mr. Mann was so fine a gentleman that he might be trusted to know. Then the city itself still frightened her, like a monstrous animal, and she never knew which way the car she wanted ought to go. So she agreed; and Stephen, with the air of having tossed some doubt and apprehension to the winds, ran on in a scamper of conversation. Sarah had at the bottom of her reasons

for saying yes, — or was it a surface bubble? — a thought of Linora and her own possible mission as peacemaker. She would broach the subject presently.

The sermon that night was no revelation to her; it only responded like an ecstatic chorus to her own certainty of eternal life. She was one of those fortunate souls who never really doubt it. At the close, the choir melted into a sweet confirmation of the preacher's wisdom. The tenor pierced through it like a bugle note, — ecstatic, triumphant, a conquering Michael. Sarah threw back her head; she felt like challenging the voice with answering joy. It upbore the harmony, and ended at a triumphant height. She could not bow her head for the benediction; it was the natural worship, for the moment, to look up into the face of the Almighty. But Stephen looked at her.

"Will you ride down?" he said, as they left the church.

Sarah, quivering, and on the verge of excited tears, answered hastily, "No, I must walk! that is —"

"No," said Stephen, his voice no more even than her own. "I must walk too. Is it proved to you?" he asked, when the stars and clear air had calmed her. "Are you surer of being immortal?"

"More sure than I was?" cried the girl triumphantly. "I did not need to be."



"Are you so positive?"

"You may take my word for it, if you are not," said Sarah, with an audacity that seemed like inspiration. "I am sure, if the universe is destroyed, that I shall live."

They did not speak again till, striking the Common, Stephen stopped her to say, almost in a whisper, "Look at the moon. How young she seems! A month or so ago I thought the world was rather an old affair; now I could swear it is just born."

When she would have gone on he arrested her again by a hand on her arm.

"Just one minute. Give me that to think," he said in a husky voice. Sarah turned to look at him curiously, but it occurred to her that, after Linora and Miss Phebe, it must not surprise her to meet any out-of-the-way type.

"Well," said Stephen, looking up from his moment's meditation. "If a man has burned his boats behind him, he must e'en go on. I shouldn't have come out with you to-night."

"I'm sure you needn't have," said Sarah, flip-pant, to cover the fact that she was a little frightened.

"I suppose it must out sometime; there's a fate about such things. I love you!"

"What do you mean!" she cried, losing every other feeling in indignation. "How dare you

make fun of me? That was the way you began with Linora."

"Linora be — don't mention that girl's name to me!" with a sternness under which she quailed a little. "And don't even think so blasphemous a thing as what you said first. Does a man feel his whole frame convulsed by his jokes? I'm not so dramatic." His voice was hoarse; she felt a current through the arm she held, -- not a trembling, but such a thrill as results in music from vibrating atoms. "There! It's said," he went on dryly. "Now, having made a donkey of myself, I'll stop. Doubtless I shall feel better after the disclosure, though you probably won't speak to me to-morrow. I don't suppose that, by any chance, you are at this moment madly in love with me?" The speculation in his tone was sufficient to provoke a laugh, most of all from Sarah, who was nervous enough for any outbreak. "No? I thought not. Well, shall you speak to me to-morrow?"

"Yes, I hope so. Oh, don't make your voice so hard!" she cried, overcome by an irresistible pity. "I don't care if you did mean it for a joke. Just don't say it any more."

"So you don't feel disposed to have me decapitated? I dare say not. A woman likes well enough to see a man crawling."

"You insult me!" flashed the girl. "You need

not class me in such vile generalities. What sort of women have you known?"

"None like you," he said softly. "I know what you are, though I am trying to be rough to you and sneer myself into good behavior. You would not like to have me incontinently stop here to kiss the toe of your overshoe. I might."

"Because," Sarah went on, with an awkward feeling that something must be settled, "you've only known me a month. We shall be very good friends, though, I feel, after we're better acquainted." Here she was a little stung by the thought of Linora.

"Only a month? I loved you the first night I set eyes on you. You'll say that's a thing of the senses and you'll have nothing to do with it. I know your practical little hard-headedness. If I were a hero in a German romance and wore my soul outside, like a frock-coat, you wouldn't object to my abruptness. You came, and I said, it is my angel, my deliverance, my soul. No, I didn't say anything; I knelt before the altar and covered my eyes."

They were almost home. Sarah was absolutely overawed by the consciousness of a great fact. The man might be wild, but he was talking truth; he loved her in this strange fashion.

"If you think you're to be annoyed by opening your door and stumbling over me," began Stephen

again, lightly, "you're mistaken. I shan't sigh across the table; I shan't leave verses under your plate. The world will go on and the boarders stagnate in ignorance that I am your subject. But just what I shall do I can't decide to-night: when I do, I'll tell you."

He was fitting in his key as he finished, and let Sarah in, as bewildered as humanity has capacity for being. Stephen laughed, though his eyes were like blue fire, quenched in suspicious moisture.

"I hope Bernard's head is better," he said, comfortably, going up stairs. "Good-night, Miss Ellis. I hope I haven't talked too much."

Miss Phebe was in Sarah's sitting-room, putting coal on the grate. "I thought maybe 'twouldn't keep till you came back," she said, without turning, vigorously poking, and besprinkling herself with ashes. "I'm glad you're getting acquainted with Mr. Mann. He is as good as gold. The only thing about him I ever had to complain of was his treating Miss Linora so. But we can't all be perfect."

Next day, at tea, Miss Phebe announced that if the boarders were in no hurry she would like to see them in the parlor for a few minutes. Accordingly, there they assembled after the meal. Sarah had not dared look at Stephen all day, but he had said good-morning and offered her the butter in so un-

concerned a manner that she blushed at herself for having had a bad dream and one of which she was ashamed.

The parlor at the boarding-house was less attractive than any other room, with its stiff bouquets of dried grasses and its family photographs.

"I've been trying to make up my mind about the board," said Miss Phebe, coming in at last, and sitting down on a camp-stool with the air of a darning-needle stuck in.

"I vote we raise the price a dollar a week," said Stephen, breaking in.

"No, you needn't take the trouble," said Miss Phebe, smiling at him. "The fact is, I mean to give up my table." Everybody looked dismayed, Miss Reynolds severe. "You know I never started to keep a boarding-house, only one for lodging, and you sort of persuaded me into having a table; and it's too much care. I do this for fun; just to earn my living and stay in Boston. I don't want to make money."

"I'm surprised!" said Miss Reynolds, with a cutting emphasis which left it in doubt whether her emotion had reference to the last fact or a preceding one. "It's very inconvenient to go out for meals this weather."

"There's a good table next door," said Miss Phebe, with not much feeling for that particular

member of her family. "And I guess they've got vacant rooms there, too!"

"We don't want to work Miss Phebe to death," said Stephen, coming to the rescue. "We want to stay with her, but we can't,— so let us be good."

"Is that all?" asked Miss Reynolds, rising.

"Yes, it is!" said the landlady, with emphasis.

"Miss Phebe, how did you happen to take lodgers in the first place?" asked Linora, getting up to lead Miss Phebe over to the sofa, where she sat patting the bones which stood for that lady's hand.

"I needed money, bless you, for I wanted to live in Boston."

"Yes, but how? When did you come to Boston? What did you do before?"

"Well, I took care of mother; she was paralytic. Then, when she died, I came here and took a house, and took singing-lessons." Stephen looked up with sudden interest. "Oh, you didn't think I'd had anything happen to me, did you?" said Miss Phebe, with good-natured sarcasm. "You thought I was only old Phebe Kane, just about up to answering the bell and bringing up fresh towels. I can have my history, too, as well as the rest of you!"

"I wish you would tell us about it," said Sarah, shyly.

"There's nothing to tell. I sang in choir at

home, and I meant to sing here. I meant to sing in concerts."

"And did you?" asked Linora, alone in not fearing to stir up painful suggestions.

"Once."

"Where?"

"In Music Hall."

"Was it a success?"

"No, I failed."

"O Miss Phebe, why?"

"Because I was so homely."

No extreme of delicacy could have kept down curiosity at this. Her audience hung on her next words.

"It was an air from an opera. I shan't tell you what it was. I used to feel that I was meant to go on to the stage; I couldn't help acting. That night when I sang I suppose I nodded my head round, and behaved like a fool generally. You can guess how anything would look acted out by such a face as I've got. When I got through there was a titter, and all the rows I could see were one broad smile. I came home and burnt my music, and said to myself that no living being should ever hear me sing again, and they shan't!"

Linora's nostrils were dilating and her mouth was quivering. "O Miss Phebe, and you didn't tell me, when I told you all my story!" At which

remark Stephen began turning over the photograph album.

"There was no call to," said Miss Phebe, shortly. "What happened to you was a trial. I lost my chance through my own stuffiness. There, I've talked enough."

She left the room, followed by Linora, who insisted upon fondling her in sympathy, a kindness Miss Phebe bore with commendable patience and great awkwardness.

Bernard rose, too, to go to the library for an evening's reading. With a wild fear that she was to be left alone with her new and embarrassing acquaintance, Sarah made her way to the door, with as much dignity as could be indicated by lack of haste.

"Miss Ellis," came softly from the table, just as Bernard found his hat and went out. Sarah looked round; Stephen was still turning over the album. "I'm very anxious to say something to you, and I don't want to say it in the hall." Sarah came a few steps nearer, and Stephen drew forward a chair.

"Please sit; well, then, I must stand too. I've decided."

"About what?"

"What to do in regard to being in love with you." Could mortal man be serious and yet speak in so softly reflective a tone? And yet she could



not doubt him. She took one step away and then paused again. "I've decided to keep on." Now he was looking at her, and her eyes would not sustain her in the combat. "It isn't the point as to whether I keep on loving you; that's decided for me. I shall do that in my grave. But as to troubling you with the tender of it, — that was what weighed on me."

"Well?" said Sarah, gaining courage and mischief at the same moment.

"I have decided that I remain a suppliant till you reach me a gracious hand."

"I shall never do that!" flashed the girl, the suggestion of surrender like a sting.

"Very well, then, I shall stay."

"Mr. Mann, if you say such things to me, I shall be obliged to avoid you. I'll do anything — I'll move away from here."

Stephen looked at her with an admiring smile. His eyes were dangerous in their mastery. He seemed to himself dangerous.

"Are you honestly sure," he said, compelling her eyes to meet his, "that you are not willing I should love you?"

A slow blush came into her cheeks and stung her forehead. "No," she said at last. "I daresay I like it — if I don't see you. Oh, what a shameful creature I am!"

"If you don't see me? Then I'm a monster?"

"How can you lead me on so! I mean if I were never to see you again."

"I understand. You'd like to have me in China, wearing the willow under your feet. That cannot be, unless you become a celestial citizen. Now it is a very painful sort of thing to love and have no expression of one's feelings; therefore I shall not be silent. To-morrow morning I shall send you a rose, and you will wear it at your throat, or in your hair just behind the ear."

"You may be sure I shall not," she cried, flying baffled up stairs. And she kept her word, leaving the great velvet creature to wither on her bureau, and there it looked so pathetic that, after breakfast, she put it in a glass of water on a shelf in her closet.

"So you didn't wear it?" said Stephen, glancing at her incidentally as they were left alone at table. She had gone late to avoid him; he proved late also. Sarah vouchsafed no answer. "Never mind," said he, placidly, as he rose to go. "I think, on the whole, I'd rather you would not wear flowers till I pin them on for you."

Bernard had guessed at their secret understanding, though he had not accredited it as going so far. It was like a blow to see any other man's time and service at her command. He grew moody and churlish, refusing to drop into Stephen's room, as he had once done every night. The other man

wondered a little, and then set his coolness down to jealousy, though necessarily of a fraternal sort.

Stephen went on his way, apparently careless and at ease. He exchanged a word with Sarah now and then, sometimes neglecting her for so long that she began to draw a breath of relief and regret that it was all really over. Being honest, she shamefacedly confessed to the regret in her own heart. She was young and full of a nervous vitality; the new circumstances filled her with a kind of animal elation; moreover, she was recovering from the physical strain attendant on her mother's illness, and was still in a supersensitive mental state from the fact of her death. Excitement was welcome, and Stephen had been food for thought.

"Promise me, dear," said Linora one day, after a protracted account of her latest troubles, "promise me you won't talk me over with Stephen Mann. No, I know you don't exchange three words a week with him, but you may. Promise!"

"I can't, dear," said Sarah, angry with herself for flushing, with those clear eyes on her face. "I might want to praise you, you know. But I do promise I never will except for your good."

"What people invariably say before a particularly nasty dose!" said Linora, with a grimace.

But Sarah laughed and shook her head, and the postman saved her. A letter was brought in for Linora. She came back to her seat, and, holding

it tightly, looked at Sarah with slowly dilating eyes and quivering lips.

"What is it, dear?" cried Sarah in quick sympathy. Linora's universe, to her thinking, was a fabric always in imminent danger of being dissolved. "Open it; it may not be bad news."

"Oh my dear, my dear!" said Linora, shaking her head mournfully, "if you knew what his letters can be! Some new calamity, some new cruelty in each!"

"Come, let me tear it open."

"No, no; you couldn't save me from reading it finally." She walked to the window and stood there, reading slowly. Sarah watched her, her heart in arms, ready to succor. At last Linora crumpled the sheet in her hand, and came back, to sink at the other girl's feet and bury her face in her lap. "Oh, I deserve pity — I know I do!" she sobbed. "And he has always been cruel to me, always!"

Sarah stroked her hair and dried her eyes in pitying silence. Then she tried to be equal to the emergency in some sort of practical help. She had always occasion to flagellate herself after a one-sided confidence of this kind, at the remembrance that she had only sympathized and never proposed a remedy.

"Now let us consider, Linora," she said, mentally stiffening her own backbone. "You are not

in your uncle's power. He can't treat you like a child, or shut you up in a convent."

"No, but I am so young, you see; only seventeen, Sarah, and he can call me about from place to place, or put an end to my winter here, for I haven't a cent out of his control."

"Ah, that is a difficulty, an actual one," said Sarah, tightening her lips and musing. "But it isn't at all likely he will do it, Linora. It isn't in nature."

"You don't know his nature. And there are other things I can't tell you — things you wouldn't believe. My dear girl, you don't know what trouble is."

So the usual petting followed, and the practical sympathy proved as unsubstantial a phantom as ever.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LAYING A TRAIN.

**T**HE course of events brought about the fulfilment of Riker's prophecy with marvellous exactness. Leonard Sparrow was now Professor Leonard, Test Medium, and saw his name at last on a black sign in letters of gold. He had adopted his Christian name as his professional one, at Riker's suggestion. Riker had conceived the idea that when the young man should become well known and prosperous, a score of relatives might start up to divide the proceeds. This his tutor had no idea of allowing. Uncle Ben demurred a little at the assumption of the name, but submitted when Riker told him that the influences had strenuously insisted on it, without giving a reason.

Mrs. Riker had gone West, as her husband said, with a sigh, because he and Julia were no longer congenial; therefore he had moved into a room adjoining Len's office and kept a constant and vigilant guardianship over him. Len was not sorry for this, and would not have objected had it implied a companionship ten times closer. Riker was invariably kind to him, even good-natured, when the boy's scruples proved a dead wall to his

suggestions ; and, indeed, Len's simplicity often stood in the way of his choicest plans. One day, soon after the sign had been hung out, a visitor was shown into the waiting-room, whose circumstances Riker chanced to know. He called the medium into his own room, and briefly rehearsed them to him.

"Her name is Vincent ; she has lost a daughter," he said, rapidly, while Len stared at him in the vacuous way he sometimes had. "Her daughter died two months ago, a blond — light hair and eyes, remember — name, Mary. Understand ?"

"Yes," said Len. "Poor woman ! Shall I go in now ?"

"Yes, and you'd better tell her to keep on trying to find means of communicating with her daughter, and soon they will be satisfactory. Tell her to go among mediums, into a spiritual atmosphere. I've just had a communication to that effect. Go along."

It was not half an hour before the medium came back again. "Well?" asked his master, impatiently. Mrs. Vincent, once secured, would be a valuable patron. Len was evidently much moved.

"I can't help it," he said, wiping his eyes. "It's awful to see anybody cry so."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her I couldn't see a thing, and gave her

back her money," said Len, unconscious of the effect he was producing. "Wa'n't it too bad, when she cried so?"

Riker laid down the pencil with which he was writing his next inspired lecture, and looked at the boy in silence. Len went to the mirror and brushed his hair, with a growing smile over his eminently satisfactory appearance. His watch-chain had been new only the day before, and had not yet lost its power of keeping his undivided attention.

"Didn't you see Aunt Peggy?" asked his master, at last, in a scrupulously even voice.

"No, I couldn't see a thing but the chairs and tables," trying the effect of a longer loop in his chain.

"Didn't you say anything to comfort her?"

"Yes, I told her you said she'd better keep going around among mediums." Riker groaned; then he made one more effort at the instilling of first principles into Len's benighted mind.

"Len, it's your duty to say something to comfort people," he began, gravely. "The spirits have put you here to do a great work, and when you refuse to do it, you are committing sin. When people come to you, you can always say something that will be satisfactory."

"I can't," said Len, almost in tears. "I ain't bright, like you; bright things don't come into



my head. And how can I say I see things when I don't?" he added triumphantly, as a final and unanswerable argument. Riker could say no more. He dared not hint at the advisability of lying, until the pupil's mind should be ready for such an advance.

But Len, in spite of his unambitious simplicity, was wonderfully prosperous. His honesty impressed people, — a circumstance Riker was not slow at marking, and which made him all the more anxious not to conceal this trump-card too effectually. When the real virtue was gone, its counterfeit must be left. It was surprising that so many people were satisfied by the few things the boy had to say. He saw an old lady; that almost invariably stood for the dead-and-gone ancestor of the questioner. Often she had much to say; however it might have been accounted for, most of Len's simple reflections seemed to him to come from her lips, and, clothed in the high-flown phraseology he caught from Riker on the lecture platform, they were generally satisfactory. He had certain office days in the week; on others he accompanied Riker in his shortest trips about the country. It fed Len's vanity to be regarded, in small towns, as the friend and colleague of a great man. There was usually a circle of spiritualists wherever they stopped, who received them hospitably, heaping social honors upon them. Simple

and worshipping women sent Riker buttonhole bouquets to be worn on the platform, and sometimes Len came in for his share of floral tributes. His simple, innocent vanity grew like a mushroom. He was a great man now; what a pity the poor-house boys could not see him! Still, they never would guess who he was.

One day of this same winter, an early visitor stood nervously in the waiting-room, grasping his stick and hat, and smiling with impatience. It was Uncle Ben in company array; all excitement at the prospect of meeting his boy again. This was the first time since their farewell at Coventry. Len came in, giving his faultless coat a last affectionate brush with his fat white hand.

"Why, Uncle Ben! Why, why!" he began, and then ran forward to seize the old man by both hands and smile speechlessly in broad delight.

"Well, well!" said Uncle Ben at last, extricating himself and stooping to pick up his hat and stick, which had fallen unobserved, and then carefully wiping the hat with his handkerchief as a diversion for his feelings. Len kept one hand on his shoulder, stroking the homely gray coat. He had not known how dear the old life was until the breath of its atmosphere drifted in.

"Well, well, Lenny," said Uncle Ben, when the hat no longer served as a pretext, "we old folks get into a second childhood before we know it; but

it ain't any disgrace to have to wipe your eyes," suiting the action to the word. "You look well, Lenny. You look prosperous."

Len glanced down at his well-made clothes, and involuntarily settled his blue necktie.

"You've made it well by going away; but that ain't the main thing. It's everything to be doin' such good; bein' such a medium as you have made is a great callin', Lenny. Don't you forget your responsibilities."

"No, Uncle; but how's Aunt Maria?"

"Maria, she's well, an' she sent you a whole carpet-bag full of things. It'll do Maria's heart good to know how well you look; she won't have it but the professor's cross to you."

"Oh my, no!" cried Len, laughing at the very idea.

"Needn't tell me, boy; I know him. He's got your good at heart, if ever anybody had a good heart for anybody else. I wanted Maria to send him some things, too, for fear he should feel sort o' touched, you know, but she wouldn't. When Maria gets anything into her head, it's there! an' she never liked the professor. Now, Lenny, you'll give me a sittin'?"

"O Uncle, I can't bear to take up the time so!" cried Len, in weariness at being perpetually hagg-ridden. "I'd rather talk."

"Yes, yes, so you shall; that's all right enough

— but you don't want me to come all the way up here an' go home without seein' how you've developed! No, no! Well, if there ain't the professor!"

Riker came in, with beaming countenance and outstretched hand. It did Len's heart good to see the two people he so admired and loved, on such terms with each other.

"Now I begin to get over being hurt in thinking you haven't been to see us!" cried Riker. "I hope you're going to stay a month!"

"No, no, that wouldn't do," said Uncle Ben, beaming at what he considered a reception far beyond his deserts. "Maria wanted me to make a visit on't, but I am too old for that. We old ones are better on't at home. This changin' beds in winter time can't help bein' bad for old bones. No, I shall have to go home to-night."

"Oh, not to-night, uncle!" cried Len.

"Yes, Lenny, so it's got to be. I don't know what possessed me to come on a journey in winter weather, but a while ago it was borne in on me I must see Lenny, an' I said, if there's a warm spell I'll go. So when this thaw come, I couldn't go agin my word."

A caller for Professor Leonard was shown into the hall. Len looked appealingly at his master. "I can't see anybody when uncle's here."

"No, no, Lenny, don't turn anybody away

empty," said the old man. "It might be some good you never could make up in all your life. No, I'll talk with the professor a little while, an' if he's busy, I'll take a nap."

The professor was unctuously ready to be of service, and was not at all busy. He proposed a walk, — a look at the State House, and a call upon a medium of great popularity. So they left Len sorely and boyishly disappointed, feeling his vocation to be more of an old man of the sea than ever.

This was the opportunity Riker had longed for — and for which a visit to Coventry within Maria's jurisdiction would hardly have sufficed.

"Well, an' how's Lenny gettin' along?" asked Uncle Ben, when they were once outside. "You think he develops, don't you?"

"Think, my dear sir! I know there isn't a more wonderful case in the country. He develops slowly, but we must have patience, you know."

"Yes, yes; the Lord brings out His revelation pretty slow. We musn't get our backs up an' pretend we could plan things better. I've got beyond that, little's I know. Now how is it about money? Does Lenny need more for his expenses?"

"No," said Riker thoughtfully, wondering how far he dared go. "No, not for his immediate expenses. He makes enough for those, and when

he doesn't regularly, I always supply what he lacks."

"That mustn't be!" said Uncle Ben promptly. "You've got ways enough for your money, I'll warrant, — a man that does as much good as you do. No, you must let me send Lenny a bill once in a while."

"Ah, that's very kind," said Riker, smiling, "but you don't know how independent he has grown. I don't believe he'd take it; when I help him out, I have to do it on the sly."

"Now you don't say!" cried Uncle Ben, delighted. "Well, I do' know as I like him any the worse for that. He'll get over it by the time he's as old as I am. We all have to find out there's nobody but what has to have things done for him. But I'd rather he'd begin by bein' independent. Now what say to my sendin' the money to you?"

"Capital, if you can trust my judgment about spending it."

"Don't you say another word! You'll know how to lay it out, an' you can do it so he'll never have to be worried. It's pretty hard for you that have so much hard work to do, to have to think about what you shall eat and wear."

"Well, I'm greatly relieved," said Riker, watching him furtively. "At least Leonard never will want while you live, and if he should survive you, I should try to look out for him." They walked

along in silence for a few minutes, Riker still craftily keeping the corner of his eye open to the old man's expression.

"I do' know but what I've done wrong not to make some provision for Lenny," said Uncle Ben, thoughtfully. "I ain't likely to last forever, nor Maria after me, an' I meant what property I had should go to him. I sort o' wish I'd made my will before I put myself in a place of danger comin' up here on the cars. But then, what's the Lord's will's sure to come, whether you're asleep in your bed, or in a train of cars."

"A will is the only safe thing," said Riker quietly; then, turning suddenly, with a great burst of frankness, he went on: "You must not think I speak too plainly. I do speak plainly, I know, but it comes from my great affection for Leonard."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Uncle Ben, trudging sturdily along, emphasizing the points of his sentence with his stout stick. "You've got a great heart as well as a clear head. 'Tain't everybody's got such feelin's as you have; an' I always feel as if you was under influence to speak."

"Then perhaps I might as well go on and speak further. If you ever do make a will in Len's favor, I hope you'll do it in the safest way. I wonder if you've noticed one of his traits? He's as good as gold, but he's what worldly people

would call simple about some things, — business and money, you know.”

“Yes, he’s one of the Lord’s triumphs; I’ve always thought of that. He’s bringin’ the revelation out o’ the mouths o’ babes.”

“Now if Len should have absolute control of money, it would be cheated out of him in a year. He’d never go to the bad, but he’d fall into the hands of sharpers and speculators.”

“Yes, yes, there’s reason in that.”

“And you know there are periods in spiritual development when we must rest; we can’t do anything but render ourselves receptive. Now such a period might come upon Len when his money was all spent. What could he live on? I should help him, but I am a poor man, and likely to be, and I have my family troubles that take money.”

“To be sure, to be sure. It’s everything to be long-headed, ain’t it? I never was. You just go on an’ talk it out for me.”

“Well, I should suggest that you leave what money you have for Len in the hands of some competent business man, who, though Len might be of age himself, would act as a sort of guardian over him.”

“That’s a good thing, an’ I’m obliged to you,” said Uncle Ben; and here, at the medium’s door, the subject was dropped.



When they were once more at home they found Len busy with waiting visitors. Uncle Ben seemed not to be disappointed, but sat down by himself in Riker's room, evidently turning things over in his mind. Riker left him to himself for a while and then came in, proposing to give him a sitting. Leonard was busy, and might be so half the afternoon, and there were influences crowding round. The room was full of faces, Riker said.

"I guess so, now!" cried Uncle Ben delightedly. "Ain't willin' I should have to have my journey for nothin', are they? I told Maria so. But they must just wait a minute. Professor, I've got a great favor to ask of you."

"Anything in my power to do," said Riker, his small eyes gleaming impatiently. "Anything in the world in my power is at your service."

"It's to let me appoint you Lenny's guardeen in my will."

"My dear sir!" said the professor, standing back and shaking his head. "Such a trust as that? No, no, I'm not fit for the responsibility."

"Now I begin to feel disapp'inted," said Uncle Ben. "I thought you was the right man for it, an' I thought you'd jump to do good to anybody." Riker held up a warning finger.

"Sh-h!" he whispered, inclining his head to listen. His eyes closed and his face twitched con-

vulsively. — "Well, it's settled!" he went on, presently, opening his eyes and smiling faintly. "The influences are too much for me; I often have to submit my will to theirs. They tell me to do as you say, and if I feel myself unfit for such a task, they will aid me."

"There! how bright things do turn out in the end!" cried Uncle Ben. "Here I was, five minutes ago, all worried and unsettled; and here I am, my way all marked out for me by them that knows more'n I do. No wonder I was impressed to come to Boston!"

In the course of the next hour's discussion as to the provisions of the will, Riker had also prepared for a séance. The curtains were drawn, the door locked, and his arm-chair placed beside Uncle Ben's. Then they went on talking, in the midst of which Riker suddenly closed his eyes, his face becoming set and his voice unnatural.

"I s'pose the medium hasn't got anything to do with what's goin' to be said to me?" began Uncle Ben. "I mean, he won't hear it."

"The medium is quite unconscious," returned Riker.

"Well, now, I want to ask for a test; not for me; for somebody else that don't believe. Somebody told me, when I was talkin' of comin' here, that I'd better not have a sittin' with the professor, because he's talked me over with Lenny and Len-

ny's told him all about our family and the folks that's died. Now who told me that?"

"The name is quite clear," said the medium, slowly. "We will spell it. Ma-ri-a, Maria."

"Now if that ain't a test!" cried the old man, rubbing his hands. "Why, this is wuth comin' to Boston for. Now how about what I was talkin' over with the professor; had I better do it?"

"It was what we brought you to Boston for," returned the voice. "We have been influencing you for a long time. Your mind was all ready, and then we brought you up here. We knew what to do."

"I guess you did! I guess you mostly do know more'n we poor creatur's that don't have no wisdom but what comes to us here. You must help me write the will; put me up to what to say to the lawyer."

"Yes, we'll be there; but we want you to remember one thing, — don't tell Maria."

"Not tell Maria about the will? Now I should like to know why."

"She would be unhappy. Some bad spirits have got hold of her, and they make her hate the medium. She thinks he would cheat the money all away."

"Now ain't that queer?" said the old man to himself. "Maria don't like him; she can't bear him. Strange folks shouldn't believe, when tests

come out like this. — What shall I do about Maria in the will?"

"Leave her half, and let it go to the boy after her death."

"I do' know's I can do that," said Uncle Ben slowly; "still, Maria's got bank-stock. She'll never want. Who is it talkin' to me?"

"'Squire John."

"I might ha' known it. There ain't a lawyer round anywhere to compare. How about your fee this time, 'squire?"

"Give it to the medium," returned the voice; at which Uncle Ben laughed, as having got the worst of it.

The interview lasted over an hour, at the end of which time Len came in exhausted, having finished his own engagements. Riker opened his eyes, and conversation resumed its ordinary tone.

"Professor, do you know what you've been doin'?" asked Uncle Ben, solemnly.

"No," answered the professor, with a start that might have been ascribed to guilt. In fact, the answer was true; his deeds were too numerous to be classified.

"You've gi'n me more'n twenty names of folks that have passed into spirit life from Coventry alone, an' messages from more'n half. I ain't had such a feast, no, nor such tests, since I've been a believer."

The professor declared himself humbly delighted, and only accepted a fee of ten times the usual amount, with the second thought that he could use it in sending specimen copies of the "Spiritual Messenger" to unbelievers.

Uncle Ben went home scarcely disappointed at having had merely a glimpse of Leonard. That was enough to show him as well and happy; and finding him a man of business amply compensated for the loss of his society. Len insisted on packing into the emptied carpet-bag, with his own hands, a parcel for Maria containing a dress and a pair of long ear-rings.

"You tell her I'm well, and having a jolly time," he called in at the window, as the train moved away.

## CHAPTER VII.

### REVELATIONS.

**W**HEN Miss Phebe's entire household were asked to leave her hospitable table, two of the members made a pleasing amendment to that proposition. One night, as Sarah and Bernard, jubilant after a long walk, were passing a kitchen-furnishing store, Sarah stopped before the window, bright with tin and illuminated with brass.

"Bernard, come!" and she drew him in. He stood by in wonder, while she bought a small tea-pot; but questions were to no purpose till he had been convoyed here and there for sugar, tea, and a couple of cheap little cups.

"We shall not go to the ogress' den to-night, my hearty," said Sarah, on tiptoe with delight at a new thing. "We shall buy a frugal lunch, and then we shall make a festive cup of tea in our sitting-room."

So that evening the tea was steeped over the coals of the grate, and two spoons borrowed of Miss Phebe. Spoons had been forgotten in the midst of household purchasing. Bernard was in high feather that night; he had been happy all that afternoon, with Sarah to himself. But there

came a knock at the door which was destined to overturn his cup of joy. Sarah went to the door, to find Stephen in gala array.

"I have come to call," he said, with great gravity. "I have never called on my new neighbors. I have put on a claw-hammer coat, in which I am sufficiently miserable, and I have a flower in my button-hole."

"Come in, by all means," said Sarah, merry and annoyed. Seeing him always brought some change of her mood, — a curious disturbance of her life-forces. "Bernard, Mr. Mann, has come to be polite to you."

Bernard shook hands with him, and hated himself for hating Stephen's air of general adaptability.

"We are having tea," said Sarah shyly, not quite knowing what to do with her guest, now he was there. "Will you have some?"

"I will have some by all means," said Stephen, disposing himself comfortably. "Are there only two cups? Then give me yours and improvise another."

His manner, his look, were enough to inflame Bernard. He was sure that he should not have resented the familiar gallantry of men in general, but Stephen in particular was especially irritating. And this was a new experience; until now he had only seen his sister interested in a few old friends she had known from her cradle.

"I'll borrow a cup of Miss Phebe," he said, hastily rising. "Sarah, keep your own."

Sarah would not meet the look Stephen turned on her when they were alone.

"I came to-night because I could not stay away," he said in a low voice. "I am making a joke of it because I am terribly in love with you. How long do you think I can live like this, — darling?"

"How dare you! I hate you!" she cried, with an instinct of self-defence.

"If you like: oh, if you will! A hot hate up to the measure of my love! yes, give me that!"

Bernard came in, frowning, his face to light up with a flash of suspicion as he caught his sister's confusion. She filled the three cups with a trembling hand, and would have passed Stephen his, but he quietly took her own from the table and talked to Bernard about the latest additions to the library. It was too much; his coolness struck the boy like insolence, and he was too much a boy for concealment.

"Sarah, I'm going out to buy a paper," he announced, suddenly putting down his cup, having made Stephen no answer.

"O Bernard, no!" said Sarah appealingly. "Stay!" But was she altogether displeased at the chance of listening again?



"No, I must go." There was a grain of pleasure in doing the penance which lay in refusal.

"He is very kind," said Stephen, putting down his cup the instant Bernard had gone. "Do you object to being loved?"

"Yes, in this way."

"This way is my way, and you must learn to like it. What do you mean by this way?"

"Suddenly, without knowing me. I want people to like my qualities."

"I love you!" said Stephen irrelevantly, leaning his chin on his hand and musingly regarding her.

"That is no answer!" said the girl, waxing wroth. "You are like a parrot. Say something new."

"Anything you teach me, sweet mistress; being a parrot, I can only learn."

"Besides, I don't approve of you; I don't like your character," she went on, satisfying her conscience by having it out at once.

"Nor I, but I will improve. I will be whatever you like."

"Then I don't like fickleness. You have been false to Linora."

"Bother Linora!—I mean I know I have. The parrot pleads guilty."

"Well, if you have done wrong, why not apologize and let her forgive you?"

"Because I don't choose to, — not even for you. I shall never again label myself Miss Linora's friend: you must like me without the label."

"Are you fickle?" suddenly asked Sarah. Her eyes were very soft and searching. The question might have arisen from an impulse of coquetry; its effect was entirely charming. Stephen looked at her more than an instant in silence.

"My dear little girl, I honestly think not," he said, slowly, and with a gravity that lent him a dangerous charm. "I have been fickle, but it has been to the false. You can't blame a man for not worshipping false gods."

"No," said Sarah, softly, "and I believe in you."

Perhaps he might have taken a confession of love like one of the world-old race of lovers. This serious little speech was like a blow of knighthood. He hid his eyes.

"Oh, don't!" said Sarah, instinctively stretching her hand out, and as quickly drawing it back.

"I won't disgrace you," said Stephen, throwing back his head with a toss of his bright hair. "You put out your hand then. Do it again." Sarah laughed and shook her head. "No, trust me. Put it out and hold it there." He knelt and bent toward the round white wrist, not touching it with lips or hand. "That is my regard for you," he said, rising. "If my love were less I might long

to kiss the hand. I am willing to worship at a distance."

The task of setting their acquaintance on a commonplace basis was greater than she had anticipated; she despaired of it. She took her sewing, then laid it down to make one more effort.

"Mr. Mann, I like you ever so much, and I want to know you."

"Very well; that's a good beginning."

"But I can't be comfortable when you say such silly things. You call me names, too, that you've no right to."

"What names?" Sarah blushed deeper and deeper, and took a stitch that would hardly have done credit to basting. "How cowardly you are! How can I know what you mean, till you tell me?"

"Well then, — 'darling'!" with a sort of desperate bravery.

"Oh, the sweet word!" said her lover, his eyes feeding dreamily on her face. "When will you say it to me in earnest?"

Bernard was soon back again and without his paper. He had taken a walk in hot haste, lashing himself all the way for a suspicious fool. Coming back sane, it was only to fall into the same pit of jealousy at finding Stephen still there.

"What a dandy he is!" he exclaimed as soon as Stephen had taken his leave, — and then hated himself for his injustice.

"He isn't at all," flamed Sarah. "And you didn't think so at first. What has happened?"

"Nothing. I've grown envious, that's all. His nose is handsome and mine is not," sneered Bernard, bolting out of the room, leaving Sarah to wonder at the general disjointedness of the characters she had to do with. She could not be angry with Stephen. No woman can be with the worship of a man in whom she finds a charm, and who keeps at a respectful distance. Then his audacity of word was so delicately excused by the reverence of his look and manner that she could not feel herself to be held lightly.

Her coming here had been like stepping from the fireside to the stage. The foot-lights dazzled her. Perhaps this hurry and rush of events, this outcropping of the unknown in character, was the ordinary and expected thing in city life. She would not shrink from her draught of elixir, but take it with the high courage she would like to show were it hemlock. She had often said she longed to know every emotion and every possible experience of life. Fate was taking her at her word. And yet often when she went to her bed at night the thought of her mother came like the sound of a clear stream in deep woods, after one has shouted with revellers in a garden of artificial beauty. She longed for counsel; for aged womanhood and placid experience to place a cool hand on

her forehead and still her pulses, before the next glowing dream of the panorama.

Linora was keeping her room most of the time, as Miss Phebe said, "all broken down by some new villany of that uncle. Do you know what I should like to do?" she said, with emphasis, one day, passing Sarah's door on her way to carry Linora a cup of coffee. "I should like to take him by the ear and walk him up to that little angel and say, now do you see this dear little thing? Well, you've most broken her heart and drove her to the grave with your carryings on!" and Miss Phebe passed by, having spoken her righteous mind. Sarah, having exhausted her imagination in trying to be of use to Linora without full knowledge of her troubles, was at last admitted to a further confidence. One day she went to Linora's room, to find the atmosphere heavy and fragrant with smoke. Linora lay upon the sofa, in a barbaric-looking costume, with colored wraps disposed about her. She was very different on occasions, sometimes rakishly so, from the Madonna-like Linora whom Sarah had first seen.

"Dear girl!" she said with her most sorrowful smile, holding out her hand; "take the little hassock and come here. Don't be shocked at my cigarette; come and have one too."

"Cigarette?"

"Oh, I was in fun, of course," said Linora,

quickly, withdrawing the little case. "I am ordered to smoke them for my head; it is very disagreeable. Please don't mention it to any one. It seems so unwomanly, even under orders."

- "Poor little thing! I don't believe anybody would suspect you of unwomanliness," said Sarah, seating herself and patting the soft cheek. "And how do things go to-day?"

"Quite as one might expect — badly," said Linora, more pitiful than ever, when she tried to smile. "I had a letter from him to-day — uncle."

"Another? How often he writes!"

"He speaks of a widow who is in their party. He has fallen in with a party abroad. Suppose he marries her!"

"Well, suppose he does? You may like her, and it may make things twice as pleasant for you."

"Ah, my dear, there is more behind. I could tell you a reason why he should not marry. There is insanity in the family." She buried her face in her wilderness of wraps and sobbed aloud.

"Poor, poor child!" said Sarah, thinking of the slight proportions of her own sorrows, in comparison with those heaped upon this little creature.

"And that is not all," whispered Linora. "Don't fear me; don't shun me afterwards, but — I dread it for myself!" Sarah could only put her arms about her and hold her in motherly fondness.

"That is why my uncle hates me; because, whenever I find him in danger of marrying, I feel obliged to warn the woman in question. He never would tell her, and how can I see any one so sacrificed without knowing what she was binding herself to?"

"But," said Sarah, a sudden thought striking her, "you were going to marry, yourself." Linora paused, as if an unforeseen obstacle had presented itself. But she was ready for the emergency; no one was ever quicker-witted than she.

"That was my sin. That was where I was weak," she cried, in bitter self-reproach. "I loved him so much that I was ready to deceive him. Sarah, don't despise me!" But Sarah pitied her the more, and spent hours in reading to her, and soothing her when she seemed in hopeless paroxysms of sorrow.

She, too, had some growing need of Linora, as an affectionate, clinging creature who frankly owned dependence on her help. She was more and more alone, shunning Stephen, as his power of moving her grew, and shunned by Bernard. He had fallen into the habit of staying whole days away from her, coming back at night surly and moody. Their old companionship was dead, and she grieved over it. Sometimes she was too hurt by his evil humors to do more than keep silence, and leave him to his own ways. Then Bernard was only more

bitter, and was sure she was comparing his churlishness with Stephen's readiness and grace, — hating the other man less than he did himself.

In one of these moods of self-torture, he went to the box of papers where lay the statement of his birth, written by his second mother. He began to formulate his reasons for leaving it unread; chief among them must have been the feeling that it could only amount to a weakening of the tie made only by affection, if the name and locality of his kindred should assume a practical value in his mind. Now, when the superfine texture of Stephen's manner and beauty mocked him continually, he was driven back and out of himself to find further cause for misery. Stephen faced the world coolly, and looked as if he might do it arrogantly, with an eye single to his future, knowing the past contained no stain. Bernard had been transplanted; no doubt taken from a soil that grew only weeds; and if that were so, it was no wonder that the rankness and grossness of the weed lay in his nature. Sarah tapped at his door while he was unlocking the box. The sound was like the dissuading whisper of a guardian angel. He stopped and listened, his finger still on the packet.

"Not now, Sarah; go away!" he called, harshly, hoping she would insist, but her footsteps retreated slowly down the stairs. Then he opened the paper, committed himself to the severe mercies



of truth, and read. There was no attempt at melodramatic surprise in the document, and there was need for none. He knew the main fact before, being ignorant only of name and place.

"My dear son," his mother wrote. "I thank you for being so willing to belong to me that you are not curious as to your natural ties. The year my little son died, I found you in Freeport, a country town where I boarded a few weeks. Your mother did some work for me, and brought you with her when she took home the clothes. You were very precocious; Sarah, who was a month younger, took a great fancy to you, and I fell in love with you. Your mother was very poor just then, and was willing I should take you to educate. I think she was the more willing because she was about to marry again, a very respectable mechanic, who objected to a child not his own. I adopted you, and she promised not to find you out, when you had once taken my name. She still lives in Freeport, I have recently taken the trouble to ascertain. Her name was formerly Bridget Mac-Claren, and she married a man by the name of Mason. They are in good circumstances, and have a large family of children. I do not think she needs you, but it is unnecessary to remind you to consider — though you may not acknowledge — the ties of blood, if you should ever see an occasion of duty for doing so."

Bernard dropped the paper, and, in taking it up, looked curiously at his hand. The white length of Stephen's fingers ranged itself beside his square ones.

"Anybody could tell, to look at that," he said aloud. "A workman's hand, through generations of ditchers and road-menders." He took the lamp, and, placing it on the bureau, studied his face intently in the glass. It had before only struck him as not being handsome; now it classified him.

"Features thick," he went on relentlessly, every word stabbing; "skin coarse, eyes no-colored and watery. And I dared to dream of marrying her. Faugh!" Moved only by pure physical disgust, he threw himself into a chair, to think it all out.

"Bridget MacClaren. She must be Irish; that accounts for my temperament. So she brought home the clothes; that means she was a washerwoman. And I'm not even gentleman enough to be willing to be a washerwoman's son!"

It occurred to him that Stephen — for Stephen would always now stand opposite himself for a contrasting type — would have inherited such chivalry of feeling that he could believe himself sprung from a muck-heap without losing self-respect.

"He is too fine to despise anybody," went on the sharp tongue of his consciousness. "He could

hold up his head anywhere; he could win his spurs if they were withheld. I am too coarse not to despise coarseness."

A beautiful and ideal state of mind arose temptingly before him, — that which counsels one to condemn no man on account of his birth, and love no woman better for the fineness she borrows from station. All the maxims relating to man's intrinsic worth, and the transitory nature of advantages that lie outside himself, passed through his mind with a monotonous iteration, but he could not absorb them. He told himself that he could appreciate them in an intellectual sort of manner, could see their beauty from an artistic point of view, finding nothing akin to them in the spontaneous utterances of his own heart. That blank feeling of having no part or lot in what his spiritual eye saw to be finest, moved him to despair. No other man, except one with his inherited ignobility, would have taken Stephen's intrusion on his life in just this way. Another lover — and he shuddered to think how Sarah would shrink from the word applied to himself — would have risen to meet his rival in noble and generous combat, thinking first of the lady's happiness, and, if he must leave the field, withdrawing in all courtesy. But he had merely fostered in his heart a noisome growth of envy and hatred. With a sudden thought of Sarah, he seized the paper and

ran down to her room, afraid of waiting a second lest his resolve should fail him. She looked up in surprise at his wildness.

"Read it!" he cried, thrusting it into her hands. "Don't wait an instant or I shall tear it up. The devil is tempting me!"

He could not watch her. He felt like imploring her not to let her voice change when she should speak. With his eyes covered, his heart beating a cruel death-march to his hopes, it seemed ages before she finished, though she had run her eye over it rapidly.

"Well, dear boy?" with surprise in her voice, which held also a sweet intonation. He could not believe his ears: his heart broke its monotonous time for a suffocating leap into a quicker measure. "Bernard," said Sarah, her tone all gravity, — one that would compel an answer, "are you so fond of me you are sorry you are not my brother?"

An impetuous answer rose to his lips, to be choked there.

"If you read such a thing about yourself," said he, "if you knew your mother —" and then he stopped.

"I hope I should respect her name because she was my mother," said the girl, hotly. Whatever could be construed as a slur on the sacred name touched a wound.

Bernard's head sank lower. He deserved it; but it was hard that she too must recognize the pettiness of his soul. Still that was not, after all, the main point. Nothing stood before his relation to her, and the manner in which she would regard him.

"Do you mean that you wouldn't despise a man who came from such a family?" he asked, with a shamefaced resolution. "Now you know all about me, don't you half wish your mother had never adopted me? Shan't you treat me differently to-morrow from what you did yesterday?"

He had an instant to wait for his answer. It was a ringing laugh that startled him into looking up.

"You silly child!" said Sarah, a delicious mirth about her mouth, and a motherly compassion in her eyes. "Do you think this is news to me? I could have told you the facts ten years ago."

Bernard looked at her in blank amazement before he rushed up to his own room, where he locked himself in. If that was a precautionary measure against the betrayal of unmanly weakness, I am afraid his Irish temperament must be held responsible for the latter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BURNING HIS BOATS.

SARAH came in from a walk, slow and full of reflection, to be met in the hall by Miss Phebe and a smell of camphor.

"I've got to go to Linora," said Miss Phebe, in passing. "Mr. Mann's been thrown from his horse and hurt. Go in and see that he don't faint again, till I come back."

The sickness of sudden calamity came upon Sarah, blinding and choking her. Above and through this purely physical sensation, sounded like a clear full note of music the consciousness that Stephen belonged only to her. After that recognition, she walked steadily to his half-opened door, expecting to find him shattered, perhaps unconscious. He was sitting by the fire, his paleness the only apparent flag of distress.

"You?" trying to rise, and then giving it up with an annoyed sense of its awkwardness. "What is it? What has happened?" he went on, in some sudden, vague fear, when she did not answer.

Sarah stood looking at him, her eyes radiant, her face quivering. Not an impulse rose in her

— and this was the most purely impulsive moment of her life — but one of joy, and honest willingness that he and the universe should know its cause. Indeed, they must, taking the burden from her own heart by sharing it.

“I thought you must be dead!” she trembled, her voice full of musical suggestions. “I don’t care for anything now. I don’t care how much you are hurt! Oh, you are alive!”

Stephen sat quite still, but his eyes were like two living creatures.

“Very much alive,” he said dryly. “Do you want to feel my pulse? For God’s sake!” he burst forth, his self-control swept away by the tide. “Is it so?”

She faced him with an unfaltering look. The time for blushes had not come. She would take love like a goddess, not like a coquette.

“That I am yours?” she said clearly. “Yes! Then came the instinct of flight, and she turned to the door.

“Go, dear,” said Stephen gently. He had turned his face from her, and his voice shook. “Go, I shall come to you.”

When Sarah reached her own room, instead of going through any dramatic yielding to emotion, she quietly drew off her gloves and hung up her wraps in unwonted order. Then she sat down by the grate, and began to shiver. The word had

been spoken, and withdrawal was beyond her power. Miss Phebe came to ask if she would sit an hour with Linora. The poor child was so exhausted; the fright of Mr. Mann's accident had sent her into a fainting fit and then into hysterics. Sarah was ashamed of herself for a momentary hardness and disgust. These seemed such trifling emotions, compared with the real convulsions of life. She would not sit with Linora; she could not bear to see her when she longed to look only in the face of her own awe and joy.

"I can't, Miss Phebe," she said, desperately. "I'm — busy."

"Then if you can't, you can't," rejoined Miss Phebe. "I've got to see about Mr. Mann. He's only got a million bruises, but he's none too comfortable."

That evening Sarah refused to go out with Bernard, and he jealously sought for a reason. Was it somehow for Stephen's sake? — though Stephen, in his disabled condition, would probably not make calls. The sharing of his own gnawing discovery with Sarah had not proved to be of much permanent comfort. With the next day, and a look in the glass, he was again his most jealous and suspicious self. But, though his own evening was spoiled through anticipation, he would not intrude on hers. She would doubtless hate him enough, even if he refrained from becoming a spy upon



her. So he betook himself to his room, and locked himself in with his changing moods.

And Sarah was waiting; her heart giving the lie to her judgment, and declaring Stephen's coming. Presently his knock announced it. He was there, pale as much with mental disturbance as physical discomfort. Sarah held the door open, and when he had come, retreated to the fire-place.

"Shall I sit down?" asked Stephen. "I am heartily ashamed of behaving like a rheumatic old lady."

"Oh, please, and in this great chair. Was it a dreadful hurt?" coming a little nearer in voice.

"No hurt at all, to speak of, and I wonder I'm so voluble about it. Ridiculous to be faint, wasn't it? Perhaps it isn't quite fair to come to you to-night."

"Why?"

"You may pity me. I don't want your kindness to spring from that; I'd rather not be indebted to my bruises."

Sarah stood looking down at the coals, and tracing the diamond-shaped pattern of the rug with her foot.

"Dear, let me speak seriously to you," said Stephen, his voice shaking out vibrations from her own heart. "I have been half laughing about it all these weeks; it was because I didn't dare to do anything else, for fear of frightening you. Now

I can tell you everything I meant." He moved a cricket near her. "Will you take it? I want to see how you will look beside my hearth."

At the last sentence, she arrested her movement to draw it forward, with a sweet contradictoriness.

"Oh," said Stephen beseechingly, "let me have the comfort! I've got some hard things to say to you. The cricket commits you to nothing." Thereupon she smiled a little proudly, as if asserting her continued freedom, and obeyed him, sitting with her hands clasped over her knees and looking persistently at the fire.

"I wonder if you will answer me as it is natural for you to do," he said at last, evidently making an effort; "truly, not coquetting nor trifling?"

"Yes."

"Then, shall you love me? I don't ask if you do; I could not quite believe that. But shall you sometime?"

"Not more than now!"

He bent forward quickly, but pulled himself up.

"Not yet, dearest, don't say it yet!" he cried. "How could I let you take it back!"

"Why should I?"

"Because you may hate me instead. Once I thought I loved another woman." He had turned away his face, and his lips were ashen.

"Do you care for her now?" asked Sarah,

steadily. His hand framed a quick gesture of disgust.

"No, no! How could you think so poorly of me? What should I deserve for offering you this?"

"Then —" began Sarah.

"Not yet. Hear it all and condemn in one breath. I married her. We were married three years."

"Were you happy?"

"I was a fool, but even a fool can suffer torment."

"Darling!" said Sarah, softly, a swell of love and pity urging on her voice. "You said it was a sweet word."

Stephen turned to look at her. Her face dazzled him.

"Do you want to hear the miserable story, dear?"

"No, I shall never want to hear it."

"But sometime you must. You must know all about me."

"Then let it be afterwards. Bernard will come," she added; "don't tell him, please."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, except that he is so strange and moody of late, and I can't bear to have this one night spoiled."

"But he is your next of kin."

"No kin at all," said Sarah, laughing. "Hadn't you guessed that he was an adopted brother?"

"Powers that be!" whistled Stephen. "That accounts."

"For what, if you please?"

"For his not seeming fraternal."

"Ah, but he is! He's very fond of me; only he's troubled of late."

Stephen said no more, but thanked his particular divinities that he came in time.

The following days were sweeter for being full of a hidden joy. Stephen carried the feeling that he had an appointment at a secret place with one of whom the world did not know; but the source of joy could not lie long concealed. He was too desirous of her presence, and hung too boldly on her words and face, ever to feign indifference; moreover, when there was no good reason for subterfuge.

Sarah lived in a dream, seeing little of Bernard and avoiding Linora. She was blinded by the haze of her own happiness, and did not see the disturbance in her brother's manner. The world was shrouded in mist, through which she beheld the figures of men dimly, — but before and above her vision hung the dazzling globe of love, striking white light from the surrounding veil. She and Stephen took long walks, their best chance of being alone together. He talked rapturously, but only

of her, and she was often silent. She had taken the wonder of love royally, after her first wide glance of amazement at its shining form. Standing where he placed her, high above him, she dispensed her favors with a gracious hand, — bewilderingly shy, motherly, and stately, all in one, until his tongue was well used to swearing there was no woman like her.

That quick egotism which usually springs to life in a man, with love, prompting him to dwell on his past life, even if he scarcely chooses to lay its incidents bare, was quite absent from Stephen's mood. He was rather like a man born to life on a new planet, looking forward with exultant hope, and spurning memories of the old dark days. Yet he reminded himself sometimes, with a shiver, when he was not with her, that a miserable story was still to be told. To put it off longer would be cowardice rather than the forgetfulness that comes with happiness. It would be easier to do it on the road, her hand in his arm; so, one night at the early dusk, he called her to equip herself for walking.

Sarah was in high spirits, "like a cat when the wind is rising," she said. It oppressed Stephen. He had made up his mind at last, and it roused in him that sickening feeling which comes when some are talking glibly and others must listen, yet hear at the same time the insistent inner voice of

a concealed anticipation. They were barely outside the house when he began.

"I want to tell you about myself to-night."

"How like spring it is!" said Sarah, not heeding him. "Feel the softness in the air, and see the moon. I can almost hear the little brooks that come from the melting of the snow. Stephen, I wish you had had my country life, years and years, with me."

"I wish to God I had!" broke out the man, startling her. "Perhaps I might have been something different if I could have been delivered over to an angel instead of—other people."

"You need not be different for me, dear," said the girl, serious in an instant. "You are my true and loyal knight."

"Now, yes. But I must tell you it all. Sarah, I was once desperately in love with a beautiful woman. I married her at twenty-one, and was divorced three years after."

He threw the words out as the skeleton of his spectre. It would be easier to add details, having the main, hard facts before him. Sarah had stopped short, and was looking at him in the moonlight, her eyes growing wide, and her throat constricting itself too closely for speech.

"What was it? Divorced?"

"Yes, I told you the other night."

"But not that!"

"I must have. What did I say?"

"I don't know — I thought she died. But she did die, — she died afterwards?"

The appeal told its story. Stephen understood that the spectre had risen between them. He had believed that the fair white hands could thrust it aside.

"She is alive," he said, doggedly.

Sarah's steps faltered a little, but she did not lift her face.

"Only speak to me!" cried Stephen, at last. "I'd rather have died myself than hurt you, — and that means I'd rather have gone to perdition; that was where I was going when you stood in the way."

"Tell me about it, — though it can do no good now," she said, miserably. Her voice, no matter what its tone, was like a sudden light through fog. Stephen hated his work too much to think of anything else till it should be over.

"I was twenty when I saw her," he began, hurriedly, "more of a boy than most boys, romantic, dreaming about music, and in my sophomore year at college. She was the sister of a fellow who was ill a long time, and she came to nurse him. I used to visit him. After she came, I used to take night after night to watch with him. You will despise me more than I deserve, when I tell you why I think I fell in love with her. I know how

you feel about such things, like an angel that was never human. She was beautiful flesh, enough to prove an artist's life-long discouragement, with her tints and outlines. I had the sort of nature that worships beauty; I was at the age for falling in love; so I took the first material at hand. I fell in love with her."

"How did she look?" asked Sarah, in a whisper.

"Like a sunset, I always told her. You won't understand when I tell you that an indescribable purple always seemed to me to be the tint hanging about her. Her eyes were a strange blue, and her hair black, but her skin always seemed to lie under a veil, like the bloom on a plum. As I told you, she looked to me like the rosy sunset of a moist day."

Sarah felt herself at the brink of shivering, and clenched her hand on her nerves. There was more pure dramatic interest than jealousy in her excitement.

"She was five years older than I, and she was a coquette to the very marrow. She liked my worship, you may be sure of that. She'd had a good deal before, but young adoration has a flavor about it, I have come to think since. She used to come in to relieve me or bring me a glass of wine, when I watched with Fred, and look at me across his bed. When he was delirious, she could make eyes at me. I saw then that she had no feeling



for anybody but — me, I suppose I thought! I knew she hoodwinked me and lied to me. I heard her lies with my ears, but they made no difference with my heart. I must have been a fine sort of fellow!”

“But if you saw she wasn’t your ideal,” began Sarah, in her perplexity, “why did you go on loving her?”

“Because, I suppose, I had no ideal. Yes, I had. Yes, it is fair to tell you all the good there is to tell of me. I had. I had all my short life a woman in my mind made up of all perfections, whom I should sometime love. But when my senses said ‘she has come,’ I tore off the crown and put it on her head; and I could not see straight after that.

“She treated me like a boy; scolded and flirted with me, but she said she loved me, and I was infatuated. Fred got well and she was going home. She lived West, fifty miles from what was my own home then. I remember wondering, when I found out her birthplace, how such a creature could have grown up so near me without my hearing of her. Somehow I was afraid of losing her, she seemed so beautiful and my deserts so small. I suppose I thought little Skeriton, where she lived, a sort of Belmont, and that suitors flocked there night and day. I proposed that she should marry me, and she consented. I thought it was

because she was an angel, and the gods were in love with me: afterwards I saw she found my position good and my money an object.

"So we were married secretly, because I was still in college, and she went back to Skeriton. I saw her twice a year, on vacations. She forbade my coming often, though I could always have done so on my way home; and I stood back and revered her commands. Now guess, for once, why she wouldn't allow me to come and see her," said Stephen, with an unpleasant sort of amusement in his tone.

"I can't."

"You never would. Your eternal salvation would be lost if it depended on that. She was engaged, and was afraid the other fellow would see me and ask unpleasant questions."

"I don't understand. How could she be engaged?"

"Easily. Why not? Nobody knew I was her husband but myself and an old Methodist minister, and we weren't on the spot."

"But she couldn't marry him."

"Naturally not; but that didn't detract from the pleasure of the experience. I don't suppose she had debated on consequences. She'd been engaged to more than one man, I found out afterwards."

"That is very strange," said Sarah, more to herself than to him.

“One might call it so indeed. But let me open your ears — which, to be sure, ought to be sacred temples — to an unclean truth ; it may help you to understand the kind of ideal, as you say, I had chosen. There is a variety of woman, as there are men, with whom a sort of commerce of looks and small change of caresses is a necessity of life. Well, when I graduated, it was not with honors, as it might have been. My mind had been too much engrossed by writing a poetic epistle daily. I told my father what I had done, and asked permission to take my wife home. I am sorry to say my father swore and my mother cried. I had no patience with either of them. I thought they ought to go down on their knees and be thankful for what they were about to receive. I was very obstinate, and they were too fond of me to go through any such dramatic business as cursing me ; so the marriage was acknowledged and Dora taken home. Her relatives were quite as electrified as mine, though not displeased. My father, being Judge Mann, was too well known. The young man to whom she was engaged at the time was also surprised, I believe !

“I was in a sort of maudlin Elysium. I was to study law with my father, and tried faithfully, but the reading did not make its deepest impression on me. I was beginning to be uneasy. I should have been glad enough to spend my time at her

feet if that would have made her contented, but it did not. She wanted to be taken into society, wanted me to spend a winter in Washington or New York and read law there. I refused flatly. I had an instinctive jealousy, such as would sicken a loyal wife. I did not dare, somehow, to trust her with people more worthy her liking than I. I suppose I told myself that it was because she was such a gem that everybody must covet her. Perhaps if I had let her have her own way, the end might not have come so soon. She was dull enough in our dull town, and finally her old lover moved there. By the way, I knew that story of the previous engagement; Fred divulged it one day when he was angry with her; but she told me it was a lie, and I believed her. The lover had struck silver in a mine near town, and it had filled his pockets fuller in a week than mine would be in ten years, if I doubled my father's business.

"One fine morning she walked away with him, leaving a note telling me where to express her clothes."

A strange revulsion was coming about in Sarah's mind. She was too oppressed with pity for the boy to remember her own relation to the man. It seemed impossible to live unless she could restore his betrayed trust, lead him back to his boyish love to find her pure, and say, "It was a bad dream; wake and behold everything you imagined."

"My father and mother were very good to me," said Stephen, gravely. "They had reason for saying, 'I told you so,' and for being glad I had come to the end. Everybody had seen what she was, but everybody had been forbearing for my sake. Through my father's influence I got a divorce as soon as possible, without much publicity. Then I came East."

"And how long did you care for her?" asked Sarah, in a whisper. Stephen turned upon her in amazement.

"Care for her? Never one instant after I really knew her. Do you think a man could stay on his knees to carrion after he was sickened by it, even if his senses had been once so vilely ordered as to love it? That was partly why I had the divorce, because I could not bear having the least connection left between us. Then, too, I thought it would be better for her to feel she had some sort of sanction."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Not once. I see her name in the papers sometimes. She has left that man, and joined a troupe of travelling comedians. Once I was in the town where they played a night. You can imagine I didn't go to see them."

"Is there anything more?" asked Sarah, with sick apprehension that there might be new horrors.

"No, nothing so pleasantly dramatic ; only that I didn't study law after all. My heart wasn't in it, or in anything. I gave up music, too ; I felt that I had lost my chance in life. Father had this manufacturing interest here in Boston, and when he died — mother had died the year before — I took charge of the factory."

They had come round the great square that had become a familiar walk, and were again before Miss Phebe's door. Stephen followed, when Sarah went into her room. She turned on the gas, and as the light fell on her slight figure and pale, working face, his eyes came back to her with a kind of amazement. Then he fell on his knees before her.

"I had almost forgotten my heaven," he cried, brokenly, "I had gone so far back into hell. Yes, hear the rest of the story ; oh, let me tell it here ! When I was tired of life and had only base-ness and my own base responses to remember, I saw you. Every dream I ever had, every worshiping thought of a woman's nature, confronted me. I was dazzled by your radiance. Not my senses, dear ; my heart and soul knelt there, and — God, I will deserve her !"

Sarah bent over him with slow, bitter weeping that pitifully contracted her face. In the cry of his vow to heaven, Stephen had lifted his face, as full of hope as hers of misery.

"O dearest, no !" he cried, starting to his feet to

dry her tears. "You must not cry for me. It was worth it, if I must have gone through even that, to be able to love you when I found you ; or — " with breathless suspicion — "are you crying for lost faith in me? You think me too stained to be lifted by such hands !"

"No, no, no !" cried she, hushing herself. "No, you have only suffered, not sinned — never that. You were deceived ; you could not do wrong."

"It is all right, then !" asked Stephen, still unsatisfied. "You love me ?"

"I love you more," she said, sorrowfully. "Go now."

She kissed his forehead, and softly touched the bright hair above it with her hand. It was like a blessing, and he could not ask for a more lover-like good-night.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A HIGHER COURT.

**H**ALF that night Sarah sat by the fire, facing her problem. In the one moment of realizing Stephen's disclosure, a fatal denial had branded itself into the living flesh of her heart. It burned there now. Stephen's wife was alive; no human law could part the two so irrevocably that either would have a right to form new ties. She had no jealousy of the other woman; her falsity seemed to debar her from Stephen's life as entirely as it would have done from Sarah's own. In her pure young love of the highest, she could imagine no longing for a beautiful dream when a waking moment had pronounced the outlines distorted, and transformed the bewitching haze into poisonous vapor. As it happened, she was right. Stephen had nothing but repugnance for his past, a repugnance that was tainting his life till he found a star in his low sky. She felt a deep compassion for him, — nothing yet for herself. She was young and strong, fresh from her mother's side, new to trouble and able to bear it. He was jaded and worn; he needed sunshine rather than continued struggling through mists.



The wisdom quickly born of love taught her this. A motherly instinct of sparing him had kept her that night from outward decision. The next day it must come. Then, when his low tap came at her door, she called a good-morning and said he must excuse her for not appearing at breakfast. She had risen late; she might be away at noon; he need not come home with the hope of seeing her.

"You are well, dear?" came his voice, the last word in a whisper.

"Quite well," she said, clearly. So Stephen had a few more hours of confidence.

Sarah entered upon a busy day, almost solemnly. Did any one ever pledge himself to a great renunciation or purpose without a new sense of consecration to all other duties? She ran up to Linora's room, finding that excitable young woman in a fever of discovery.

"I have found the most wonderful medium," she said, impressively. "You really must see him. He is controlled by an old lady, and she told me all sorts of things about what has happened to me."

"Don't go again, dear," said Sarah. All the world seemed younger than herself just now. She wanted to protect it, and save it from further danger of fall. "I don't believe it's good for anybody."

"But I must investigate," cried Linora, rising from her nest of pillows and looking, with her hair ruffled, like a little goblin. "I don't care so much for my private affairs — nobody can help them much —" with the old dropping of her lids, "but I feel it my mission to investigate. Miss Phebe," she called, as that lady went past her door, bearing rattling *impedimenta* of coal-scuttle and dust-pan. "Just a minute! Won't you go with me to see a medium?"

Miss Phebe, her head temporarily swaddled in a red handkerchief, the insignia of sweeping, smiled grimly. She always did smile at Linora, regarding her pranks with much the same indulgence due to a kitten's whisking of tail. "I'd rather go to a good play."

"But, Miss Phebe, if you went once you'd go again."

"Fiddle-dee-dee!" said Miss Phebe, withdrawing the length of her countenance.

"The Bible says the witch of Endor —" called Linora.

"The Bible speaks of answering folks according to their folly," came tartly, with an undercurrent of amusement at the cleverness involved in her repartee; and the coal-scuttle and dust-pan moved on.

"I should think your brother might be interested," said Linora, when they turned to each

other, with a smile over Miss Phebe's memory. "He seems to have a very nervous, impressible nature."

"Poor Bernard, yes," said Sarah, with a sigh for his recent strange moods. "But don't ask him. I think it would be worse for him than for any one I know. But, Linora, why do you try to draw your friends into the belief? Is it from a missionary spirit?"

"Partly," said Linora; then, with a childish frankness, "Not altogether, either. Half of it is selfishness. You know I was brought up to think a chaperone one of the necessities of life. Now here in this democratic Boston, girls as young as I am seem to go about alone, and so I try to make myself. But it is a comfort to have some one with me, even if it is not an older person."

"Very well, dear. I'll go anywhere with you."

"Go to Professor Leonard's? I shall go, in any case," with a quick leap at her own purpose.

"If you are determined to go, I'll walk there with you and wait till you see him. Not to-day, though. Now I must find Bernard."

He proved to be in his own room, ready to go out. A portfolio of blank paper under his arm indicated the library.

"O Bernard," said Sarah, eagerly, "let me go with you. How I should like to spend a long day with you and a book!"

"You'll disturb me," he said roughly, though he wanted her more than anything in the world.

"Disturb you? I never do; I'm not a child!"

"I can work better alone," pulling his sleeve away from her hand.

"Bernard, what is it, lately?" asked Sarah, with the patience of wounded affection. "You are so changed. You never spend your evenings with me —"

"Are you lonely, then?" he sneered.

A quick blush stained her face, as memory threw before her eyes the record of happy hours.

"No, I have been very happy," she said. "But, Bernard, I care for you; I miss you," she added softly, seeking to heal whatever wound he had. "Don't be so unjust; you are not generous."

He looked at her, with his face contracting.

"You see it in me too? You are right; I've got in me every vile trait a man ever had. Don't speak to me again. Don't come near me!"

He ran down stairs, and left her to follow in sore bewilderment. But she put thought of him aside. There would be time enough later to make things right there; the coming moments must hold her good-by to Stephen. He came that evening, boyish, radiant. Now she knew him as he was, and did not love him less. He was ready for the future; the past had received its cancelling stroke. He held out his arms; she must fly to him, sharing

his fulness of joy. But she shook her head with an effort at smiling. Her shyness disappointed him.

"Well," he said, with his habitual shrug of the shoulders, "must I beg my way?"

"No," said Sarah, trying to speak lightly, but feeling her heart die within her. It was going to be harder than she thought. "Sit down, please. I want to tell you something."

Stephen began to look at her searchingly. She felt her limbs trembling. Her mouth seemed to stiffen, and her teeth chattered with cold.

"Did you ever think —"

"Dear, if it's something hard to say, why not say it here?" He held out his arms again, but Sarah shook her head and turned her eyes from his. The gas-lamp opposite was being lighted; it flamed up as he spoke.

"Did you ever think," she went on, still frozen, "that, the woman being alive, you had no right to marry?"

All Stephen's jubilation died down like a fire suddenly extinguished. So he must face the old spectre once more! Now it had become more horrible, — a ghoul, with malicious eyes.

"No, the law gave me full liberty to do so. I have always known that, though I never expected to use it."

"Did you ever think that the law had no power to give you liberty?"

"Do you mean," he asked, in a hard voice, "do you mean you will not marry me?"

"Not while she lives," she said, in a whisper.

The silence was so long that Sarah felt it might be broken by a shriek from her own lips. Then she dared turn to him. Stephen was looking into vacancy, his face haggard and old.

"God! isn't it a little too hard?" he said quietly. "Do you punish crimes as you punish me for being a fool?"

"Oh, I know how your throat feels!" cried Sarah, childishly, at the sound of his voice. "It's dreadful, isn't it?"

She moved swiftly towards him and stood by his side, her beautiful eyes full of compassion. Stephen slowly raised his own to them; they gathered flame. He put his hand on her wrist and held it firmly.

"Is it your personal feeling for me?" he said, searching her face with eyes that must have compelled the truth. "Are you changed? Is it disgust?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, quickly, with a momentary impulse towards him. "I love you. You are everything to me! It is God's law."

The change that swept over his face was like the light and shade from flying summer clouds. Now there was light.

"To the winds with your silly scruples! You

are mine; I will never give you up!" He had drawn her into his arms, his heart beating in triumphant mockery of her fallen resolutions. A sense of despair seized her. She must yield, she felt, only to repent to-morrow.

"You hurt my wrist," she whispered, with a feminine instinct as to her choice of weapons. He was still holding it with all the energy of pain. She was released, and the red, bruised flesh covered with kisses.

"Darling, how can you love a brute? You will never forgive me this, even if you can forgive me for loving you!"

Sarah drew her hand away and retreated to the hearth. There were the two chairs where they had so often sat like married lovers and dreamed of an assured future.

"Come and sit here, please. Now let us be serious, — and quiet. Stephen, it may be right for you to marry, if you feel it so, but it is not right for me."

"Has the law pretended to free me, and left me bound?"

"I think it has only freed you from present unhappiness. It hasn't given you a right to choose new ways of happiness."

"Then the law, according to your idea, is an infallible vengeance, not reformatory in the least?"

"I don't know what you mean. Don't be bitter,

Stephen, not yet; it is so much easier to talk if you are not." He bent forward and touched her hand softly.

"I'll try not, dear. Go on."

"I have only this one thing to say over and over. When you were married, your promise was made for life."

A flush rose to his face, — a savage shame at what he had to remember.

"Sarah, you must hear hard facts. Do you realize that when the woman went from my house to another man's arms, the promise was broken?"

"For her, not for you."

"You are a strange physician," he said, bitterly. "You think my moral health would have been improved if I had carried about with me this eating sore."

"No, not that. You were free. It would have been horrible to live together after that. But a new marriage would have no sacredness."

"Not even with you?" He was only the lover now, adoring but conquering. She feared her own strength, set face to face with his charm.

"Not even with me," she said, steadily. "I should only be your mistress."

"God forbid!" said Stephen, rising and walking to the window. "Your purity shall never feel itself sullied by me."

To be protected was too much, after standing



so wearily alone. She fell into soft weeping. He came back to stand before her. He was armed with reason this time, not persuasion.

"Don't cry, dearest, don't cry. Nothing is worth one of your tears. Listen. In this world everything is so full of contrariety and we are such weak fools, that it is almost impossible to get along without mistakes. You don't believe in eternal punishment hereafter, — why do you insist on life-long punishment here?"

"I don't. But happiness isn't all."

"No, but in this case it is not my happiness alone that is in question. It is my good, my one chance of life. Sarah, you know well enough what I was when I found you, — sneering at pretences of good, unbelieving, forsaken of ideals. You know what will surely happen if you marry me. I shall live as I never have — as I only dreamed it was possible to live, when I was a boy."

He had meant to meet her argument for argument, but his heart would make itself heard in defiance of resolutions.

Sarah could only repeat wearily, "It would be no marriage."

"Dear, there have been a few high souls who were not afraid to choose for themselves. If you think it would be no marriage, still come, and be everything to me."

"I cannot! I cannot!" she repeated, the word

ending in a cry. She could only belie her heart, that had lost all voice but one of pleading in his cause.

"Shall I take off the little ring?" asked Stephen. In his dying hope, he caught despairingly at whatever trifle might move her. Sarah looked at it on the hand that lay in her lap. The moment of his putting it on, his joy in the symbol, flashed upon her and roused her.

"Oh, no, not you!" she cried, longing to save him pain. "Let me do it. It will be easier."

Stephen stayed her other hand as it came to do his work. He bent on one knee to look at the stone.

"See, princess!" he whispered. "See how it burns!"

In the shadow of her dress, the opal was like flame,—a heart of fire in a shimmering sea of green and violet and milk.

"Take it for an omen. It means nothing but love."

The mighty bond of nature which lies between the man and woman tightened, like an invisible chain. Their eyes met. Some blinding consciousness came to her that in another moment her lips would passively confess surrender. The saving, valiant right hand did its work, snatched off the ring and held it, while she rose and looked at him, trembling. Stephen rose too, flushed with an

adoring admiration, too much in love with her for pain.

"The spirit of all the Romans was nothing to yours!" he said, between his teeth. "My darling, do as you will. Make me serve all my life, whether you are mine or not."

"Then go; I am so tired!" she said, brokenly.

It was best, he saw. He could only excite her now; he bent to kiss the little hand that held the mantel, and was gone. The ring lay still clenched in her palm. She looked at it, when she was alone, as her heart had begged her to look at him, kissed it good-night, and slept with it under her pillow.

Though she could tell no one, and could scarcely conceive of asking even her mother for help, had she been there, Sarah's greatest grief for herself lay in the fact that she must be entirely alone. Stephen was thenceforth to be resisted as her enemy. There was needed some one who, by a comforting and ennobling presence, could hold her up to the demands of her best self. She could not turn to Bernard; he was too hopelessly changed.

Bernard, too, longed for companionship; his days were growing sadly lonely, though the loneliness was the result of his own caprice. But the consequences of one's deeds are no pleasanter for coming logically. A little obliquity in cause and effect would be far more palatable. Bernard re-

flected, with a morbid self-pity, that there was no one in the world to whom he could turn for companionship. Stephen he hated; his easy good-humor was but patronage. With Linora he had always been at sword's points, feeling sure she ridiculed him. That was true, though her jesting was merry enough to pass unchallenged before a less critical judgment. Only Bernard knew how it stung. The uncouthness that shrouded his set of tingling nerves was very ridiculous to Linora. He reminded her of some strange animal, and she was always privately trying to guess what it might be. It amused her better to flay him, bit by bit, with satire, than to win him over to her set of adherents.

"You should sing, Mr. Ellis," she said once, innocently. Her shots were always despatched when some one was by, before whom they could be delivered without fear of too blunt retaliation. "You look so musical."

Bernard writhed and trembled, while Sarah wondered at his disturbance.

"You are right, Miss Gale, though I don't know that you are aware of it," said Stephen, coming to the rescue. "Ellis has a musical face. He has sometimes a turn of expression which suggests the great composers." And though Stephen was honest, Bernard set him down as gibing with the

rest. All the world would soon be ready to mock at him.

Sarah had been won by Stephen; Bernard was sure of that. He had hated her for not telling him, if it were so, and shrank back shivering at the fear that she would. And while he wept and prayed by himself for even her toleration, — not her love, — he met every advance she made with roughness. Through all his moods beat, like the throbbing of a wound, the consciousness that he was not akin to the pure-minded; that his soul was indelibly stamped from birth with some stain that impressed it through and through.

## CHAPTER X.

### NEWS FROM COVENTRY.

STEPHEN had only retired from the field, confident that on his side no surrender was possible. Sarah's denial represented nothing more than an illogical scruple, to be overcome by persuasion of love or reason. Able to estimate very fairly the amount of suffering meted out to him from his unlucky past, he decidedly refused further retribution; and what, but a voluntary sacrifice to Nemesis, would be the withdrawal of his suit? He loved Sarah the more for her decision; it stood as proof of her pure adherence to an immaculate standard of right, though he confidently foresaw, in the growth of her heart, the promise of a higher revelation. When that should come, as it must speedily, he having access to her ear, she would choose with him the mountain-tops of exaltation, leaving these cold valleys where prevailed only a meaningless rigor of law. Their future should win from her many a smile over the childish scruples of her past.

If he could have known how his arguments had shaken her he would have grown more hopeful still. Sarah remained by no means convinced of having

done right. She had religiously adhered to her preconceived theories, but did those theories represent the highest wisdom? Might not great love give an insight of its own, transcending everything learned of tradition? She could but remember the great cases, destined always to be cited in morals, wherein the highest course has proved that of transgression, the choice of a liberty which has become in its turn law. Might not her own problem be of the color of these?

She had been moved by no argument or persuasion as by his picture of the barrenness of his life without her. She felt its perfect truth. In this short period of their courtship she had sometimes trembled before his reverence of her nature and its demands. Whenever that had arisen which required the pure heart and keen vision which make and uphold moral decisions, he had always virtually retired, leaving her the field as one whose paths were familiar to her tread. That he by no means bowed to her judgment in this last case, shook her own belief in herself. Stephen must be absolutely confident on his side of the question. Could he be so without some measure of right on his side?

The next night he came again, at his usual time, apparently neither perplexed nor troubled.

"I know you have reconsidered, dear," he said, with a smile.

Sarah shook her head.

"Not thought it over? I have, and I can't give you up."

The same battle was to be fought over again; she trembled with anticipation.

"If you could tell me your respect or love had waned, that you could not forgive me for being such a poor fool, I would leave you at once. Is it so?"

"No."

"Then I can make you happy. Moreover, I will."

A confident lover could be better withstood than one despairing. Her spirit rose to meet his challenge.

"You never shall!"

Stephen's eyes flashed ominously.

"You cannot rid yourself of me so long as you confess you love me. I will not go. I have no pride where you are concerned; I have no chivalry, either. As to the last, you will be far happier if I stay with you and make you miserable, than if I obey you and go."

It was true. She felt it and flushed consciously, though her head was still high with pride.

"You are very beautiful!" said Stephen, in low-toned admiration. "You are more like a splendid young horse than anything. Toss your head, dear creature! You shall never be tamed, though you shall love your master."



It was becoming an encounter of lovers' wits. The great question was falling far behind. Sarah felt that, and bravely dragged it to the front again.

"Stephen, all this is not to the purpose. You have no right to admire me or — caress me, when I take away the right."

"I have my soul to save as well as you, fair saint. You are my heaven; I shall not give you up."

"But I have given you up. Our paths are different."

"Truly? Then one of us must forsake his own road, for we go together."

She was not of less inflammable matter than he.

"I refuse to marry you! You are rejected. Are you so little of a gentleman as to stay?"

"Just that. I am your slave; you can't transmute base blood into noble."

"Stephen, go!" she cried at last, humbling herself to appeal. "Only go to-night. I must think."

"Will you leave your door open while I play?"

"Yes, anything — only go."

That approach to her ear was well chosen, for Sarah must take her place among the untaught worshippers of music. Her face covered by her hands, she listened, and was moved, as he was praying that she should be. The appeal and an-

guish, the supplication of minor chords, she could withstand ; but not the flowing of the melody his fingers presently wove, that was like an endless marriage-song of joy. Jubilant at first, full of ecstasy at its triumph, it led into mazes of sweet wandering through the green fields of wedded content. It stopped on a hasty chord, and he was hurrying down to her. She could deny him no longer, but she could not decide in hot blood,—and Stephen found the door closed and silence within.

After this, she scarcely saw him for a week. She knew him too well to hope he had taken her at her word. The battle between the two wills must be renewed, and she must somehow gain strength and confidence. For every day her consciousness grew that there were two balancing sides to her question, and she wondered more and more if the spirit of her love might not be fuller of divine life than the letter of her belief.

During this time Linora was beseeching her to visit Professor Leonard. Linora herself went almost daily, now, to one medium or another ; and though Sarah still reasoned and pleaded against such mistaken zeal, she was conscious that the subject had aroused a vivid curiosity in her own mind. In consequence, she one day agreed to witness an interview with the man of magic,—this to Linora's great delight. But with their

entrance into the medium's little waiting-room her courage failed, or her disgust arose, and she refused to go further. Linora was injured, indignant, and coaxing to no purpose; if she would keep her appointment, it could only be by leaving Sarah without, as she presently realized.

An old man was turning over the album in the waiting-room, — Uncle Ben himself. He had come up that morning, and had not yet announced his arrival to Leonard. He meant to take his turn and go in after Linora, standing hidden in the shadow of the curtain, when the latter was beckoned in.

"You goin' to have a sittin' after your friend?" he began, when Sarah put down her newspaper. She looked up to catch his sunny smile, and trust him immediately.

"No, I am only waiting for her."

"Oh, yes, yes! Well, young folks don't have so much call to get comfort from them that's on the other side as some of us do. But I like to have the young believers. They can help on the cause better than we can."

Sarah's interest rose. "I see you believe," she said, smiling.

"Yes, anybody could see it, I hope. I mean to speak a good word for it everywhere I can. It's meat an' drink to me."

"I wish you could tell me something about it,"

she began, hesitating between a sudden loving interest in him, and a fear of encroaching. "It is quite new to me."

"I see, I see; there's a good many so," said Uncle Ben, nodding. "Never lost anybody, I s'pose, an' don't feel the drawin' we do, that have folks on the other side?"

The quick tears sprang to her eyes.

"There, there! anybody but me'd have known better'n that!" said Uncle Ben, in distress, hastily removing his hat from the floor to a table, as a delicate excuse for looking away from her.

"You needn't be sorry for speaking," said Sarah, at once. "My mother died last year. My father is dead, too, but I can't remember him."

"Pretty hard! pretty hard!" said Uncle Ben, "unless you can have a word from 'em now and then. I al'ays think, too, how hard it must seem to the young to wait, with so many years afore 'em, an' we almost through."

"But it's a beautiful world," said Sarah, quickly. It was always a point of honor with her to uphold the praises of her birthplace.

"Yes, yes, that's so. I like to hear the new generation say that. It shows they'll make the most of their privileges, an' they've got a good deal to answer for. Now I hope you remember to think what a privilege 'tis to be sound in wind an' limb?"

Sarah laughed. "Perhaps; not often, though, I'm afraid; but I enjoy my strength."

"That's so; that's just it;" nodding to her over his stout cane. "You don't have to think about your hearin', nor your eyesight, nor your sciatic nerve. I often think if I could go out mowin' an' feel gallons of blood goin' like coach-horses through my veins, as I used to, I should be some good in the world. All I can do now is to have faith an' believe."

"That is a great deal, I think," said Sarah, shyly; "a very great thing to do."

"Well, well, we must all be contented with our powers," said Uncle Ben, the smile coming back, to wrinkle his face into sunny ridges. "Some are made prophets, and some of us can't be anything but sort of underwitted bein's, clingin' to the hand that feeds us. But now about spiritualism; if you should ever feel a drawin' towards it, you'll find the medium in there can tell you things worth hearin'."

"Is he a good medium?" asked Sarah, chiefly from the desire of leading him on.

"I've known him ever since he was a boy and had just begun to develop. He's got great powers, an' he's gentle an' tender an' honest in his heart. Oh, you can trust him! I al'ays feel bound to think o' that, too, in a medium; there's just as much lyin' an' cheatin' in this as there is in any faith. Even religion ain't free from it."

Linora presently appeared, and Sarah bade her new friend good-by, offering him her hand, with a sudden impulse of reverence. As they were on their way down stairs she heard him calling, and going back, found him hurrying to meet her.

"I was most afraid I shouldn't overtake you," said he. "There's one thing I ought to ha' said. I told you where to go if you should feel any drawin' towards spiritualism; but if you shouldn't come to be interested in it nat'rally, I wouldn't force it. Some are ready for it an' some ain't! I wouldn't force it."

"If your Professor Leonard were like that dear old man, Linora," said Sarah, as they walked away, "I might be willing to make him my confessor. Did you notice the sweetness of his expression? And he is wise."

"Would you truly go?" said Linora, her eyes beginning to dance. "Well, they're very much alike. Professor Leonard is a dear old gentleman."

"Old! I thought you said he was young."

"You're thinking of the young man who showed me in. Professor Leonard is white-haired and venerable. Now I hold you to your word."

Uncle Ben had gone back and succeeded in surprising Leonard. It warmed his heart to find the boy so fond of him, and so unspoiled by prosperity.

"But we'd better get to business, Lenny," he said, interrupting an avalanche of questions about the farm. "You must give me a sittin' this time. We've got to see trouble, Lenny, you an' me, I'm afraid. Maria ain't well."

"Aunt Maria! How long's she been sick?"

"She's up an' around this mornin', but she's had a pretty ill turn. When I come in from the barn day 'fore yesterday, she was on the lounge an' couldn't move nor speak."

"What was it?"

"Her heart. She had to tell me all about it then, though she was a good deal put out with herself for lettin' me know. She's had the spells nigh onto two year, an' ain't told nobody but Lomie, an' wouldn't ha' told her if Lomie hadn't found her in one an' promised to keep it from me."

"O Uncle Ben!" cried Leonard, his eyes full of great tears; "what are we going to do?"

"Lenny, boy, we shall have to do exactly as the good Lord says," said the old man, patting his shoulder and smiling at him. "Just exactly. It ain't been easy for me to be reconciled. For two nights, I've been almost questionin' the Lord, an' wonderin' how, if 'twas to be, I could give Maria up. An' then somethin' says to me, 'You selfish old creatur', when you ain't got a day to live yourself, here you are grudgin' your girl goin' to find out her home afore you.' Then I give up."

"Will she die right away?" asked Len.

"I don't think it's likely," said the old man. "She's had the spells two years, but they've been comin' on faster for a couple o' months, so Lomie says. An' she may be here longer'n any of us, an' she may go 'most any time. Now, Lenny, I want to have a sittin', an' have you ask if there ain't somethin' can be done for her."

"Oh, get a doctor! Don't stop for sittings!"

"Lenny, don't speak so. You're young, an' you ain't reverent, sometimes. No, set down an' see if the influences won't come."

Leonard yielded with a sigh, and led the way into the inner room. Then he closed his eyes, and seemed to fall at once into an abnormal state.

"The old lady's here," he said, in a voice not quite his natural one.

"Aunt Peggy! Yes, go on!"

"She puts her hand on her side as if she had pain there."

"Yes, she takes on Maria's conditions. Now what does she say we shall do?"

Leonard's face gathered an expression of genuine misery, until he burst forth, —

"She doesn't say anything, only keeps her hand on her side. She don't say a word."

"Try, Lenny, try; be patient," said Uncle Ben, an extremity of impatience in his own voice.



The door opened softly, and Riker walked in, his eyes closed, his hands tightly clenched.

"This medium is under control of those who have most interest in you," he began monotonously. "The other medium is tired; listen to this one."

"Thank the Lord!" said Uncle Ben fervently. "I knew they would have something for me."

So Leonard opened his eyes and listened, while Riker went on.

"Me big Injun — medicine man," he said gutturally. "Squaw much sick; me make her live many moons more. Me put hand on heart and stroke it. Squaw not get well, but live many moons."

"That's good news," said Uncle Ben. "You'll be with her, won't you? An' ain't there something we can do for her?"

"No — what you call it? — excitement. Not let her see folks she would be much glad or much sorry to see. Don't let young brave here," putting his hand on Len's knee, "not let him go there yet. She be too heap glad."

"Oh," cried Len, in a sorrow long drawn out, "I wanted to go down right away."

"Brave not go yet, — go sometime. Now we want to send medium out on smoking steam horse, to give big talk." Riker came to himself with a start, and opened blank eyes on the two tearful

people before him. "Ah! I've either pleased or troubled you," he smiled. "Dear Uncle Ben, how glad I am to see you!"

"The Lord forever bless you, sir!" returned the old man, fervently. "I wish I could do one quarter as much for you as you have done for me an' mine."

And before he left, he had decreased the obligation by fifty dollars.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A VERDICT.

**H**E who hesitates is lost, says the proverb. He who looks too closely on both sides of a question sees himself in danger of offending the truth on either. When Stephen came in for his next evening with Sarah, it was with softened and graver air. He was no longer disposed to take her audaciously by storm. Further waiting had placed her scruples in a light which made him shrink with fear lest they might indeed prove irrevocable.

"You know why I have come?" he said, smiling faintly.

"Yes, to ask if I have any further light. I have, Stephen, but it confuses me the more. I see so much reason on your side."

His heart leaped, though a generous impulse checked the coming jubilation of word. She should take her own course. Yet, so deserving of victory did his arguments seem, that over-persuasion had begun to assume the guise of charity.

"In the first place, I know you would never ask me to do what you thought wrong," she said, lifting her innocent eyes to his.

"I hope not."

"And your standard of right is likely to be quite as high as mine; higher, since you know more."

"No, you are wrong there," said Stephen, honestly. "My intuitions as to fine questions are smoke compared with yours. I can plod along very well in every-day life, but as to very ideal aspirations, I am a beast of the field."

"Don't say such things, Stephen. Now I suppose, in the sight of God, you are free."

"I hope so; I've done my best to become so."

"And it seems only just that you should be allowed to choose a new life after shaking off the old."

"I agree with you."

"But, after all is said, marriage ought to last till death, — the sacredness of having one wife or one husband," she cried, piteously, "that is the only right thing."

Stephen was silent, debating within himself. Then he said, gently, "Sarah, in all your thinking, have you thoroughly considered the cause of my divorce? Not incompatibility, you know; no sentimental reason, but the old sin, the one that snaps a marriage bond like rotten thread."

Sarah's face flushed painfully. "I know," she said; "I have thought."

"Dear, laws are for the protection of society. The law allows me to marry without reproach to

myself or danger of injuring other people. And you know there is a law of human development; we must cast off old fetters and take on new habits. You are going to refuse me that privilege."

"No, oh, no, but something — not my heart or reason — denies every word you say. Stephen, give me a little time to think, and don't come near me till it is over."

"Have it as you please, dear," said Stephen, rising to go, and touching her hand softly. But he knew well that if she decided against him, he should return to the siege, and that with a more desperate courage than before.

The outward actions of life lost their savor with the girl. She scarcely knew what she ate or when she slept. All action seemed concentrated within; her brain had become a whirling maze of what might prove sophistry or truth. She could no longer distinguish between the two. Bernard eyed her jealously, and saw her less and less often. But Linora grew violently curious, her fertile little mind suggesting Stephen as the moving cause of disturbance. He had been constantly with Sarah of late; now they met less often, and Sarah was growing ghostly every day.

"Ah, dear, if you had only taken my warning!" Linora said to her in her softest, saddest tones. "I told you he was fickle."

"Who?"

"You know,— Stephen Mann. Why should you mind talking it over with me?" Annoyed as Sarah was, her bright sense of humor flashed up.

"Linora, what a sentimental goose you are! Mr. Mann and I have not quarrelled."

"No, very likely not; we had no out-and-out quarrel."

"I shall need to visit your favorite medium to procure balm for my wounded spirit," said Sarah, jestingly.

"Will you, really?" Linora scented emotions, fainting-fits, tears, afar off, and neighed like the typical war-horse.

"No, assuredly I shall not. There is nothing to moan over, and if there were, you may be sure I should not trust it to a man in a trance."

But her jest nevertheless fulfilled itself in earnest. There come times when, to a nature like hers, excitement, abandonment, are as necessary as food on ordinary days. She was worn out with struggling. How weak she felt herself, how powerless to choose the wisest right, and how unable to cling to it after it should be chosen, only she knew. Stephen, though he saw her grow paler day by day, would have said it was her reason only which held debate. He was wrong. Her whole nature was bound upon the rack of a torturing

question, rising wearily after every ordeal, only to fall into stupor.

In a mood which made her anxious only to escape harassment, Linora found her, and reminded her of a half promise to see Professor Leonard. Sarah agreed at once. She would have accepted a ride to Tartarus in the same reckless spirit.

"Now remember what I told you," said Linora, as they were going up the stairs. "He is a venerable old gentleman, and you will like him a great deal better than your farmer friend. But promise me one thing,—that after you are in the room you won't change your mind and come out."

"Of course not. Why should I?"

"You did before, you know, and this time I so want you to go through with it!"

Professor Leonard was at liberty, and ushered Sarah at once into his private room. She had made the condition, also, that whatever was told her should be said in private.

Leonard was in an excited frame of mind. A letter from Uncle Ben that morning informed him that Maria had been ill again. A rare occurrence, his own cheeks of cherubic plumpness were pale, and Sarah's first thought was that he seemed a pretty, though overgrown youth.

"Take a chair here, if you please," said Leonard, regarding her with a good deal of reverence. He was always on his knees before women, and this

was a lady, finer even than her clothes. He hoped with all his heart he might help her, since she bore the facial marks of mental illness. Sarah had seated herself, and noticed that he was drawing up a chair at a little distance.

"Is Professor Leonard ready to see me?"

"I am Professor Leonard," said the young man, smiling. He had grown to feel himself almost as well known as the State House.

As the meaning of Linora's cunning flashed over her, Sarah's first provoked impulse counselled her to take summary leave; but that would only give rise to a scene. She would go through with the interview now, reserving her indignation. This boy was no more objectionable than if he wore gray hair.

"Would you mind having the windows darkened? We find it better. Now if you will be patient, I'll see if anybody will come."

He closed his eyes and waited, while Sarah looked curiously around the room. It was furnished simply, in neutral tints that gave back a solemn twilight when the day was partially shut out. Riker had been wise enough to please the eye while the ear waited for heavenly utterances.

"I see an old lady, and she calls you, 'My child, dear child,'" said Leonard, in a subdued voice. In spite of her scepticism, Sarah's heart leaped in answer. "She is your mother. She sees you



are troubled, and comes to tell you she tries to help you."

She had honestly thought it would be profanation to suffer her mother's memory to be tampered with by vulgar clap-trap. The influence of the softened light, the quick yearning impulse that arose towards whatever could address her in her mother's guise, overbore every other feeling.

"Woll?" she said, breathlessly.

"She says, 'You poor child; how you have suffered!'"

A quick sob rose in her throat. She had suffered indeed. No mortal being, even the two nearest her, had guessed how much. It was likely that only the finer ears of the dead should have heard her cries.

"She says there are two paths ahead of you. You have been trying to choose between them till you're all worn out. And she says you needn't be so unhappy."

"Why?"

"You think you can't be happy; but you can."

"I must do right," whispered Sarah. She had not meant to speak, but the words forced their way.

"You will do it. She won't let you do anything else. The first thing you've got to do is to take the pleasant road. I see it now. It's all flowers, — white flowers, — and oh, how sweet they are!"

"Tell me more. Tell me plainly."

"She says she could talk different if the medium wasn't so ignorant. His tongue gets all twisted up, and he can't talk well. But the lady wants you to take the beautiful road and be happy."

"Tell me more."

"Not now; not to-day. This is enough, if you follow it. Only take the path with flowers; don't be afraid, and don't worry any more."

Leonard opened his eyes, and Sarah hastily rose, leaving his fee on the table. She could not speak to him. A further word from him in his own proper person could only vulgarize what bore the stamp of the supernatural.

"Well, tell me," said Linora, meeting her.

"I can't."

"That means he told you something," said Linora, in triumph. "I know well enough you'll go again."

"Never, as long as I live. This was enough. I can't have it made common." And in spite of entreaties, and even pettishness, she would say no more. Linora began to think there had not been quite as much entertainment as might have been expected from the conversion of an unbeliever.

Sarah was penetrated by the solemn sense of having been face to face with the unknown. In spite of her overwrought sensibilities she might not have fallen so quickly into belief had the medium's

personality carried any offence with it. But Leonard always affected people with a peculiar tolerance. They saw him to be simple and untrained, but there was so much gentleness and honesty about him, so much reverence for higher powers than his own, that even his childish vanity never led him into arrogance or presumption. Nothing he had said to her was beyond dispute, but it bore so unmistakably the stamp of reality that she tried it by no cross-questioning of reason. Her problem had hung in a nicely adjusted balance, and a weight of influence from a higher region had turned the scale. Mountains seemed to have rolled from her; she was free to breathe and live; and such a life, fed by such rarified air! She caught her breath, as she sat waiting for Stephen that night. She was sure he had read her smile, as he passed while she and Miss Phebe were talking, and that he would come. He was early in coming, — hesitating and afraid of his welcome. What had seemed to be betokened by her new look of brilliant joy could scarcely be true.

“Shall I come in?”

“Yes.” She blushed vividly as a daring impulse prompted her to add, “and never go away again.” He stopped midway, arrested by her hand. Since the ring had left it, he had not once seen her without involuntarily wounding himself by letting his eyes seek the naked white finger.

"Sarah, why do you wear it?"

"I took it off; why shouldn't I put it on?"

"Yes, but why did you?"

He was not to be put off. A coquette would have found her archness go down like grain before a mighty reaper. Sarah took off the ring and gave it to him.

"Do what you please with it."

"I choose to put it on again."

Accomplished summarily, almost roughly, he looked at her like a flash to see whether denial would follow. But she was far beyond mischief; that had been a momentary weakness to save them both from tragic outbreak. Her eyes were wet and shining, but lifted to his most trustfully.

"Stephen, I have decided; it has been decided for me. We can be happy!"

The violence of his possession almost frightened her. How could her weak hand guide a love that was like a torrent?

"Whatever you say, I shall never let you go again," he said, assuming a harshness which might cover the break in his voice. "This has been too much; a man can't bear more. I never will yield to the trial again."

"Oh, you will let me make up to you?"

"You have made up everything, when you look at me with such divine eyes. When will you marry me?"

"Oh, talk of that to-morrow."

"No, to-night, to-night!" You have nobody to consult; you have no clothes to buy. I adore this little black dress. Put a red rose at your throat and come to the wedding."

"Stephen, you are wild!"

"So I am, but I will have my way. Afterwards, when you are safely between my four walls, you may take your turn. Then I will obey; now it is you who must yield." Sarah lifted her head a little proudly. The wild-horse instinct rose in her, and challenged mastery. "Love, forgive me," he whispered, all gentleness. "Do with me as you will. You know you can. I am bound hand and foot with silk, — no, with this," bringing forward a clinging lock of her hair.

When she told what had influenced her, he listened in wonder, but without expression of it. That a girl of clear sight could be moved by quackery was not to be accounted for; but he laid the great effect at the door of her fine sensibilities, always liable to be swayed by the figments of her brain. Whatever the cause of her new decision, he was exceedingly grateful to it, and by no means so curious as to dare risk weakening the effect by discussion. Instead, he expended his efforts in convincing her that, as a first preliminary of marriage, Bernard must be informed of their settled relation. As they could not well be married

under the rose, other people might as well begin to make up their own minds to the ceremony. The task was not too easy of performance. Sarah had the feeling, of late, that Bernard scarcely saw her, or listened when she spoke. He seemed to carry about some irritating wound which stung at intervals too short to serve as breathing-spells, in which his mind could fix itself elsewhere.

"Bernard, I want to tell you something," she began, decoying him into the room one night, with hand and smile.

"I know all about it," said Bernard, walking back and forth. "You need not have told at all. I've known it all the time."

"But to have nobody to tell!" she said, the tears coming. "To be all alone and have nobody glad! Bernard, don't leave me alone."

"I can't wish you happiness; I'm not good enough," he went on, rapidly, hastening his steps. "I don't wish you suffering; I suffer too much myself. You are going to marry Stephen Mann?"

"Yes."

"I hope you won't find him vile, a wretch like me. He may be. That's a part of my curse; I can't believe in anybody."

"Bernard, it is not so bad as that! You believe in me, at least."

"I suppose I do. It may be foolish to do even that. The taint has come out in me after all

these years. Every coarse thing I ever read or heard, every wicked thing, every blasting, distrustful thing, has started up in me. You played with me when we were children; aren't you afraid of having been contaminated?"

"Bernard, what have I done? What have we all done? It must be something; we have been unkind —"

"Nobody has been unkind but the God who made me, and made me of such clay. I can't forgive Him that."

"My dear, you are childish and foolish," said Sarah, calm only by an effort. "You can estimate yourself as well as the rest of us. Who that I ever saw was as bright as you? Who had such fancies and so much ambition?"

"Who, indeed? And who would have lost ambition so? Everything noble in me died down the instant I lost you."

"Lost me! Why, you have me! I love you dearly."

Bernard bit his lip. He had not meant to disclose that first grief which had stirred all the others to light. He would not be pitied for despised love.

"Well, lost your society; lost the right to be with you. When are you going to marry him?"

"I do not know."

"You must know something about it ; in a year, or a day?"

"In less than a year. If you knew how much he needs to be made happy ! His life has been sad."

"I don't want to know. Why should I pity him? He has eaten his bitter bread, and is ready for his reward. Some of us are in the slough, still."

At any other time his moods must have filled her with fear and a deep anxiety. That was so now in a measure, but every emotion which did not have to do with Stephen, was seen through haze, touching her sensibilities but numbly. The world can scarcely keep its just proportions in eyes newly opened to the value of the one.

It would save the trouble of surmise, to tell Linora her great fact. To her surprise, the tears gathered in the girl's eyes. They were there very often, but there was a spontaneity about these which bespoke them as unsummoned. While Sarah was perplexedly trying to comfort her, Stephen came in, and to him walked Linora.

"She has told me," she said. "Will you let her keep on liking me?"

Stephen looked doubtfully into the appealing eyes. "Yes, I will," said he, the doubt vanishing.

"It's a promise !" said Linora, drawing a breath of relief. "Thank you. Then I wish you both joy."



"What does she mean, Stephen?" asked Sarah, as Linora left them together. "How could you help my liking her?"

"By incantations and the black art."

"Will you tell me why you were unkind to Linora, — or were you unkind to her? Why did you drop her friendship?"

"To be plain, I didn't like her as well on acquaintance as I did at first. Set me down as fickle and hard-hearted, dear, but don't bother me about her any more. I haven't time for her; I have to think about my wedding."

Sarah was forced to be content, but there remained in her heart some blame of him which loyalty forbade her acknowledging. He had not been quite kind or unselfish, said that persistent inner critic. She was annoyed at herself from time to time, by detecting the lurking of a wish that he had been different.

As spring came on, Linora divulged a new plan. According to the advice of Professor Leonard, she had decided to spend her summer at Coventry.

"And with your divine old man and his daughter," she said, gleefully, to Sarah. "I asked Professor Leonard if he knew of any place where I could find rest and quiet, — real country, you know. It seems he grew up in this most idyllic place, where all the people are good and everything blos-

soms and bears. And he thinks your old man might take me."

"Don't call him my old man! He looked like a prophet."

"Well, it seems his name is Adams. The professor calls him 'Pa,' in the most pastoral manner, varying it with 'Uncle.' 'Pa' adopted him in his early youth."

"Linora, how you run on! How much you have changed since I saw you first!" Linora's face fell into its most dove-like innocence.

"If you knew how I try to be light and gay, to prevent you from getting tired of me!"

"Dear child, do you think I complain? I am only surprised at finding you so different. Oh, don't cry, dear!"

"So many new blows to bear," sobbed Linora, throwing herself on the floor and putting her head in Sarah's lap. "Now, with the prospect of a beautiful summer before me, with these simple, good people, I am likely to be ordered anywhere else, perhaps into a whirl of gayety, and that I dare not think of."

"Poor child! But you have been allowed to stay here all winter."

"Yes; though, after any time of peace, I am always afraid of a new calamity. It has always been so."

Stephen came in — the two were in Miss

Phebe's parlor — and critically surveyed the tableau. There was a good deal of latent amusement in his eyes. Sarah indignantly shook her head at him, fearful of its cropping out in a smile. His total indifference to Linora's sorrows annoyed her sorely. How could he be so unfeeling in this case alone? Linora felt his presence, and, glancing up, rose at once, wiping her eyes with real shame.

"Is it some new trouble?" asked Stephen, lifting his brows rather quizzically.

"Linora is expecting bad news," volunteered Sarah, putting her arm round the little shrinking figure and looking at Stephen defiantly, as if to say, "Here am I! take the other side if you can." Stephen read the look, and smiled. His valor was discretion, it seemed, for he only said, quietly, —

"From your uncle? I had a letter from him this morning; he was quite well."

"Why, you didn't tell me you knew him!" cried Sarah. Linora's eyes implored him to be silent.

"I knew him at college, though I was not aware he was related to Miss Gale until I chanced to meet them together in New York."

That was all; but after Linora had gone, as she did go speedily, Sarah looked at him with a keen sparkle in her eyes, saying, —

"Stephen, you know something about Linora that you won't tell me."

"Many things," answered Stephen, smiling at her prim little air of wisdom. -

"Anything I want to know?"

"No, something you don't. You wouldn't choose to know her secrets till she told you?"

"Naturally not," with reproving dignity. "I like Linora; I sympathize with her, yes, deeply, Stephen. You think her sentimental because she cries so often, but that is only from her being so sensitive. And since she is my friend, I don't need to be told anything about her."

"You purest, finest of souls!" cried Stephen, in a transport. He admired her at such odd times, found her a paragon in what seemed to her such ordinary moments, that she had begun to cease wondering, accepting worship with a pleased acquiescence, and querying, "Is this a lover's manner of thinking? How beautiful, but how strange!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### SPRING.

**T**O linger over spring-time is the temptation of the story-teller, as lingering in memory over the first days of love is common to the world. But when spring-time and love-time come together, who can resist an attempt at his own imperfect rhyming of the poem? He has not known spring who has only watched her advent in the country. There she is winged, and comes floating on a thousand breezes, bending for sweetening touch of apple-bough or violet. She cannot walk, poor princess; the ways are too muddy. But look for her, you in city streets, and you shall see her tripping blithely into town, her skirts held daintily, though her feet kiss the pavements without fear. I would not miss seeing her walk into town for anything, not for all her coquetting with springing grass and swelling buds. And it is good to catch the first news of her from happy faces, when the air softens and the sky melts, and human hearts and features are played upon by the change.

The warmer months would have brought a dear delight to Sarah, even if she had met them alone, or herself in tears; but without her, Stephen must

have found himself jaded and dull in his once keen scent of beauties. The emotional nature dies quickly down, touched by blight, though in time it rises again to the sun's kiss, venturing to enjoy once more the mildest of heaven's breezes. Stephen had but now lived in the intermediate stage of clinging to the earth and declaring he dared accept nothing from life beyond the commonplace. He had doubted, he grovelled in spirit, he was neutral of mind, only keeping himself from sin, but never aspiring to heights beyond innocence; and lo! in the midst of this half-light, arose a dazzling sun of love, — no marshy will-o'-the-wisp, but the god of the world.

Slowly came back to him the sense of divine mystery that wraps the world from the eyes of the child and the poet. He loved Sarah with a youthful, adoring love, as distinct from reason as if reason had given no sanction to what his heart declared of her. He could not tolerate in her the sense of mysterious sadness brought by the young months. It seemed a reproach to his exultation. There should henceforth be no sorrow in the world. But the more she loved him, the more her distance from him widened, until her delicious reserves of confidence and denials of love's rights pained, bewildered, and charmed him a dozen times a day.

"Once you let me pin your roses there myself,"

he said, jealously. Sarah half turned, with the daring coquetry that grew in her day by day.

"That was because I loved you less than now."

"Oh, sweetheart, if that were true —" She eluded his caress, and sparkled at him from a distance.

"I don't blame you," said Stephen, huskily. "I see what you have to lose by love, — your freedom, your personality, everything. And you shall not have a thought that is not mine; you shall not look away from me. I will devour you, roses and all!"

"So much? Am I to pay so large a price!" with lifted brows. "And you, sir; do you go free?"

"I have given everything, now," said Stephen, humbly. "I am no longer myself. I have no self away from you. Quick! see that star sink into the night."

After such a passage, she was likely to seek him with downcast eyes, asking him to take back the ring. Not for always, oh, no! she would wear it again, but she must be her own for one day at least. Then, when the period of her resistance had passed, she would as timidly beg him to replace her fetters. The first time it happened, he was cruelly wounded; the sun would never shine again. But when she had once come back to him, he learned to bow to the whimsical shifting of her

moods, — and in what full measure did she thank him for forbearance ! In those days he was most bewildered by her caresses and humility ; it was perhaps easier to bow to her imperious phases. .

Sarah had conceived a great fancy for going with Linora into the country. The green fields drew her ; and might they not bring some healing to Bernard's diseased spirit ? For of course he would go with her.

"I think he will do nothing of the kind," said Stephen, deliberately, when her plan was broached.

"If anybody goes with you it will be your husband and lover. The two offices are to be combined."

"I will have only the lover," laughed the girl, defiantly. "But seriously, dear, Bernard, — what can we do for him ?"

"I don't know. I am anxious first to do something for myself. Marry me now, and in six months set me any task you please."

As it proved, Linora was not to go to Coventry, having, as she said, been ordered to join her uncle for the summer. Bernard also ceased to furnish motive for delay. One morning he was missing, leaving his trunks ready to be sent, with a letter asking Sarah to take the trouble of starting them to New York ; he would write her from there and give her his address. This was no sudden freak. He had long meant to go, and this suddenness of



action did away with the misery of farewells. He did wish her happiness, if the wish of such a man could do her good, and Sarah hugged that to her heart as some slight comfort. She was for going with the trunks and prevailing upon him to return, but Stephen forbade it, and then reasoned her into compliance.

"He is old enough to take care of himself," said he. "Besides, he has acted neither like a brother nor a gentleman. Taking the consequences of his own freak will be good for him."

There was nothing to wait for now but the bride's whims, and in the temporary sadness brought on by Bernard's disjointed course of action, she fell into gravity and constancy of mood. In that she was easily influenced; and one June morning, the two walked to a little church and were married, going immediately away to the sea.

They found Linora drenched in tears when they returned from the church. In spite of Stephen's laughing beyond the verge of mercy, she did her duty heroically as chorus.

"O my dear," she said, clinging to Sarah as they said good-by, "you will not be alone: you will not be at the mercy of every wind that blows." And I—

"Come right here, you little lamb," said Miss Phebe, drawing her into her own bony embrace.

"You're not the only one. Folks don't lose two such lodgers every day."

So the prince and the princess were married, and went away to seek their fortune in a land where every one should be happy ever after.

Was there ever before, thought Stephen, a woman for whom the bridal chest of linen would not have delayed the wedding-day, or from whom the consideration of the house-furnishing would have provoked no question? Sarah came to him in her simple gowns, tied her bright hair with a little black snood, and let the wind sweep it back in defiant tangles, as freely as the sun had leave to burn in it. She opened her eyes wide at the jewels he brought her; he had inherited his mother's small magnificence, and spent his own fancy in exquisite devisings for his bride.

"They must cost a great deal of money," she said, gravely, at the first.

"Not too much, sweetheart. We can afford it."

"I must be a prudent wife, you know. I must not let you ruin yourself for me."

After the assurance, however, she objected no more, but worshipped her gems in lightness of heart. Years after, nay, as long as he lived, Stephen never thought of that bridal stay away from the rest of the world, without seeing one picture struck out by a throb of mental light. A slender figure in black, by a window through

which came the sound of the monotonous wash of the sea ; all her attire dead simplicity, but her hair a glory, and her face a joy. In her lap a glittering handful of gems and gold, and she turning and twisting a necklace in the sun, flushing at its flashes of light. She never wore her jewels out of her own room ; not from that conventional idea that gems are only suited to magnificence of apparel, but because they were put on solely for her own pleasure in them. When she must give her attention elsewhere there was no reason for their being outside their casket.

"If I were a prince of the Indies," Stephen would say, watching her, as he always watched her, "I should be able to make you happy. When I went out you would say, 'Bring me a box of diamonds, most worshipful sir, and let them be of the purest water and the most marvellous cutting.'"

"No, not that, but bring me moonstones, cat's-eyes, opals, emeralds for light, and rubies for blood, and a great yellow topaz. Diamonds are for the senseless rich ; they ought to have some compensation."

"Sarah, how lucky it is I am not poor !"

"No, no ! we could live, with buttercups for yellow, and roses for red." And she hid the gems away, as having done him wrong, and would not touch them again for many a day.

When summer was half done, he tried her curiously with a question : " Sarah, where are we going to live when we go back ? "

" Why, at Miss Phebe's, I thought. "

" Is Miss Phebe's the place for a princess ? "

" You used to think you saw one there, sir ! Miss Phebe's was good enough for me and good enough for you ; why isn't it good enough for us together ! "

" Not for a princess come into her kingdom. There is a house in town, not too small, large enough for breathing-space and for a wayward woman to indulge her moods — "

" Am I, Stephen ? " creeping up to him, all submission and softness.

" When you gave me that hard month of waiting last winter, it was planned, and since then a hundred Pucks have been girdling the earth to furnish it. "

" Stephen, in that month ? Then you were sure I should say yes ? "

" No, though I was sure you must. I think I spent my time so, to keep myself quiet. Shall I tell you how it looks ? I don't want you to expect different things, and be disappointed. "

" Yes, please. "

" I meant it to be like a great carven casket for my jewel. There are rare woods everywhere, and heavy red hangings. Here and there the glass is

stained; I knew then, even, how you fed on color."

"Stephen, it is marvellous!" cried his wife. "I love you, — but you think of me, you do for me, — you serve Love."

"It is the one god," said Stephen, reverently. "and you are his prophet! You are my best."

"No, dear, don't believe that, or I shall fail you."

"You can't fail me. Does it frighten you? I don't wonder. You look up to strange white angels of ideals; I look up to you."

It was well Stephen had no pressing business, and that his place of oversight at the factory could be taken; for that summer, in spite of herself, Sarah drew him to forgetfulness of action, as Enid drew Geraint.

Yet he was not to find his rose-garden lacking in thorns, — the expression of an honest coquetry, which sprang so directly from his wife's nature that he could but yield to it. He could never cease to think of her for an instant, he said and believed. She was a thousand things in one; an elusive, submissive, untamed creature. The gods must have intended her for the wife of a fickle man.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A NEW DEPARTURE.

**P**ROFESSOR RIKER became afflicted with that noble discontent which reproves a man for not having done the utmost in his chosen profession. Heretofore he had been satisfied with gorging himself to repletion on the sentimental side of his victims. With such a man, however, no income remains sufficient when he once espies heights of mammon beyond. As an inspirational lecturer, his travelling expenses were always paid; beyond these he received the proceeds of the evening, greater or less, as it might happen. His income from private patronage was not small, but here he lost time in travelling.

"I diffuse myself too much," said he, with modest self-estimate. "Jack-at-all-trades is master of none. I will become a specialist." Therefore it happened that he gave no more lectures, but five days in the week received visits from private patrons, devoting his remaining time to preparations for a new departure. The professor was about to materialize the heavenly visitants who had previously sought him as a medium of verbal communication only.

It was at this point that Leonard became a source of exasperation to his master. Riker could not say that his pupil had belied his prophecy; in spite of his honesty, Len had proved a good investment. But it was when the professor reflected on what might be made of him if that transparent honesty were not in the way, that he was tempted to wish he had never seen the boy. Here were shining qualities, needing only for their perfection to become the creatures of a master will. Had Riker not recognized in Len such marvellous possibilities of duping by the wholesale, he could have borne his daily discomfiture more calmly. From a man of moderate endowments, you take what you get and are thankful; but it goes to the heart to see exceptional ability wasted.

Still, in considering the boy's simplicity and capacity for dog-like attachment, Riker caught a gleam of hope; it seemed almost possible to lead his pupil blindfold into the acts his stiff-necked judgment would have condemned. His honesty had never seemed to sleep; it was pugnacious, alert. If his master counselled him to report what his strangely hazy intellect refused to corroborate, he would cry in acute regret, "But I can't!" Now, though his conscience was no less alert than formerly, it was rapidly losing its power of vision. He was confused between the supernatural and the actual. Urged on by Riker's cloudy expositions

of what the spirits demanded, impressed by the certainty that Riker knew a thousand-fold more than he, he followed devious ways, believing them with all his heart to be straight.

When Len was informed that the spirits had selected Riker as a medium through which to materialize, he regarded his master with an increased reverence. He had been kept as much as possible from communication with other members of his profession, and had never seen the phenomenon in question. He could but conceive of winged creatures floating down and about. Would there be anything he could do, — and might he help? There was much he might have done, had he been capable of becoming his master's actual confederate. As it was, qualified only by obedience, he might assist in a measure.

Mrs. Riker had returned, after her vacation from domestic wrangling, urged into compliance by her husband's promises of sharing his business proceeds with her, and also by an interpolated clause that if she refused he might call for her in person. He needed an assistant, and the wages of the woman legally belonging to him would be only a fraction of those demanded by one who had no part in his lot. Also, in spite of her one rebellion, she would be less a partner than a servant, and that was what he wished. Mrs. Riker was a woman of nerves rather than nerve. Hav-



ing more than once felt the weight of her husband's hand, she had sunk into quivering submission. Rebellion — and she had ventured upon it but once — had been the result of a sudden, simultaneous jangling of the irritated nerves, ringing the alarm to an action that frightened even herself. Away from him, though she had fled to a brother who vowed he would protect her, she could never feel safe. The time for settlement must come, however long it might be deferred, and when her master did at last beckon, she dared do nothing less than creep back to him.

It must not be supposed that Riker could dash into this channel of his profession without laborious preparation. That had gone on for some months. He had been long tending towards this goal, with a concentration of attention, a power of will and constancy of thought which put to shame such among us as do slovenly, intermittent work. But it was not without trembling that he ventured on his first public exhibition. Even he was capable of stage-fright, though he had the privilege of choosing his audience. There were certain disciples of his who came often for interviews. The most constant were the most credulous; these he informed, from his trance, that the medium would be influenced to materialize on a specified night. As the medium was not accustomed to the work, and it might at first be difficult for the influences to

make use of him, the atmosphere must be harmonious. Therefore the audience must consist of a chosen few, and the conditions imposed would be rigid.

Leonard was somewhat hurt on finding himself relegated to the position of second assistant, in favor of Mrs. Riker, but submitted, as he always did when Riker cited the commands of the influences. Riker and his wife were to take charge of the cabinet whence the spirits would issue, while Leonard regulated the lamp at the back of the room. The condition of absolute obedience was imposed also on him. If the sky should fall, he was not to approach the cabinet.

The little company of ten arrived in the state of excited interest with which the enthusiastic theatre-goer hurries to his place. Nearly all had seen materializing before, but to witness it through the mediumship of their trusted, their admired professor — a man of such marvellous gifts — was a blessing, and as such to be received. The cabinet, a light frame covered with cloth, was set up before their eyes, and one and another tested it, at Riker's request. This was apologetically done, their faith in him being absolute, but he insisted that the evidence of their senses should be on his side. The parlor doors, three in number, were locked by one of the company, and the key was retained in his own pocket. Then Riker, at his

own suggestion, was bound to a chair in the cabinet, the two men who tied him affirming with self-laudatory smile that only Samson himself could escape from their bonds. The gas was turned off, and Len had been previously instructed to keep the lamp at a faint glimmer of life. Mrs. Riker, who stood beside the cabinet, broke into a droning song, in which the audience discordantly joined. The stanzas had been twice repeated before the slightest manifestation appeared, and then a hand was waved from the little window of the cabinet. The song was continued, though in tones hushed by awe. Leonard felt himself almost overcome by a shuddering wonder. His knees trembled beneath him, and he was very near begging that the light might be turned up.

Suddenly the curtain was thrown aside by a white-robed figure, which remained visible in the opening. The light was too indistinct for disclosing more than its outline and the ghostly sheen of its garments, but to the honest senses it was without doubt a figure of life size, with human form and power of motion. It proved likewise to possess the power of speech.

"Dear friends," came a whisper, — and in that twilight and silence, the tones were nothing if not unearthly, — "dear friends, I have never been able to materialize before, though I have tried ever since I passed over. The medium has a wonder-

ful power of helping us. I have just entered the second sphere. Dear husband — my strength is — is — failing — I — ” It vanished into the cabinet.

“It was Jenny!” cried a man among the circle. “O Jenny, can’t you say more?”

“She has gone into the cabinet to get strength,” explained Mrs. Riker. Her face was white and set as that of one dead. Evidently she was at an extreme pitch of anxiety or interest. Her voice shook perceptibly, and one whispered to another that Mrs. Riker seemed to be “under control.”

“Be patient,” came the whisper from the cabinet. “Sing; I will appear again as soon as I get more strength.”

The slow dirge of aspiration for the “By-and-by” began again, and again the curtain was drawn aside to admit the same figure, brighter, more distinct, with a glow about the drapery of the head that was either celestial or phosphorescent. Then the curtain was hastily swept together as the husband seemed at the point of rushing towards his wife’s semblance.

“No, no!” cried Mrs. Riker, holding him back with a trembling hand, “you will hurt her. She can’t gather strength enough yet to bear a touch.”

“I know it,” said the man, retreating humbly, “but I couldn’t think. Won’t she appear once more to-night?”

“Perhaps,” came a whisper from the cabinet;

"but there are a great many more behind that want to come, and I am so tired."

Leonard watched the man who had received the manifestation, with heart swelling in sympathy. Every day confirmed in him the certainty that Riker was a lover and helper of his kind. This was but additional proof.

An old man appeared next, and even stepped outside the cabinet, making a little speech in Quaker phraseology. Then, with a nerve-tingling war-whoop, an Indian, with feathered crown and floating hair, sprang into the very middle of the circle, brandishing a tomahawk and chattering voluble gibberish. His disappearance was followed by the arrival of an old lady in a cap, and a gray gown of some soft fabric. She could not speak, "because," Mrs. Riker explained, "the medium was growing weaker; too much strength had been drawn from him."

In the subsequent interval of rest, the audience, according to Mrs. Riker's direction, strove to calm the influences by renewed song, in the midst of which Riker's own voice, exhausted of all its vitality, was heard asking that he might be unbound. The lights were turned up and the cabinet curtains thrown back. The professor, flushed, trembling, was seated, bound to his chair as he had been left. The committee of two who had bound him, declared the knots to be intact.

No religious sect bows to its pastor more submissively than the spiritualist to his chosen leader. Riker was a sort of high-priest among his followers. They crowded about him when he was released, with hand-shakings and profuse congratulations.

"How was it?" he asked, faintly, allowing himself to be fanned. "Was it at all satisfactory?"

After their assurances of perfect success, and his promise to give other exhibitions weekly, they took their leave, at Mrs. Riker's anxious request, because, she said, her husband could not bear further excitement.

One curious incident was connected with the evening. At the last appearance, that of the old lady, some one remarked in quick surprise, "See, she has a seal ring on her finger!" Mrs. Riker started, and possibly turned pale, though she had before been sufficiently spectral, and it was immediately after that the old lady disappeared. While the following ovation to Riker was in progress, the husband who had received such indisputable proof of his wife's existence, began, shamefacedly, but as if constrained, —

"Professor, besides taking your strength, do they take anything else? — part of the medium's form, or anything?"

"Sometimes," said Riker, with bland readiness. "I believe it often happens that they draw so

much from the medium as to resemble him in face or voice. Was it so to-night?"

"No," hesitated the man. "No, but I could have sworn that the ring on the old lady's finger was the one you always wear."

Riker smiled indulgently, and extended both his hands. There was no ring on any finger.

"It could hardly be, for I lost the ring this very day, and have been worrying about it. It may be that the spirit wished to indicate to my wife that it would be found, or my thinking so much about it may have brought about an appearance of it on the spirit's finger. Why, did any of you see the ring on my finger when I went into the cabinet?"

Nobody had noticed it.

"You did not think I was the spirit myself, when I was tied in the cabinet?" asked Riker, smiling heartily.

"No," said the questioner. "I know everything is above-board, but you see, Mr. Riker, I've got something at stake. It's a good deal to me to know whether I saw my wife or not, and I don't want to have any little doubt picking at me when I go away. I ask your pardon, sir." Which Riker granted with patronizing affability, and the doubter speedily took his leave, glad to escape the reproachful glances of the more devout.

When the hall door closed on the last guest, Riker turned to his wife in triumphant elation; but

she had thrown herself on the sofa, and was sobbing in hysterics. At another time, Riker might have resuscitated her with some roughness. To-night he was too beamingly grateful to fortune.

"There, there, Julia!" he said, affably, walking up and down the parlors, his hands in his pockets. "You've done well, for you. You shan't regret it, either. — Len, let the cabinet alone!"

The tone was as sudden as a pistol-crack. It did almost as effective execution. Len dropped the curtain, which he had begun to remove, and stood petrified in sheer fright.

"There! don't look so scared," said Riker, dropping into his affectionate manner of speech. "I wanted to stop you quickly, that was all. The influences have just told me that you mustn't work a stroke to-night, or you'll be too tired for your sittings to-morrow. Good-night. Julia and I will take down the cabinet."

Suspicion had no place in the boy's mind. Appeased at once, he obeyed, and the door was locked. Riker, his first flush of triumph over, turned upon his wife with an oath.

"Now stop whining, and take down the cabinet."

The woman dried her eyes, and set about the task.

"It was the ring that frightened me so!" she



said, stopping now and again to wipe away the persistent tears. "I thought it would be all over then. What made you think to take it off?"

"Didn't I hear them talking about it? You must think me a fool. Now it goes into my desk, and nobody sees me wear it again for one while. No, see here!" He dropped it carefully into the depression between the seat and back of the sofa. "Some fool will find it. People are always running their fingers along there, when they are talking. Mark my words, it'll be brought out at another meeting!" And it was, as it happened, by a sort of poetic justice, by the very man who had questioned Riker about it.

After this, his success as a spirit-producer being assured, Riker bent his energies afresh towards educating Leonard according to his own standard. To enjoy through him a double income was not sufficient; he saw new ways of utilizing him. Moreover, it was becoming too great a task to keep up the same system of deception towards him that must be used for the public. Philanthropic motives had failed. He had set forth to the boy in glowing colors the good he might do by attempting more ambitious consolation. Leonard recognized the possibility, longed for it, and almost wept over his inability to grasp it.

He had sufficient vanity to be led thereby into an infinite number of deeds, good or bad. Riker

worked now upon that vanity. He took the boy — it is impossible to call him anything else, though he had now reached manhood — to the theatre, to the tailor to be measured for superfine clothes, and to examine fur which, Riker declared with a sigh, would make just the garment for Len's princely figure. Len had a childish delight in finery; Riker fed it by spending exorbitant sums in chains and rings. He took him to drive behind fast horses, and discussed buying a house, they two together, to be furnished like a palace, where Uncle Ben and Aunt Maria might sometime be persuaded to spend the winter.

"Just think, if Miss Maria should pass over into the spirit life, and leave Uncle Ben all alone, you'd have to take care of him," he said one day, as they drove along, looking, as Len exultantly thought, like gentlemen and millionaires. "There'd be nobody to keep house for him then, you know, and if there was, he'd be lonesome. Now if you had a house where you could invite him to spend his old age!"

"Oh, how I wish I had! Do you think it will ever happen?"

"If you should work hard, there's nothing you couldn't do. What should you say to a house all white marble?"

"Like mantel-pieces?"

"Yes. I tell you it would cost a fortune, but

you could afford it, Lenny, if you tried. And a pair of diamond ear-rings for Aunt Maria ! ”

Len's face was all beaming delight.

“But you must give way to the influences more than you have done. When anybody comes for comfort, say all you can.”

“But I do ! ”

“You must put your mind on it. Sometimes the spirits want help. It's just as it is when they materialize ; they have to draw strength from you. And if you think they want to say something, you must help them say it. O Lenny, spiritualism is a wonderful blessing to people ! ”

Len listened respectfully, but flicked the horse with more interest. Sometimes he tired of this monotony of topic.

“And even,” went on Riker, feeling his way, “even if there was no truth in it, it is such a comfort to people, that I should hate to give it up.”

Len laughed at the idea of holding to a pretence.

“Tell 'em lies ? ”

“Tell some good, pious truth, and if they thought it came from spirits, why, so much the more good would it do them ! Lenny, we could do more good than all the ministers put together, even if that was so.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN TOWN.

**R**ETURNED to the city, the friends of a winter drifted at once together. Linora was again at Miss Phebe's, and had descended upon Sarah's door-step like a sorrowful little thistle-down.

"Are you happy?" she asked Sarah, drawing back after a light little kiss.

"Naturally," answered Sarah, laughing. She seemed to herself made only for laughter now. "Are you?"

Linora began slowly pulling off her long gloves, her mouth quivering as she looked down at them. "You can guess. Look at me." She was indeed much worn. Eloquence of mouth and nostrils emphasized the change.

"Poor child! Your summer has done you no good. Sit down and tell me about it."

Linora threw herself into a chair, and stared straight before her.

"I've begun to find out that there can be nothing but misery before me," she said. "I have spent the summer with him."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes; we have been from one resort to another.

said, stopping now and again to wipe away the persistent tears. "I thought it would be all over then. What made you think to take it off?"

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"Your uncle?"

"Yes; we have been from one resort to another.



I have danced night after night ; he forced me to do it."

"I can't believe it was necessary for you to do what you didn't choose," said Sarah, indignantly. "If you had shown some spirit, now ! Suppose you are young, you are a woman. If you resisted, he would have to yield."

"Never," said Linora, with all the quiet of a sad conviction. "You don't know him. Besides, you forget, he can turn me away to earn my living, and that I cannot do. But there is more — worse. I have seen him."

"The priest?" whispered Sarah.

"Yes, and he has followed me here."

"Why?"

"Oh, he is so troubled ! He cannot forget me, any more than I can forget him. It is wild, insane of him, but he has come only because I am here."

"My dear," said Sarah, "unless he has made his choice between you and the Church, what can this do but harm?"

A fortunate love had given her a prophetic sense of the shipwreck which might come of one having no right to exist. Linora's only answer lay in tears. Sarah was right ; only sorrow could come of it all, but they were too weak to resist.

"He is here, and I must see him. It would be cruel to refuse him that," she said, slightly recov-

ering from her sobs. "And I have something to ask of you. If you love me, do it; go with me when I meet him."

"Where?"

"We shall walk together after dark. I am to meet him on Park Street to-morrow night."

"Impossible, Linora! If you are to see him, let him go to Miss Phebe's."

"I would gladly, but he is so sensitive, so morbidly sensitive, so afraid of being detected and disgraced!"

Sarah began to be confirmed in her former opinion of the young man. "Linora," she said, after a moment's thought, "spend the night with me, and let him call on you here. You ought not to meet; if you must and will, this will be best."

"You are so kind! and if he consents, it will take a terrible load off my heart. These secret, dark ways fill me with horror. Dear, you are so good to me!"

So she took her leave, specifying that Stephen should not know; all her confidences must be kept from him. Sarah agreed, after a little remonstrance. It seemed to her that no one could help as much as Stephen; she privately thought that it might do good to this young priest of tortuous ways, to make Stephen's acquaintance. But she also reflected that she herself should scarcely care

to confide in a friend's husband merely because she might wish to confide in the friend.

The next day, instead of Linora, came a sorrowful little note saying he had refused. More than that, his conscience was again roused, and he had vowed not to see her at all. She could bear anything better than this ; even a final renunciation would be preferable to uncertainty. Sarah went to Miss Phebe's without delay, asking that lady, who opened the door, how Linora seemed to be. Miss Phebe regarded her with stony benevolence.

"I'm not a mite sorry I lost you," she said. "You've found better quarters than mine. Linora! Poor little soul! Up and down, here and there! I'll see if she's ready for you."

It was a long time before Linora answered, and longer still before Miss Phebe was informed by the little maid that she would see Mrs. Mann. Meanwhile Miss Phebe had sat tenderly recounting the girl's last mental symptoms.

Sarah found her sunken among billows of cushions, her face pale, her hands folded.

"You wonder at not seeing me more overcome," she said, with her piteous smile. "I have done crying. I can shed no more tears."

Sarah silently stroked her hair, and then ventured to say, —

"But isn't it better as it is, my dear? It seems

to me wise and conscientious of him to refuse to see you, if he has chosen the Church."

"I shall come to you to-night," said Linora, restlessly. "I am all unstrung; you will rest me."

Stephen found her there when he went home to dinner. Linora amused him, though he had his own private reasons for not subscribing to her. As to that, however, he could afford to show her more cordiality than formerly, because his own heaven had grown so bright as to shed its friendly radiance over everybody. That evening it happened, as it inevitably must, with Linora in the room, that the conversation drifted to spiritualism. Linora had some excellent "tests" to report. In her wanderings, she seemed able to find everywhere mediums for the transmission of spiritual messages.

"The best society is open to you; why do you go into this sort of limbo?" asked Stephen, lazily regarding her.

"Think of investigating such a thing!" cried Linora, her little hands fluttering in dramatic commentary. "Think of establishing immortality!"

Stephen laughed, but his wife looked grave. When they were alone that night, she touched on the subject again, though with hesitation.

"Stephen, you used to doubt immortality."

"I doubt nothing now," said he with smiling

fondness. "I believe whatever you tell me to believe."

Sarah knitted her brows.

"Dear, I am in earnest."

"So am I. Deeper than that; I am in love."

"You laughed at Linora. Are you sure spirits cannot appear, or cannot communicate with us?"

"Quite, if you force me to say it. It is a physical impossibility."

"Stephen, if you were convinced that they could, wouldn't it prove immortality to you?"

"Undoubtedly. If the dead can speak, they exist."

"Should you object to investigating it with me, if I wanted it very much? I don't know that I do want it, but suppose I should?"

Stephen hesitated.

"I don't know," he said finally. "I suppose I could be brought to it, but I should be exceeding loath. I should be sorry to take you into such villanous company."

It was on the tip of his wife's tongue to remind him of the spiritual old man she had seen at Leonard's, but she checked herself. For some reason she felt disinclined to run the risk of dimming the halo about her own experience there, by making it the subject of conversation. Stephen went on.

"You don't know as much as I do about the people who engage in that sort of thing. Hun-

dreds of fine, sensitive natures are misled by it, but the mediums themselves are simply vile. Do you want to see a man through whom Shakspeare recites doggerel purporting to be original?"

"All mediums may not be alike," ventured Sarah.

"No, but when you find an educated man of known integrity, who offers himself as a medium, I'll visit him with pleasure."

It was inevitable that Sarah's own experience should have lingered in her mind, asserting from time to time its right to be heard. And as she refrained from speaking of it, she protected it even from her own thought. But the subject in general attracted her craftily. It might be possible, she argued; spiritualism might be the great coming revelation. For the world is not at a standstill, as priests would have us believe. A faith not yet established need not of necessity be false. That the formless embryo is destitute of grace in the artistic eye, furnishes no proof that a Venus may not expand from the lump.

"Men laughed at Galileo, and Newton, and Stevenson," she said to herself, again and again, "yet they were right."

Linora was often with her, and when her personal griefs were not the subject of conversation, this one topic held the floor. One evening, as the three sat together, without announcement, in

walked Bernard. Haggard, care-ridden, he seemed ten years older than the Bernard they remembered. All her past love for him, mingled with present grief, surprised Sarah into a show of tenderness unusual in her. She gave him both her hands, and when she lifted her face, Bernard saw that she was crying. A sword welded of opposite emotions pierced him. Her gladness at renewing old associations scarcely argued well for the present. Stephen must be neglectful of her, and he was angry and exultant in a breath. Stephen, seeing his wife so moved, was gently kind in his own greeting. Sometimes his manner towards Bernard was half ironical. An unrestrained display of the poetic temperament struck him as something ridiculous. Bernard was too suggestive of tragedy in every-day life; he seemed ill-adapted to anything outside Wagnerian opera.

"Did you come to-night, Bernard?" asked Sarah, hovering about him. "Do tell me it was, so that I may be sure you came straight to us."

"Yes, it was to-night," said Bernard.

"And you will make your stay with us, I hope," said Stephen, courteously.

"No, thank you. I am at Miss Phebe's." Here Linora broke in for the first time, with a fervor which drew Bernard's eyes suspiciously upon her.

"How glad I am! Do you know, I am still there, Mr. Ellis, and your coming will bring a bit

of dear last winter back again. We must help each other in our loneliness !”

Bernard murmured something unintelligible, turning of a brick-red. Stephen regarded Linora quizzically, and Sarah again wondered what he could possibly know to the girl's prejudice. Conversation flagged, as it has a way of doing when its participants are thus at cross-purposes, and Bernard soon rose to take his leave, promising to return the next day to be catechised.

“And am I going, too, Mr. Ellis,” said Linora, rising also, and looking up through her lashes. “The same way, to the same house. What does that imply?” Bernard rather awkwardly stated that he should be grateful for her company, and the two set off together, — Stephen smiling after them, and informing his wife that the girl was better than any comedy.

Once outside, Linora alluded to the beauty of the night and the probable closeness of the horse-cars. Bernard consequently inquired if she preferred walking, and Linora did prefer it. Her manner towards him was wonderfully softened, Bernard thought. Could he possibly have been mistaken in thinking she ridiculed him? Linora led him on with gentle interest to speak of himself. He had been in New York, he told her, through the hot summer months, trying in vain to get work as a journalist. He had served no appren-



ticeship, and nobody wanted him. And yet he must find work to do ; it was absolutely necessary that he should earn money. Here, however, he checked himself, and would speak no more of his own affairs. He catechised Linora in her turn, with a suppressed eagerness which she set down as fondness for his sister. Did she think Sarah was happy? Yes, Linora was sure of it. After that Bernard seemed to withdraw within herself, wrapped about with his own musings.

He had come back, as he doggedly acknowledged to himself, to be near Sarah. Perhaps his homesick loneliness through those hot months in a strange city had made him exaggerate his fondness for the one creature in the world who was dear to him ; and the more irresistible his longing to see her face, the more harshly did his perverse spirit set it down as springing from the devilish side of his nature. He was most evidently in love with her. No man but one tainted, like himself, with hereditary disposition towards the base would boldly acknowledge such a thing and tolerate it a day after. Taunting himself thus, driven beyond endurance by his own flagellations, he turned upon himself one day, declaring, "I might as well commit base deeds as plan them. I long to see her ; the sight can be no worse than the longing. I will go !" Therefore he was here, not abandoning his purpose of finding work, but relinquishing

it for the present. He had been living with all possible frugality, because it had seemed to him of late impossible to use the money given him by his adopted mother. She had not known him, he said bitterly. If she could have understood the vile nature of the creature she took to her heart, she would have shuddered and cast him from her. In common honesty, the least he could do towards preserving his self-esteem was to earn his own bread, and render up his ill-gotten legacy to Sarah.

Next day he went to Sarah while her husband was sure to be out. She was waiting for him at the window, her bright hair and white hands points of brightness and beauty against her black dress. He forgot to taunt himself by declaring to his resisting heart that he loved her. He could only think, with a dull pain in recognizing his distance from her, that she was not only fair, but pure as a statue. She smote his eyes as the bliss of heaven is said to pierce the heart of the sinner.

"Your dress is the same," he said, slowly, after she had seated him and was fluttering about like a radiant butterfly. "The same black clothes. But your face is like the sun; it never used to be so."

Sarah seated herself opposite, folding her hands in her lap. A laugh and blush came together.

"I put on the black dress for you," she said. "I wanted to be the same. I wanted you to see I had not changed."

There was such candor in this assurance of the constancy of her love, that he felt the tears strike a hot flash into his eyes. Contrasted with his sickly fancies, her affection fell like pure sunlight after the blackness of underground passages. He bent forward to kiss her hand, and Sarah gave his head a reassuring little touch with the other palm.

"You say I have changed," she went on. "You see it in my face? So do I. Do you know, a girl is only half alive; she begins to live when she becomes a woman."

Bernard was leaning back, regarding her blindly. It had been more unsafe to come than he had thought. She dazzled him, and, he stopped to think, not from his worship of her. She would have dazzled any one.

"I am so happy, you see!" went on Sarah, rapidly. "See this, all this he has placed me in," indicating with a sweep of her hands the room about her, — a soft, deep wonder of color.

"So you worship your household gods?" said Bernard. Sarah looked at him gravely; he met her glance, and hated his own flippancy.

"Yes," she said, simply. "They are symbols of the whole."

She was giving him a great deal, he realized, in admitting him to her sacred inner confidence. He must lose it if he received it lightly. Therefore he tried to regain his ground.

"You must forgive me, Sarah; I am tired. The hot summer has been too much for me. Tell me more about yourself, and let me snarl if I like, but don't punish me as I deserve."

She was ready to prove her quick forgiveness.

"I'll tell you anything to show you how happy I am; but it won't come all at once, without questioning. Stay, — yes, I can prove it without many words. Bernard, when I'm not putting on a black dress to please you, I wear deep reds and amber, in velvet and soft cashmere. I put jewels on my wrists. I hear wonderful music, and I dream at night that I can sing in a wonderful soprano. Am I happy?" Bernard almost groaned. She seemed ages distant, in a radiant heaven all her own. Her changes were like a bird's darting from bough to ground. "And now about your summer?" she said, quietly. "Tell me it all; — why you went, why it was so sudden and secret, and what you did when you were there."

He gave her the briefest facts, laying the eccentricity of the proceeding on the shoulders of his known moodiness of nature. It seemed perfectly reasonable to Sarah that he should care for work;

she was sure she could not be content, if she were a man, without some stated business. Stephen might prove of practical use to her brother, and she privately resolved to speak to him on the subject.

## CHAPTER XV.

### LINORA.

**I**T grew into a habit for Bernard to spend much of his time with Sarah, and as Linora was often there, it gradually fell out that the two came and went together. Bernard slowly, suspiciously, recovered from his fear of Linora. How could it be otherwise, when she one night threw aside her reserve and frankly confided in him, as she had in others? He listened with painful sympathy; he, too, knew the suffering involved in hopeless love. Again the priest had returned to the city, because he was unable to remain away.

"We must meet!" cried Linora, almost wringing her hands. "And yet, how can it be done, in the very face of propriety? Sarah will not go with me, and how can I alone keep a clandestine appointment, even with him?"

"Miss Phebe," suggested Bernard.

"I couldn't ask her! She is so literal, so sure everything can be settled by the card! She would charge him with having been unkind to me."

"If I could be of any use —" Bernard hesitated. Linora clasped his arm with both her hands, her tearful eyes raised to his.

"Do you mean you would really take me to the place, wait with me, walk behind us while we talked, and take me home again?"

"That, or more," said Bernard, smiling. "Anything."

Linora made an appointment for seven o'clock, and at the hour Bernard found her waiting for him outside her door. She was dressed in black, and closely veiled. The general funereal look of the little figure inspired him with an additional pity. She did not speak on their way to the trysting place, a lonely street of unused building lots. When they neared the spot she whispered excitedly, —

"Do you see him?"

"No," said Bernard, straining his eyes, "there is no one there."

"Walk! walk!" said Linora, eagerly, tightening her grasp on his arm. "Let us use up the time till he comes."

They hurried back and forth, Bernard awkwardly adapting his steps to her uneven ones. Sometimes he fancied a suppressed sob shook her frame. So a half hour passed, varied only by an occasional meeting with some pedestrian, at whom Bernard would stare with sickening suspense, till he was proven beyond a doubt to be no errant priest. He was so sorry for the little creature, that the torture of waiting fastened itself also

upon him. Finally, Linora threw back her veil and looked at him with a despairing face.

"He will not come, my friend!" she said, in a dull voice. "Let us go home."

They went back again in silence. Linora had veiled her face, as before, and, as before, Bernard caught the sound of her sobs. When they had nearly reached the house, she broke out, to his horror and surprise, into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"You must forgive me!" she said, chokingly, as soon as she could muster voice. "Have patience. This is my way of weeping. Other women cry; I have hysterics." She laughed on and on, until Bernard was in despair, and chiefly anxious at last to get her safely into her own room before she fainted or died; he was prepared for anything.

Once there, she insisted on being left alone, and also that he should not call Miss Phebe. Bernard, too distressed to leave her entirely, sat on the stairs near her door, and from that post heard her laughing at intervals for half an hour. The next morning she was perhaps more quietly sad than usual. When Bernard ventured to speak to her,—

"It is all over, my friend," she said, with a weary smile. "He can be unkind to me. He does not love me as I thought, if he can let me suffer what I did last night. Don't tell Sarah; and forget it, as I shall. I have given him up."



After this, a further intimacy could hardly help following. It is not to be wondered at that, on one of their walks, Bernard was led into speaking of his own mental troubles; not of his love for Sarah, or the sore topic of his birth, but the fact that he was haunted by thoughts too vile to be claimed as his own. He was not altogether actuated by desire of sympathy. A disclosure of his true nature, as he believed it to be, seemed necessary in common honesty. She had trusted him; she must be told that he was unfit for trust, that he had a second self which scoffed at virtue and laughed at profanation. Linora listened with bird-like attention, her head on one side, eyeing him as if he were indeed a rare specimen.

"You mean, in short, that you think wicked thoughts?" she said, as soon as he had finished.

"It isn't that I think wicked thoughts," burst out Bernard. "It is that I am naturally bad, coarse. I have a surface polish which misleads you; that is education, intercourse with respectable people. If I had been let alone for the untrained Adam to develop in me, I should have been a thief; not a murderer, — I'm too base for courage."

"My friend," said Linora, impressively, "you must go to Professor Leonard." Thereupon she descended upon Professor Leonard, and the skill with which he ministered to the sorrowful.

Bernard had never been called on to form a very

positive opinion on the subject of spiritualism. He regarded it, in a general way, as rude quackery; after Linora's preface he was open to conviction. No one could be more easily captivated by the strange in psychology. The next morning found him inquiring for Professor Leonard. As it happened, Leonard was so ill with headache that Riker, kindly inexorable master as he was, had been obliged to excuse him from the office. At some inconvenience to himself, since there were preparations to be made for materialization that evening, Riker took his place.

When Bernard was shown in, Riker met him with an effusive apology for Professor Leonard's absence. Might he do his best to act instead? Bernard saw no reason to the contrary, and Riker accordingly went through the preliminaries of seating him, taking his own place, and going into a trance. The first result was a very clever analysis of Bernard's own character, independent, however, of the late conclusions Bernard had himself drawn. He listened, quite unconscious that he was now and then helping along the disquisition by volunteering confirmation or disapproval. Riker made some telling hits, and Bernard, in his interest, became more and more involved. Not at all to his surprise, since it came about so gradually, he was soon describing his mental troubles and asking for advice.

"We are glad you came to us," said Riker, after keen listening. "We have been wanting to help you for a long time. Do you know there is a shining throng waiting to see you? They are your own relatives; some of them have been years in the spirit land. Mary, Aunt Mary, is here."

How could Bernard accept or deny? He thought with shame that he might be presented to generations of ancestors of whose very names he was ignorant.

"One — I think she passed over when she was very young —" Riker went on. "May be an aunt or a cousin, — a sister even. She seems to know all about your condition; she tells me what it is, and what you must do. Did you ever know a tall, stooping, broad-shouldered man with a heavy face? He has thick black eyebrows and cruel little eyes. He wears a great coat with a cape, and a queer little cap. Did you ever know him?"

Bernard considered, and then said, "No."

"How could you?" said Riker, with an apologetic laugh. "She, the bright spirit, tells me he lived a hundred years ago. He was a great student. She seems to tell me he lived in some foreign country."

"What have I to do with him?" asked Bernard.

"She shakes her head and smiles. There are some things they are not allowed to tell. She says he haunts you; he whispers those things into

your ears. You believe you think them yourself, but you don't."

"What can I do to get rid of him?"

"Put yourself under better conditions. The best way to keep off bad spirits is to put yourself under the influence of good ones. There are many beautiful spirits ready at any time to talk with you. Go where they can have a chance to do it, and the black student will find he has lost his hold on you."

This was followed by much more to the same purpose, together with a very positive declaration that Bernard was "mediumistic," and might be easily developed if he chose; a compliment usually paid by mediums to whomsoever they chance to address.

It would have been hard for Bernard to formulate his impressions. Indeed, it was, when Linora demanded them. He was, of all people, one of the most credulous. It was by no means necessary to demonstrate that two plus two equal four, to insure his acceptance of the fact. Two results certainly followed the visit, — he was aroused to a vivid interest in spiritualism, and he found himself haunted by a visual image of the man Riker had described. His sensitive condition, acted upon by the vividness of his imagination, readily brought that about. If he went into a room, the malicious student was likely to confront him. If he took a

chair, the chances were that the image was already in possession of it. It was, he told himself, merely a freak of the imagination, but it was, nevertheless, productive of decided discomfort.

Gradually Linora drew him into her own fervor of zeal as to investigation, and the two consulted clairvoyants and mediums, growing more and more credulous.

Nothing amused Stephen more than to hear the two fanatics marshal their arguments. Though she had less to say, it was evident that his wife shared their interest. He was sorry for that. It was perfectly evident to so keen an observer that a double motive spurred Linora on to discuss and question. She was interested in the subject; she was doubly interested in exciting Bernard to enthusiastic exposition of his views. Zeal is apt to lead a man into ridiculous display, and Bernard was mirth-provoking at his best. Even Sarah, who loved him, could see that, and caught herself wishing that, for the sake of impartial eyes, he would not rumple his hair and snap his eyes in the heat of argument.

"For — either one of two things," said Bernard, when the four were together, "either one of two things!" He put one lean finger on the table to mark a point, and sat blinking rapidly at Stephen. Linora, having plied the subject as bait until he had once vigorously seized upon it, lay back in her

chair and watched him. "Either these phenomena come from some strange faculty of the mind, unclassified as yet, or they are literally communications from the spirits of the dead. In either case we are bound to investigate."

"Why?" asked Stephen, his coolness in striking contrast with Bernard's perturbation.

"Because we are the better for all knowledge," went on Bernard. "We have the revelation by faith; perhaps we are going to have it by sight."

"Half of it," said Stephen, "does come from unclassified action of the mind, as you say; half is clever guessing. I am willing to stake ten to one that, if I chose to barter for it the simple practice of not lying, I could act as medium for five years, and retire on a princely fortune, with a prime reputation."

"You may be a genuine medium," suggested Linora.

"No, I have only my quota of senses. But —" added he, glancing at her mischievously, "I'll prove my point, if you like. Shall I tell your past history, and let you judge my guessing powers for yourself?"

Sarah laughed, but instantly stopped when Linora shrank into herself, saying, with real earnestness, "Not that! Be kind!" Sarah at once thought of the priest, and tingled with shame and

sorrow that they should have reminded the poor little creature of her sufferings.

It happened about this time that Miss Maria broke through a custom of long standing, and made a visit to Boston. She had not once seen Leonard since he left Coventry. Through one pretext or another, Riker had prevented his pupil from going down to the old home. Miss Maria knew the reason quite as well as Riker himself. He was well aware of her hatred of him, and her continual mental remonstrance against Leonard's stay with him. The medium feared her influence; he would never allow her to exert it if he could prevent it. Therefore, since her boy could not go to her, she would find him in Boston. She wished, if possible, to go when Riker was away from home, but there was no certainty of being able to do that. One morning, as she was pondering over the question in the midst of breakfast-getting, a neighbor brought in a letter from Leonard. In the course of it, he mentioned, incidentally, that the professor had consented to give a lecture in the western part of the state. Some wealthy resident of a town had begged him to do so as a great favor, and in consideration of a large sum of money. The date mentioned was the very day on which Miss Maria was reading the letter. Her resolution was formed and matured in a flash.

"Pa," she said, when Uncle Ben came in from milking, "I'm going to Boston." Uncle Ben straightened himself after putting down the pails, took off his hat, and passed his hand over his hair.

"Sho!" was his final exclamation.

"You see," went on Maria, discreetly reserving a part of her motives, "I ain't seen Leonard for nobody knows how long, and this morning it's come over me, so that I guess I'll go to-day, if you'll get me to the depot."

"Now how pleased he'll be!" said Uncle Ben, the smiling wrinkles deepening in his face. Then the shadow of an anxious thought flitted across it. "It ain't another arrant, Maria?" he said, taking a step towards her. "Is it because you want to see a doctor up there, an' are keepin' it away from me?"

Maria laughed, half in genuine pleasure at his constant thought of her, half in ridicule of the thought.

"You've never known me to tell a lie when I did speak, have you, Pa? I've kept a good many things close, but I never lied out-and-out. I don't want to see any doctor, and I won't see any doctor, and there's the whole!"

"Yes, yes, that sets my mind easy," said Uncle Ben, beginning to bustle about. "Now you fly round an' get off, an' leave the dishes to me."

In two hours' time Miss Maria was sitting in the



train flying towards Boston, her bag in her lap, tightly clasped by both hands, and an expression of determination on her face. As the magnitude of the occasion impressed her more deeply, and she felt that it would be impossible, in the nature of things, for such wild trips to occur often, she became a little dismayed at the thought that Leonard himself might not be at home. That she might telegraph and ask him to remain at home, should he still be there, did occur to her, but though she was not sparing of money, she could not telegraph. That adaptation of the lightning seemed sacred to the uses of adversity, the announcement of illness and death. There seemed, although she did not so state it to herself, an impropriety in using it for trivial purposes.

When she reached the house in Kay Street, her eye was at once arrested by the sign which set forth Professor Leonard's name. She stopped to contemplate it. Despite the fact that she firmly believed Leonard to be a dupe, in his turn duping others, she did feel a thrill of pride in regarding that sign!

Professor Leonard was in, and Maria awaited her turn in the reception room, with Linora, as it happened. Linora became instantly observant of the woman's village smartness of dress, and her New England type of face. Placing one's self in these semi-spiritual surroundings seemed to do

away with the small restraints of conventionality. People never waited for an introduction in Professor Leonard's reception room. Linora drew her chair nearer, and asked in a gentle voice, the deprecation of which itself apologized for the liberty, —

"Pardon me, but are you a spiritualist?"

"No," said Miss Maria, stiffening, and embracing with delight the opportunity of displaying her true colors in a place where they could by no means offend her father. "No, I thank the Lord I'm not."

"Excuse me; I thought from your being here —"

"I'm here to see the medium. I've known him ever since he was a little boy. My father brought him up."

"Then your father is the old gentleman I have sometimes seen here," said Linora, assuming the air of the interest she really felt. "But he believes in it?"

"Yes," said Miss Maria, shortly. She was not drawn to Linora. Having justified herself in regard to the imputation of belief in spiritualism, she meant to go no further in the catechism.

A second visitor was shown in, — Sarah. Linora had begged for her companionship an hour before, and Sarah had refused it. When Linora had gone, however, she thought over the girl's erratic ways, and felt impelled to meet her at

Leonard's, in spite of her own shrinking from the place. She still saw no reason why a girl of respectable training should be attended through her maiden life. That was true of the generality of girls, but she began to have a faint glimmering of an idea that Linora personally needed a duenna.

"How good you were to come!" called Linora. "And you want to see this lady. She is the daughter of the old gentleman you liked so much." In the instant before acknowledging the awkward introduction, Sarah was conscious of thankfulness that Linora had not phrased the description as her "wise old man."

Miss Maria was as quick in her likings as her in antipathies. Sarah's face was not only bright but frank, and the elder woman put out her hand to her.

"How did you know my father?" she asked.

"I saw him here one day, and he was kind enough to talk with me," answered Sarah. "I was very grateful to him." Maria smiled, well pleased. — "Suppose," Sarah went on, turning to Linora, "suppose you make your visit some other day? This lady will have more time for her call, and you can come again better than she."

It was for Linora's sake also. Sarah could but feel that whatever good spiritualism might hold, it was not meant for precisely this sort of nature. Linora would gladly have demurred, but as Miss

Maria did not refuse the sacrifice, she yielded, and the two took their leave, Maria going to an excess of cordiality that was surprising even to herself. "If you should ever come my way — Coventry — come and see us," she said, pointedly to Sarah.

The visitor closeted with Leonard came out alone, and presently Leonard followed. Maria heard his step, and her heart beat high, but she did not turn her face.

"This way, if you please," said the familiar voice, not so strikingly changed as she had expected it to be. Maria did not move. The young man came nearer, and looked curiously at her. His astonished blue eyes seemed to start from their sockets.

"Auntie! it isn't! it can't be!"

"Ain't it?" said Maria, composedly, though her own cheeks were flushed and her eyes full of tears. "Well, I should like to know why it ain't?"

Leonard was quite beside himself, but none too demented for her. She had a jealous heart; it demanded much from the few who occupied it. Leonard told the servant to deny him to other visitors, and led Maria into his private room. There she was about to throw off her shawl, but paused midway to ask, —

"Is he gone?"

"Professor Riker? Yes."

"For all day?"

"Yes." Then she put aside her wrappings, settled her collar and bow, and began, abruptly, —

"Well, how's he treated you?"

"Well! splendidly!" answered the boy, heartily. "He's always been good to me, and I have more money than I want to spend."

"Do you lay up any?"

"Yes; the professor does for me."

"Where has he put it?"

"In a bank here."

"In your name?"

"No, in his. He does all my business for me; he understands business."

"Humph!" said Maria. "Lenny, you take my advice, and have every cent you own put under your own name. It's safer; something might happen," she added, with an afterthought that there was no necessity for arousing in him a distrust to no purpose. "The professor may die, you know."

"Yes," said Len, with easy assurance, "but if he did, Mrs. Riker'd look out for me."

Maria groaned in spirit, and held her peace. As she looked at Len, in his fashionable dress, — and it struck her with even more awe for its gaudiness, — she felt herself slightly dazed by his

elegance and that of the room. She was still firmly convinced that his money was ill-gotten, but there is, nevertheless, something very imposing in the sight of prosperity, even that of the wicked. A thing may have no right to exist, yet when it stares you calmly in the face, saying "I am!" there seems some practical difficulty in disputing its claim point-blank. The personal change in Len did not deeply affect her. She had been training herself during his absence to the expectation of finding him altered beyond recognition, and the reality lay far behind her fears.

"Lenny," she began again, fixing her keen gray eyes on his, "do you honestly and truly believe in what you tell folks here, — in this spiritualism business?"

"Honestly and truly, auntie," answered Len, without hesitation.

"Do you believe you see things, and hear people talk to you?"

"I know I see the old lady I've always seen, and she does talk to me," said Len, meeting her gaze unflinchingly. "Sometimes I don't see her for days, and then again she won't leave me for weeks."

"What do you think she is?" went on Maria, making a last despairing effort to reach the bottom of his consciousness.

"Why, my control!" said he, surprised at the intimation that there might be another theory.

"The professor says so, and Uncle Ben says so. They know more'n I do."

"You say she talks to you; do you hear her voice?"

"No, not exactly, — not in my ears; in my mind. I can't seem to tell you about it, auntie. I seem to hear it and feel it together."

Aunt Maria gave up the solution, in pure despair, and turned to the less vexing point of gaining a promise from him to visit Coventry. That proved impossible. Len acknowledged his longing to be there again; homesick tears came into his eyes, confirming his words, but he could only promise provisionally. He must do whatever the professor said. Maria realized that, in some mysterious way, he was held under the influence of a will beside which her persuasion had little weight. When she took her way home that night, she was very doubtful as to her own satisfaction in her visit. So far as coming to any right understanding of Len's position was concerned, it had ended in smoke. The sight of him, however, had satisfied her affection. Strange, too, as it was, and as she felt it to be, his simple declaration convinced her of his continued honesty, in the face of evidence to the contrary.

Leonard had not told her everything in regard to his manner of working, simply because he could not. He himself did not know how deeply

he had been drawn into Riker's own methods. His master still kept him, at intervals, conning high-sounding diction, suited to the consolation of the afflicted, and descriptive of the occupations and emotions of those who had "passed over into spirit life." He accepted such tasks unquestioningly, as part of his education, and was quite unconscious of their influence on his business interviews. He would have been horrified at the thought of interpolating ideas of his own in the messages given to him by his "control," but as time went on, those messages became inextricably mingled with fragments of remembered rote. On the days when he firmly declared that he could not see his phantom, Riker was obliged to excuse him to visitors, though thereby was lost many a fat fee. But as his master pressed him with hourly repeated inquiries as to his possible ability to recall her, the boy was inevitably driven into a nervous trepidation which always ended in her appearance. So, with this resource of harassment at his command, Riker was able to take care that the periods when Leonard was not "under control" should be of short duration.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### AN UNEXPECTED CHECK.

**B**ERNARD had not resigned himself to the prospect of idleness, though, as it seemed, he was not to find work as a journalist. There was no place for him in Boston, as there had been none in New York. He had had no experience, and editors showed a surprising unanimity in refusing to take the will for the deed. In the mean time, he must live on the money of which he felt himself wrongfully possessed, though when the hour for work should come, as it must, he would pay it back to the last penny. In these days, Sarah was not his chief adviser; that place was held by Linora. If Bernard did not tell her all the facts which weighed upon him, he hinted so constantly at his overmastering emotions that the clever little creature finally knew him far better than he knew himself. Sarah, in secret, deplored her inability to approach him, but noted his growing intimacy with Linora, and was glad. He must become fond of her. If Linora could forget her priest, and sometime return his possible love, it would be well for them both. She had begun to realize that there were strange inconsis-

ences in Linora's nature, but she reflected that marriage and happiness might assimilate them into the consistently good.

The time came when Bernard spoke cautiously to Linora of his parentage. Linora immediately assumed the existence of a thrilling domestic drama, evolving from her sentimentally disposed brain the conclusion that, beyond the bare facts he had mentioned, lay some dramatic mystery. For the solution of that she insisted upon his consulting Professor Leonard. Bernard refused, thought it all over, and went. Could the medium describe his mother? Bernard was conscious of a great curiosity as to whether the tie of blood or the ignobility of his nature might be stronger. Should he hate her because she was not of the manner of life he coveted, or love her simply because he was of her flesh?

Leonard was that day sadly homesick, a state of emotion for which Maria was responsible. The sight of her had renewed his longing for the old place, the farm-house, the little river flowing near, the peaceful faces of the two people dearest to him. He had asked permission to go down at once, and Riker had refused. His denials were still kind; they lay in an indefinite postponement.

Bernard's first question was, "Tell me about my mother." And Leonard began with his stereotyped phrase, "I see an old lady." Thereupon

followed the description he had given Sarah, and, like Sarah, Bernard fitted the words to his adopted mother.

"Not that one," he said. "I mean my real mother, not my adopted one. The one alive; the one I haven't seen for so long."

Leonard's heart, big with his own longing for home, pictured to him a mother neglected, deprived of her son for many years.

"Oh, go and see her!" he broke forth, earnestly, "go back to her and ask her to forgive you." Bernard could not protest against the latter phrase. There lay much need of forgiveness, he thought, in his disloyalty.

"Would she be glad to see me?" he asked, his heart sinking under the thought that he might indeed feel called upon to go.

"She thinks of you all the time. She is waiting for you to come back." Further questioning elicited nothing of a different nature. Leonard owned that the "control" had left him and he could say no more.

Whether Bernard was or was not influenced by this as being supernatural, and therefore weighty advice, it gave him a new idea. All these months he had been longing to perform some sort of exaggerated penance. Might it not be the true, the noble thing, to go back to his own people and live in their midst? He, with his evil nature,

seemed to hold no place among the irreproachable in life and pure in heart. Let him return to the place and rank where nature placed him, and become at least an honest laboring man. He went home and told Linora of his decision. To his great delight she combated it. What could be more welcome than the declaration of one knowing his position, that he was expecting too much of himself?

"Now," said Linora, in a business-like manner, "where is the duty? You are trying to make one where none exists. Your mother gave you away because it was best for you and convenient for her. It is still best for you to stay away; no doubt it is still convenient for her to have you."

The advice coincided entirely with his own inclinations, but it did strike him as being slightly cold-blooded. Linora was marvellously quick in response to the mood of her listeners. She detected in his face the surprise that held no approval, and her own expression changed at once. She broke into tearful appeal.

"I am selfish!" she said, putting her hand on his arm. "I am not to be trusted for advice. You see, I need you here so much that I can't ask you to go."

What man or woman was ever ungratified by a just appreciation of himself? Bernard, like most unprepossessing people, was gifted with a large

quota of vanity, and sought Linora oftener because her friendship for him seemed to be growing in warmth. And she was sincerely anxious to keep him. He represented a punctual and attentive audience.

Now came one of her periodical seasons of grief. What wonder? The priest had again returned, again insisted on seeing her, and again she was unable to deny him. By this time both Bernard and Sarah had settled into a very decided disgust at the proceedings of the invisible lover. Either would have been glad to offer him salutary advice. This time Linora confided in them both, stipulating over and over again that every syllable should be kept from Stephen. This time, too, she proved herself amenable to reason, and gently submitted to Sarah's determination that at least the errant lover should come respectably to call at her own house, or that Linora should refuse to see him. The girl wearily acquiesced. She was tired of struggling, so she said; perhaps even the sight of him would lead to no good. She was distrustful enough now of her own wisdom to allow others to choose for her. Finally she announced to Sarah that she had written him, and he had consented to a meeting under conventional sanctions. The evening was appointed, and when it came, Linora insisted on Bernard's being also in the house. She seemed nervously to dread the ordeal, declar-

ing that she needed his support, and Bernard was flattered into thinking himself of some slight use in the world, after all.

Stephen was away that evening, to Linora's apparent relief. Perhaps, as she knew of his engagement, she had purposely made the appointment for that night. As the time drew near, Bernard and Sarah found themselves afflicted by a sympathetic nervousness. Linora was so evidently beside herself that it was impossible to resist the influence of her mood. As the hour approached, she pathetically begged to be allowed to wait alone in a chamber which she had often occupied. Sarah and Bernard remained together. The clock struck, and the priest had not come. Five and ten minutes passed. Sarah ventured to look at Bernard; his glance prophesied ill.

"He won't come," he said. "He has a way of not coming."

Overhead they could hear Linora hurry up and down the room, all her fever of impatience made audible in her hastening footsteps. The bell suddenly rang, and the watchers started, exchanging another quick glance.

Sarah stole on tiptoe to the head of the stairs. A masculine voice was just asking for Miss Gale. Sarah came back, her face aflame, her eyes bright. Bernard forgot Linora in looking at her.

"Bernard," she announced, firmly, "I am go-

ing to see him myself before she does. He must be warned not to excite her. The poor little thing is beside herself now."

She ran rapidly down the stairs, dismissing the servant whom she met, and entered the room where the stranger was still standing. There was nothing of the priest about him, she thought. His thin face was clean shaven, indeed, but his mouth was not of the priestly order. He had rather the air of a languid man about town.

"May I say a word to you before you speak to Linora?" she began, without preamble. "The poor child is very nervous, almost ill. I beg of you to make this interview as little exciting as you can."

"By all means," said the stranger, in evident surprise. His voice was neutral, even when enlivened by that emotion. "What I have to say to her is of the most commonplace nature."

That seemed too unnecessarily deceptive, and Sarah was betrayed into a retort.

"That can scarcely be, when she has suffered so much on your account."

Immediately she was ashamed of having spoken. The stranger lifted his eyebrows incredulously.

"May I ask," he said, as Sarah turned to leave the room, "for whom you take me?"

"Naturally," returned she, with emphasis; "for the priest — she has never told me your name

—who has been so unhappily connected with her.”

The man looked thoughtfully at the floor an instant, a smile curving his lips, and growing upon them until it brooded into a laugh. It was a very pleasant laugh.

“You,” he said then, looking up suddenly, “must be Mrs. Mann.” Sarah bowed, not surprised. “Mrs. Mann,” said the stranger, with a change to great frankness, “may I have five minutes’ talk with you?”

It was certainly extraordinary. Here was no lover-like haste. Sarah came back and gave him a chair opposite the one she took.

“Now,” he said, looking at her quizzically, “I am going to surprise you. I am no priest. I am Miss Gale’s uncle.” She looked at him in a dumb astonishment which she was conscious ought to transform itself into horror. “She told you I was a monster, now, didn’t she?” he went on, with great enjoyment. Sarah made no reply, but her eyes spoke for her. “I’m not,” he rejoined, coolly. “She is simply a very theatrical young woman, with tastes adapted to the stage. It was a great pity it did not occur to her to go on, in her earlier youth. Now shall I tell you the little fiction she has been rehearsing to you of late months?”

Thereupon he told the entire story which had



been Sarah's constant food when with Linora, ending with the declaration, made with great calmness, "And there is not one word of truth in it all!" Sarah had been recovering her self-possession. Once mistress of it, she said, stoutly, —

"It is exactly the story Linora tells. When the details agree so well, why should I not believe them?"

Mr. Gale smiled.

"You will need to ask Linora for confirmation. Trust me, she enjoys the *denouement* of her drama quite as well as the intermediate stages. The little wretch has a marvellous appreciation of her own cleverness. Now, Mrs. Mann, I must ask pardon for expecting you to entertain Ella's visitors, — yes, we who have always known her call her Ella, — but I intend to stay but one night in the city, and they told me at her boarding-place where to find her. I had hoped also in coming here to see your husband, my old friend."

That last clause went far towards confirming Sarah in her growing faith in him. Her anger was rising now. If Linora had duped her, had cheated her out of a year's steady drain of sympathy! Two little spots of red burned on her cheeks; it used to be said in her village home that Sarah Ellis was "high-spirited."

"My husband is not at home," she said, rising. "He will be sorry, and you must come at another

time. Now will you come with me where we shall not be disturbed, and I will send for Linora."

He followed, apparently gently amused, but incapable of taking very vital interest in anybody or anything. There was time to introduce him to Bernard before Linora came, and time to add meaningly, "This is Linora's uncle." Bernard's eyes also began to devour the monster, a proceeding the monster evidently understood and which did not displease him. Linora came softly in, her drooping form and woeful expression making an artistic whole.

"Well, Ella," said the uncle, dryly, putting out his hand.

Blank astonishment usurped her features, effectually disposing of their misery. Then she made a swift attempt to recover herself and assume a natural trepidation. Bernard and Sarah were not losing a look, the former quite dazed by the turn affairs had taken.

"Now, Ella," began her uncle, quietly, but not without a certain authority, "this is the last scene, you know; don't try to prolong it. I have been telling Mrs. Mann that your priest-ridden love-story is all a myth. Is it?"

The girl hesitated a moment, in thought; then she laughed in genuine enjoyment.

"I must sit down if I'm to be cross-examined," she said, taking a chair, and crossing her little feet

and hands. "Yes, I suppose I might as well confess that it was the fruit of my invention."

"As to my tyranny?" suggested Mr. Gale, gently patting the arm of his chair. Linora smiled at him in the most serene good-nature.

"You've always been a dear thing," she said, in what seemed real affection. "I wouldn't slander you for the world, if life wasn't so awfully stupid."

"And — ah, there is one point I seem to have forgotten," he went on, with somewhat weary conscientiousness. "Did you make the loss of your voice one item of your drama? It usually is, as I remember it. — This young lady, Mrs. Mann, was born without capacity for musical training. She never had a voice, consequently she never lost it. Now, I think that is all."

"One thing," said Sarah, indignantly, "one thing I should like to know, Linora. What earthly object did you have in telling this host of lies?"

Linora looked at her with the first real compunction she had shown. Shallow as she might be, she would have preferred that Sarah, at least, should continue to believe in her. Her uncle left her no time to reply.

"I see I must briefly sketch this young lady's career," he said. "Her mother died when she was very young. She never had advisers, or pastors, or masters of wise repute. Her father let her go

into society when she pleased. That was when she was sixteen. From that time to her twenty-eighth year she was steadily busy in the rather ill-bred pastime known as flirting. I suppose she numbers her victims by the hundred." Here Linora smiled, in retrospective enjoyment. "About that time I became her guardian, and, as I proved somewhat of a damper on her amusements, she preferred to live away from me. I had no objection. For the last four years she had been gulling people with the little dramatic fiction I have just told you. Society was wearing her out, body and mind, and she was tired of it. Most people under such circumstances, embrace religion; Ella had dramatic instincts, and she took to private theatricals. Last summer, however, they seemed to have palled upon her, and she begged me to take her to various fashionable resorts, where she danced and flirted to her heart's content. I did it as a precautionary measure; I thought it quite as well that she should exercise her inclinations in my care. I can't take it upon myself to watch her all the time, but whenever I find it possible, I drop down and expose her to her last victims. It not only saves them from being too deeply deceived, but I fancy in time it may prove salutary for her. Possibly, with public exposure always before her, she may not continue to indulge in her intemperance."

His manner was still languid and his tone unconcerned, but Sarah thought she detected an undercurrent of real annoyance and displeasure.

"Is that all?" asked Linora, airily, from behind her archly uplifted fan. She was not defiant nor ashamed, — only amused at her own cleverness, and at the unexpected blow of finding the tables turned upon her. At that moment she caught sight of Bernard, bending forward, his hair dishevelled, his mouth and eyes distended. She broke into overwhelming laughter; peal upon peal it came, till the tears rolled down her cheeks. Angry and disgusted as she had been, Sarah's inevitable sense of humor came to the surface, and she smiled against her will. Even Gale looked at Linora with a twinkle in his eye, his mouth curving almost imperceptibly.

"Whenever I see him," panted Linora, in the midst of inextinguishable bursts of merriment, "whenever I see him I think of that night when we paced up and down at our rendezvous. I nearly died over it; I'm so glad I can laugh it out!"

It is difficult to realize that one's self is included in a deception. In some strange manner Bernard had overlooked his own share in the farce; now he started, flushing irritably.

"Do you mean to say —" he began, and then stopped, trembling.

"The way we paced up and down, and he so sorry for me!" went on Linora, still pointing at him, and trying to wipe her tears. "His delicate sympathy! His patience, and the heroism with which he kept down his shivers! It was a fearfully cold night, but I was muffled and veiled. Oh, how I have laughed at it since, and how I laughed that night! And when I could contain myself no longer, he thought I sobbed."

Bernard waited for no more; he walked from the room, looking at no one, and presently they heard the street door close behind him. There was a slight flush on Gale's face.

"Mrs. Mann," he said, rising, "I hope you will do me the justice to believe that I am very much ashamed. Perhaps it was not wise to make a scene, but my good angel isn't always at hand, and I am afraid I was too — well, — displeased with Ella to be very delicate."

Sarah gave him her hand, looking at him with frank cordiality.

"I thank you, and I want to know you," she said, simply. "You must come to us at your first opportunity."

Linora put her palms together and approached them, a humble little penitent.

"Don't try anything of that sort again," said Sarah, her anger breaking bounds. "If you wish me to tolerate you, be your real self, — if there is

any real self to you." Linora turned away, brushing aside what might have been a couple of genuine tears.

"I did care for you," she said, bluntly. "I didn't lie there."

Sarah waited for her husband that night, and, when he came, ran to meet him like a whirlwind.

"Stephen, what do you know about Linora?"

"What do you know?" asked he, shaking the rain-drops from his hat, and then turning to confront her with a mischievous face.

"Everything!"

"Well, so do I," returned her husband, as they went up stairs. "How did your revelation come?"

Sarah told him the story from beginning to end, finishing with the exclamation, "Now, Stephen, why did you allow me to be deceived?"

"My dearest," said Stephen, reflectively, "I suppose that was one of the few humane impulses of my life. You remember she asked me to let you keep on caring for her. Just at the time you were promising to bless my own life, and that made me soft-hearted. I knew the girl felt about you exactly as I do, — that you are as pure as an angel and as true as truth. I thought you might do her good."

"And I haven't!" cried Sarah, conscience-stricken.

"You must have, little heart. You couldn't expect to change her nature; that's warped out of all

symmetry by this time. But it would do the archfiend himself good to see you often."

"But why didn't you tell me before we were engaged, when you saw she was deceiving me?" asked Sarah, willing to draw the conversation away from her own perfections.

"I couldn't! It seemed such an underhand thing to do, especially as I was sure you couldn't be injured by her. I suppose she took me in as thoroughly as she ever swallowed a victim."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, she told me her story, and I was so sorry for her that we swore an oath of eternal friendship; and she used to call me her champion and brother. Then, after I met Gale with her in New York, and he gave the true version, — because it was necessary, you understand; he saw I was too thoroughly gulled, — I was so furiously angry with her, and disgusted with myself, that I acted the ruffian to her fair penitent, ever after; at least until you came, and your fingers smoothed out all my rage and wrinkles."

"I wonder how I shall treat her if we meet again," mused Sarah.

"You will meet again," said Stephen, smiling broadly. "She won't give you up so. She's the coolest little piece that ever told a lie. And she is amusing!" he added, emphatically. "I can forgive her much, in consideration of that."



## CHAPTER XVII.

### OUTSIDE AND IN.

**L**INORA had, indeed, no idea of giving up her friends. It was on the very evening after the end of her comedy that she made her appearance unannounced, in the room where the three sat together. Bernard himself had just come. His evil humors were strong upon him. His thoughts were troubled by demons of iniquity ; his room was haunted by the malicious visitant Riker had described. Choosing rather to be made jealous of the human than afraid of the unsubstantial, he had rushed away to find such comfort as he might in companionship.

Linora came in brightly, by no means defiant in ignoring what had passed the night before. She had not forgotten it, and remembrance involved no shame. She had enjoyed it, and was ready for a new play.

Sarah rose hesitatingly, divided between the promptings of her quick instinct of hospitality, and an irrepressible distrust. Linora was equal to the occasion ; she seemed to bear about her the airs from a thousand drawing-rooms. Bernard would

not look at her. Only with Stephen did she exchange an amused glance.

"I know you are talking about my iniquities," she said, coolly, taking her favorite corner of the sofa. "Don't deny it. What was the verdict, — the average verdict?"

"You may exaggerate our interest," returned Sarah, quickly. "And you were mistaken; we hadn't mentioned your name."

"Not once? Then I'm glad I came," said Linora, imperturbably; "for you would have done it in five minutes more. Mr. Bernard, you haven't spoken to me."

Bernard was beyond consideration of rules and precedents. She had deceived him; he had given his most sacred confidences into soiled hands.

"I don't speak to you because I can't," he answered. "I don't like you; I distrust you." That seemed so plainly brutal an assertion that Sarah, with her idea of the growing relation between the two, was moved to pity. She made an involuntary motion to prevent his going further. But Linora was not disconcerted.

"I knew you wouldn't like me," she said, smiling kindly. "But I like you, though you are rather more pastoral in your tastes than I should choose a young man to be." While Stephen in lazy interest, and Sarah more earnestly, were

looking their inquiries, she broke forth into peals of laughter.

"I have a vision of you," she said, when she had recovered herself, "returning to the home of your ancestors!"

"Linora, — Bernard, what does this mean?" asked Sarah, looking from one to the other. Bernard sat nervously clenching and opening his hands, his face growing every instant more and more flushed.

"After you are fairly domesticated, you take up rural pursuits," went on Linora. "You wear shepherd's costume, with pink and blue ribbons round your knees; and you strike attitudes all day long, playing on an oaten pipe. Isn't it an oaten pipe, Mr. Mann?" Stephen looked at her indulgently. "You must stand cross-legged," continued she, in solemn reflection, "one toe on the ground. You will lead forth the flocks, and the feminine portion of the household will twine garlands and wreaths about their horns. I also may go there and twine. Sarah, will you not twine?"

"Linora, don't be absurd," said Sarah, watching Bernard in apprehension. "Or, if you must make fun of anybody, take me."

"I must eulogize Colin; indeed I must," went on Linora, turning again to Bernard. "Colin, you *will* remember the blue ribbons — and a large hat

— and a crook? You'd better take the crook down with you."

The cold sweat had broken out on Bernard's face. He was miserable enough at finding himself the butt of a joke; he suffered acutely when the jest touched a wound. Stephen, glancing at him, forbore to smile.

"Has your uncle left town?" he asked, mercifully changing the topic.

"On the contrary, he has sent for his trunks," returned Linora, lifting her brows and plaiting a fold of her dress. "I think — I should object to the entire area of Gath becoming acquainted with the suspicion, but I really think — he is on the brink of falling in love with Miss Phebe." Stephen was evidently willing she should go on, and she did not wait for encouragement. "I introduced them this morning, and a wonderful community of feeling already exists between them; that is, on all subjects but one. You couldn't expect them to agree in their estimate of me."

"No, hardly," said Stephen, with dry frankness.

"But Uncle Will has not yet confided my idiosyncrasies to her. I extracted a promise from him to that effect. On condition that I leave the priest to rest in unhallowed earth, Miss Phebe is not to be told that he has never existed. Is it too much to ask you all to refrain from confiding in her?"

The request was put in an off-hand, incidental way, and she apparently took the answer for granted.

"I like Miss Phebe," she stated, "just as I like you, Sarah, though not as much. I object to losing her toleration. And with all this hideous frankness buzzing about the air, I am likely to have no friends left."

"Don't talk about it," said Sarah, longing to help her into a clearer atmosphere. "Let us all forget it, Linora. Life is too good and too short for such play."

"Will you forget it?" said Linora, looking up in what seemed earnest gratitude. But her glance took in Bernard on the way, and her demon of absurdity triumphed. "But when I think of Colin!" she reiterated, her laughter beginning afresh. "Colin, cross-legged, and piping out his distrust of me to the vales and hills, — it is too much!"

As it had previously happened, Bernard was driven from the field; he literally ran away, and Linora followed, uttering some indulgent condemnation of her own hardness of heart. Then Stephen and Sarah could but exchange glances of puzzled amusement. Possibly there awoke in Sarah something of the righteous indignation of the reformer who finds his seed scattered by the four capricious winds of heaven. Since Stephen

had told her that he had hoped good would spring from her influence over Linora, she had felt bound to drag the girl to the firm ground of truth. And lo! her first weak effort had ended in laughter.

"I am a haunted man," said Bernard to himself that night, hurrying to his lonely room. "They must be right, these spiritualists. Some unclean devil has me in his power."

With his hand on the key, he paused, half fearing to enter. What might he not find there? The bodily presence of the man who was said to haunt him?

"No one can look upon a spirit and live," he whispered. "My time for seeing may have come."

He threw open the door, and took one wide, defiant glance, which swept the room. Nothing unusual was there, though the dim light of the lowered gas softened all outlines, and transformed the common furniture into a menagerie of strange monsters. He turned on the gas to a full blaze, and drew a breath of relief. Sitting down to the brooding which now occupied half his time, he chose a corner, that he might hold the entire room under survey. Nothing should creep behind him. A fear was gaining upon him, day by day, that the mediums might be right in calling him "mediumistic." He might indeed possess this horrible faculty; it might develop itself in spite of

him, and, at some moment, a vision would burst upon him, and he must die in spasms of terror. His sick mind had still the power of reflection; it reached the certain conclusion that its own weak, shattered condition was not that in which the supernatural might be faced. Threads of reverie on the unseen and the material braided themselves in and out within his mind. Now he pictured to himself the form of his unseen visitant, who might at the moment be lowering at him from some corner. Now he thought of Linora with a pang of disgust. And yet she was not so much to be blamed for making him the butt of her scorn. He was sufficiently ridiculous to furnish food for laughter to both gods and men.

The thought of Sarah lay upon his mind like the one cool drop which must rather aggravate than allay his thirst for consolation. It borrowed heat from his own blood, and became scalding. She was the one pure thing that held place in his life, but being pure, she was not for him. Just what he would have chosen, after the inconceivable good of her love, he could not have told. Chiefly, perhaps, to be in some manner, and through her, less lonely; to feel her fingers smooth out the knotted lines of life, her sweet breath purify the air like garden pinks. She inevitably suggested things homelike, sweet, and natural. And yet, while he acknowledged his need of the loving

friendliness she had for him, he could not bring himself to the point of accepting it.

All this time he was trying, in an inert, leaden fashion, to bring himself to do his penance, in going back to his own people.

Another night came when, beside himself with loneliness and the misery of dreams, he took his way to Stephen's street and number. He stopped outside the house, arrested by two figures passing and repassing the window of the large library. There was no light in the room but that of the fire; had it not been for sharp-eyed Envy at his side, he might not have noticed them. He would not go in. They wandered up and down their paradise in interchange of articulate love. He had no part in their lot; no one could have. This was the greatest miracle and paradox of creation, — the dual unit which makes its own completeness. He ran on, almost gnashing his teeth, striving so to tire his body that it might lead the mind to forgetfulness.

The two people within were altogether happy, and unconscious of possible pain elsewhere. The glow of the fire was red in the room where they walked. It struck out red from hangings and couches. Sarah, dressed in a white gown of some soft, clinging stuff, gathered a rosy flush over face and drapery. There is, perhaps, nothing more sweetly absurd than the fact that two people, des-



tined in all probability to spend their entire life together, should steal moments and hours wherein to talk to each other with desperate eagerness, as if eternal separation might, at any instant, overtake them. These two were laughing over it now.

"And it is as if I found you alone for only five minutes, and a duenna might be lurking behind the Venus there," said Stephen, smiling at himself, and caressing her hand. "I want to whisper; I am almost at the point of begging you to fly with me."

"And I shall," said Sarah, meeting his glance. "I need but a hint."

His face contracted with the sudden pang of a remembered pain.

"We have escaped fiercer dragons than any the story-books put down," he said. "Sweet woman, I could not have escaped alone."

Part of her loyalty to his present lay in helping him to forgetfulness of his past. That was possible, since he had no morbid, poetic joy in remembrance.

"We are safely away, and on the high road to paradise," she said, lightly. "No, Stephen, how dare I forget the present? We are not on any road; we are at home."

"I may be a weak fellow to say that, if you had come earlier, my life might have been something

of itself. I ought to have been able to live down discouragement alone, but I wasn't."

"You have always kept yourself head and shoulders above common things," she said, steadily, "always."

"If it had been any other sort of thing, I might perhaps have lived it down. If I could have fought it! but it crept over me like a mildew. I couldn't breathe through remembering how base I had made my life. Sarah, sometimes I can't breathe now!"

It was true that, the more radiant became his joy, the more did it seem to illuminate the stains gathered in the slough where he had lain faint-hearted. His wife seemed to awaken in him a peculiar worship. He did not merely thank God for the gift of a good woman; he regarded her with a species of awe, and was conscious of a half-superstitious feeling that she had entrance to high regions inaccessible to him. The belief gave birth to a jealous idolatry. He feared denial of admission to the least of her meditations. He felt the necessity of purifying himself sufficiently to live with this virgin mind.

"You are on your knees too much before me," she said, that night, between earnest and lightness. "I am so happy, — oh, a woman loves to play the queen! — but you are there because you think I am good, and I am not." They had passed into

the circle of fire-light where her face was more clearly visible.

"I worship you as the symbol of all womanhood," said her husband.

"Not that, Stephen," she said, her own voice vibrating as she put both her hands on his shoulders and looked at him. "I am not worth that. Do as I do, and worship the Love instead. I think of it as a great white-winged creature above us, — noble, majestic, who must not be offended by anything ignoble in us."

He took her in his arms, and again their talk went on in a corner of their fireside. Safe, shielded, their bliss assured from all calamity but that of death, they could map out the happy years in dreams, — years that were gently to soothe this ecstasy of loving into a calm delight of growth together.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A FLAW.

THE next day, Stephen was going out of town on business, and Sarah walked to the station with him. There had hitherto been no partings for them, and she was laughingly bemoaning herself at the prospect of saying good-by. They laughed at themselves and at the world in general a great deal, in those days. There is something rarely childlike in pure human joy.

The spring was coming, and they had the summer to dispose of, in anticipation.

"You have had no mountains yet," Stephen was saying as they waited at a crossing. "I—good God!" he exclaimed, under his breath. Sarah turned to him, startled. His eyes were fixed on a woman standing near them, whose glance incidentally met his at the same moment.

"What is, it Stephen?" whispered his wife.

"Don't!" he answered, hoarsely. "Come!"

He hurried her across the street and into the station, dropped her arm when they were once inside, and drew the long breath of a man unnerved. An inspiration of knowledge struck his wife like a throb of pain.

"Stephen, is it — the woman?" she whispered.

A dull flush branded his face. He turned to her with the dogged obstinacy of one forcing his unwilling eyes to meet an accusation.

"Yes." He saw in her the instant almost imperceptible yielding of the frame, — its cowering under a blow. "Let us go home. Only have courage till we get there!" he said. But she had gathered herself for action.

"No, of course not. Why should we change our plans? Nothing has happened." She smiled up at him. The glance brought a sob to his throat.

"Heaven bless the brave brown eyes!" he said. But he ran back as she was turning to leave him, to say again, "Let me stay with you."

"No," she answered, still smiling. "There is no need. I am not foolish; believe in me, and go."

She hastened out at another door, her head bent, her eyes on the ground. She was possessed by a sickening fear of again meeting the woman. Nothing had happened. Ah, but something had, and she was hurrying home to meet it alone. She tried not to think until she was locked in her own room, with the time before her to scan and lay her ghost, if it could be laid. For a while she sat silently listening to an insistent voice. Then she spoke aloud the words that were beating themselves into her throbbing brain.

"I have been mistaken," she said, clearly, looking up and speaking to the four walls. "We had no right to marry. It was a lie; my mother did not speak through that man."

To have grown up with an ideal of right, to have been led away from it by what seemed wiser intuitions, and to behold then the forsaken goddess stretching out reproachful arms, — this was what had happened to her.

Could one go back to forsaken aspirations without as much pain as joy — the joy of possession pierced by the vibrating chord of repentance at having once renounced them? And with noble souls, what second fickleness would be possible? All that day there rang in her heart the reiteration of the certainty that she could not change again, however she might long to do so. She had been right at first, and had fallen from a just decision through what she had felt to be divine counsel. She had placed herself under the new laws of an unfamiliar world of love. What was to be done?

The sin of a wrong decision had been committed, and, bitterly as she might repent, repentance would not suffice. The past could not be retraced, but there must be some steep and thorny by-path leading to the one she should never have left. She laid her finger on this one day of her life, saying, "It ends here."

In these first moments, the one right assumed

such gigantic proportions, that she scarcely thought of the pain involved in serving it. Stephen and she had been bitterly unfortunate; their love had led them towards what seemed the most beautiful, but which was not, in this one case, the most true. They were mistaken; they would retrieve their mistake. So long as the question bore only an abstract significance, she thought entirely of the end, overlooking the common, heart-sickening means to be traversed. It was a trifling incident that recalled her to the sight of the rack, from dreamy contemplation of the heights to which it must lead. At twilight, she went to the mirror to put her hair in order; a rose in a glass caught her eye. Stephen had put it there with a lover's foolish care, that she might pin it at her throat in the morning, when he should not be by to do it. She held her hand over the petals, not touching them, a slow horror gathering in her eyes.

"To give up this?" she said aloud. "This, all!"

Her glance had flashed rapidly about the room, furnished with a hundred thoughts of her. She had been right in telling Bernard that these were the symbols of married love. There had been a time when she could have parted from her lover, feeling only the pain of loss. She might now as well think of tearing limb from limb, expecting still to live, as to give up the sweet habit of dual existence.

The night passed, and he came. They confronted each other like two ghosts held asunder by an irrevocable decree. When he entered, Stephen had made an eager, involuntary movement towards her, but he was not surprised that she only smiled at him. He had expected to find distance between them at first.

"Well?" he said, regarding her hopelessly. She had meant to take the burden of decision on herself. Now that the time had come, her dry lips refused their task.

"I couldn't help it, you know," he went on. "If I could, I would put you under another heaven, but I can't deny the earth to the creatures born on it."

Then she found her breath. "My darling, do you think I could blame you? — do anything but love you — pity — die for you?" she said, going up to him, her eyes all eloquence, regardless of the endearments she had promised herself to use no more.

Stephen's face quivered. He could have gone on his knees to her in pure gratitude. But her next words roused him.

"Whatever we decide, you will remember that I did not change, that I loved you, and found you worthy any woman's love."

He regarded her in breathless amazement.



"Decide? What is there to decide? That was done once for all."

"No," she said, not daring to look at him. "I was wrong then. You must help me to be right now."

He was silent so long that she turned to him in fear. His face showed only a great weariness.

"I thought that ghost was laid," he said, in a low voice, turning to walk up the room. "It seems ghosts never are. Well, what am I to do?"

"Our marriage was no marriage. I am not your wife. We must live accordingly — apart."

He turned upon her with a power of passion that made her shrink.

"Not my wife!" he cried, holding her before him and forcing her eyes to meet his. "Do you dare say that? Think what we two have been to each other; think of the life we have led here, and then call it no marriage!"

Her heart rose to the level of his passion, ready to join its flood with that torrent, but the pale ghost of the ideal did not flinch. There, it must be obeyed.

"If our marriage is a true one, it ought to stand every test," she said. "It cannot stand the test of my meeting that woman."

He left her again and walked to the window. When he came back, it was after reflection, and his tone was gentler.

"I want to say one thing. It will sound horribly. May it not be — the feeling you evidently have — the inevitable disgust, shame, that I myself feel?"

"No," she said, steadily. "I have thought of that. It is not jealousy. I wish it were. It is seeing in her the law I have broken."

Stephen sat down with the air of a man who had abandoned hope.

"Then I give it up," he said. "There seems to be no outlet."

"If I could think I had decided through my own free will," she broke forth, in irrepressible disgust at the manner of her former change, "I could bear it. But I was juggled with. I took a medium's misty commonplaces for a message from my mother. I thought that supernatural wisdom was setting me above law. I hate myself for my weakness. You should hate me, too."

He made no answer. He was scarcely thinking of her. So the years he had cast behind him were to repeat themselves! The shining fabric of this beautiful dream was ruined forever.

"It's of no use to tell you how much I would sacrifice to have saved you," he said, at last. "We must go on as we can. When you repent, try to think what it has done for me. Your error — if it is error — has made me very happy."

"But, Stephen," she said, in a voice that feared

itself and shrunk back, "we must not go on together."

Mastery flashed up in him again.

"Yes, by the God that made me!" he cried, his voice ringing like that of a conquering host, "you are mine! I suppose they can kill you, these higher powers, but as long as I am a man with my breath and senses, they shall take you in no other way. Let me see the being that dares to tell me you are not mine! Every law in nature declares it. If it is true that you do not belong to me, let the old universe rock — for God denies his own law, and chaos will come next!"

With all her senses fighting on his side, she, a speck in that whirlwind of struggling atoms, clung to her one conviction.

"I do not belong to you. We both belong to the law."

He turned from her and left the room. She heard him pacing the next floor, and knew he would return, winged with persuasion. She sank on her face upon the pillows, great floods of tears coming. They were all for him. She was his wife, not an imperious mistress who might accept or reject at will, but the woman who had cherished him as tenderly as mothers soothe and nourish their children. She was even willing that he should storm her with arguments. She felt an infinite patience with his rebellion, growing out of an in-

finite pity for his sorrow. She would answer him as fully as he chose to ask; he should know all her reasons as she knew them. But this time she was sure she should not yield.

In the next room, Stephen was fighting out his battle alone, conscious only of placing himself in defiant antagonism to the powers that warred against him. One rage of resistance possessed him; an angry madness against the world. Suddenly there swept upon him, like a soft pall covering the corpse of noisome passions, the old sense of sweet worship for his wife. His belief in her goodness attacked him with such melting force that he could have wept himself into childishness. Sometimes he had thought, in these throes of ecstatic woman-worship, "to be her child, her dog, if one could be no more! Anything to be near her!"

Remembering that, he would not resist. The better part of her nature demanded some sacrifice which he could not, of his own accord, give. He would have left the altar bare, hiding his one lamb in his breast, though the gods had thundered for a victim; but if she chose to place herself thereon, he would see that she died painlessly. With this mood upon him, he went back to her. She had wept herself tired, and lifted a wet but very patient face. He knelt by her couch, and her tears started afresh when she saw his eyes, like dumb things pleading for pity.

"I haven't cared for some things you care for," he began, hoarsely, making sudden pauses between the words. "I am contented to live along and be happy. Your nature is so high that your happiness lies in renunciation. I can't bring myself up to your level, but there is one way in which I won't fail you; you shall choose your right, and I will help you do it."

She could only kiss his hand again and again; but he went on, to make sure of finishing while he could.

"I must take care of you; nobody can deny me that. The first thing is to rest the dear body; so you will promise me to go now and try to sleep? In the morning we can talk again."

She rose obediently. Turning when she had reached the door, she hastened back.

"If you could forgive —"

"Look at me!" he said. She raised her eyes, to find his face lighted with a great love. "There is no such word possible between us," he went on, firmly and slowly. She must remember it, to be less unhappy. "You have given me such immortal happiness that I am willing to pay for it by going to hell! And you shall have made it possible for me not to drag you down an inch. I swear that."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### IN EXILE.

THE two met for days in a constrained kindness which, in contrast with remembered hours, had about it something of horror. Stephen was waiting, his wife felt, for some further word from her. His compliance with her decision had thrown the burden of responsibility upon her, but she was not doubtful as to her course.

"Stephen," she said, at length, "you will let me go wherever I think best?"

"Yes."

"It may seem romantic, but I should like to go to the house of that old man down in the country; the one I met and liked. I fancied I saw in him something very good, almost holy."

"Anywhere you like," he said, with the same forced kindness which pained her so much. If it had concealed impatience, disapproval, she could have taken it with gratitude. Instead, it covered an ocean of waiting love for whose expression she was athirst.

"Then I will write and find out about it," she went on, half timidly.

"No, let me do all that. Take no trouble. And

shall I say you intend staying any given length of time?"

"No, I may not want to stay; and I can't tell now where I may want to go next."

"Except that you won't come back to me!"

The next day he was away, and came back late in the evening.

"I have been down there — Coventry," he said, as soon as he had thrown himself into a chair by the fire. "I liked the old man, too. They will take you."

"You went, Stephen? There was no need of so much trouble; you might have written."

"Yes, but of course I couldn't send you to a place without first knowing about it. Then I wanted to see it, to think of you there."

His face contracted painfully, and he passed his hand over it. Sarah held herself silent, by the greatest effort she was capable of making. How often in this miserable time had she been drawn to throw herself into his arms, and heal his wounds by the flood of the tenderness that possessed her! For the next few days she saw him but seldom. He could not trust himself to be near her, but often when she supposed him to be away he was in the next room listening for her footsteps, feeling her presence in a dumb anguish, with dull presentiment of the loss that would settle upon him when she should indeed be gone.

Bernard had not been heard from, and she had no wish to see him. She would write him a note before she left, saying that she was not well and needed change. If she should see him again, his quick eyes might detect more than ill-health in the alteration she felt sure must be wrought in her. Once only did Stephen break through his resolve of unquestioning loyalty to her decision. On their last morning together, at the very instant before they set out for the station, he caught her look. It was as if each suffering soul saw itself reflected in the other face.

"Are you sure you are not making a mistake?" he said, hoarsely. "It is a good deal to do for an abstract sort of sacrifice."

His arms and her home lay before her on one side; on the other, barren days among strangers. Still there was no doubt, and she shook her head.

"I have told them at Coventry that you have had trouble and need rest," he said, as he left her. "And you promise to write if you are ill, or if you need me? You couldn't deny me that."

She promised, and they looked at each other no more. It was easiest to part in haste.

When she reached Coventry, Uncle Ben had been waiting for her half an hour, patiently sitting in the old sleigh and discussing spiritualism with a sceptic. There was something Socratic in his longing to turn market-place and hall into sympo-



sia ; he had, moreover, the rare faculty of issuing with undisturbed serenity from debates wherein his dear belief had been scoffingly received.

"It's the works of the devil, I tell you !" shouted his opponent, hurling his last arrow as the train came in, and winking at the bystanders. "The works of the devil, an' nothin' else."

"Well, well !" said Uncle Ben, smiling, "then I must be one of the devil's followers ; an' as long as there ain't anybody but what's got some good in him, perhaps he won't lead an old man fur out o' the way.— I guess it's you, as long as there ain't no other passenger," he said, walking up to Sarah and offering his hand. "Come right along. I'll take your bag, an' Sam — he's comin' up from the ma'sh byme-by — he'll take your trunk on his sled."

Sarah cast a quick glance at the landscape, as soon as they had turned away from the dingy little station. A country of bare trees and unclean, melting snow. The trickling of water here and there from little runnels by the side of the road sang the tinkling prelude to the spring song.

"Seems queer to have you down here," began Uncle Ben, when they were on the straight road. "I never thought o' seein' you ag'in till we got over on the other side, after that day in the city. But then you never can tell how things are goin'

to come round. Perhaps you've seen Lenny lately."

"Lenny?"

"Now it's no wonder," laughed the old man. "We've al'ays called him so. He's our little boy, you know, an' I s'pose he al'ays will be. Professor Leonard, you know, test medium," with the air of reading the sign, and that with great relish.

"No, I have not been there for a long time," said Sarah, the mention of the name bringing back her sickness of heart.

"An' have you got any new light?" said the old man, earnestly. "Somehow I expect the new lights are comin' from you young folks. Likely you're nearer the kingdom of heaven than some of us."

"No, no light anywhere." After their utterance, she felt that the words must have sounded like a cry. The old man answered them gently and patiently.

"Sometimes you have to wait a great many years. Little as I know, I can tell you that."

Maria was at the door when they drove up, starched of dress and very stiff of collar, but evidently in some trepidation. When she had fairly seen Sarah's face, she uttered a fervent "Lord be praised!" The ejaculation was explained later, while she was, as she would have said,

"flyin' round," making the last preparations for tea, and Sarah sat by the window watching her.

"Ever since pa said he'd take you," said Maria, cutting a pie with dexterous little strokes, "ever since, I've had sort of a sickening feeling for fear 'twas the other one."

"The other one?"

"The one that come with you that day to Lenny's. And if she's your own flesh and blood, I should say the same — I couldn't abide her." She compressed her lips, evidently challenging reproof of her defiant honesty. But Sarah laughed.

"You mean Miss Gale. Many people like her, but I'm very much obliged to you for liking me better."

"Pa took a fancy to you, too," went on Maria, setting the last chair in place at the table. "That's how we happened to tell your husband we'd undertake it. Not but what we both wanted you," she added, hastily, "but I never took a boarder in my life, and I'm going to say it beforehand so't you can put up with our ways. Pa likes young folks, and you must cheer him up. I ain't so chipper as I used to be."

Through the tea-time Uncle Ben kept up his soliloquizing reflections, chiefly on spiritualism and the other life. Sarah noticed that his thoughts seemed to tend irresistibly towards some centre outside mundane affairs. And yet, constantly as he

harped upon his one string, the tune was not wearisome ; possibly because he never insisted upon an answer, and never attempted to convince. He seemed to be holding the shell to his own ear, smiling to himself at its song of eternity.

When he had gone out after tea, Maria stationed herself before Sarah and transfixed her with keen eyes.

“Do you believe in it?” she asked, abruptly.

“Spiritualism? No, I think not.”

“Thank the Lord again! If there was only one spiritualist in the world, and that was pa, I could get along well enough. But the rest of 'em make me sick.”

Sarah smiled at her in understanding. Her extreme shrewdness and honesty were refreshing.

“You needn't be afraid,” she said, still smiling. “I shan't try to convert you, and I'm enough interested in it not to offend your father.”

When Sarah went to her own room, she started with a low cry. In contrast with the rest of the old house, it was a princess' bower. Books were there, the pictures she loved most, the red hangings that suited her fancy, and the fragrance of fresh flowers — her red roses and spicy pinks. How he had brought it all about in so short a time she could not guess. She remembered that, as he had once before in separation planned the home he meant to offer her, so now his pain had

been lessened by serving her. She wandered about the room until late, touching one thing after another. Here was almost his visible presence. She was indeed less unhappy than the morning had found her. The strangeness of the place, with these reminders of his care over her, suggested the fact of a temporary separation. And as an absence of years would have seemed slight, if she might go back to him at last, she comforted herself with the delusion, and slept.

Aunt Lomie came in the very next morning, ostensibly to bring the week's "County Times;" in reality to see the new-comer. She had a mild curiosity as to the person Maria had been willing to receive into the family. Her sense of awe vanished, however, when she found Sarah to be a girlish creature with short hair, "sittin' round doin' nothin' in particular," as she reported to the two boys.

"We should like to have you come in an' be neighborly, if you feel to," she said, with her air of prim courtesy, instantly suggesting the day of husks.

The boys, Aunt Lomie privately told Maria, had indicated their purpose of "fightin' shy" of the house so long as the stranger should remain in it.

In the following days, Maria more than once caught herself wondering how she had ever dared try the experiment of admitting a stranger within

her kingdom. That pa had been inclined to do so, furnished a strong argument, but the course seemed in itself almost beyond reason. She had also agreed that a woman might come in on certain days of the week to help with the hard work,— she who had once religiously reserved her rights of doing with her own hands every part of the housekeeping.

“I wouldn’t have believed anybody’d be so little under foot,” she said one day, when Sarah was slicing apples for pies, “nor that I’d have anybody touching a dish round the house. But here we are !”

“Here we are, indeed,” repeated Sarah, looking up in quiet triumph. “But it’s pure charity in you. How can you let me meddle, when I do things wrong so many times?”

“I don’t know,” answered Maria, with uncompromising candor. “Maybe it’s because you’re willing. But that don’t make it clear how I can let you do housework, and take your money for board.”

“I’m an apprentice,” said Sarah, soberly. “When I graduate, perhaps you’ll give me wages.”

There was something ideal and charming in the homely work about the old house. Everything was so exquisitely clean, Maria herself was always so starched and immaculate ! There was even a delicious flavor about the sweeping and dusting.

"It is more than clean," said Sarah, as she stood by the hearth after the final setting to rights of a washing day. "I can smell and taste it."

"What?" asked Maria, practically.

"It — the flavor — the essence of the house, and the cooking, and the sweet country life." And they laughed together.

As time went on, Aunt Lomie often came for an afternoon, with her knitting carefully rolled in a gingham kerchief. Sarah used to watch her as she made ready for work, to see if she ever deviated by the hair's breadth of a gesture from one established programme. It never happened. She sat bolt-upright in the straightest chair to be found, unrolled the kerchief, pinned on a knitting-sheath, stuck the needle in the quill, and cast the yarn over her little finger. Such trifles made Sarah's daily food; her study even of still life had become minute. Aunt Lomie had therefore assumed place in her mind, but the boys remained unknown factors. She saw them pass with their oxen, or alone, giants in stature and stentorian of voice, but they had not ventured within possibility of meeting her. One day, however, she ran away. She had had a longing to take the cart-path that wound round the barn and over the hill to the woods, but Maria had laughed at her. Surely there was something to be found in the woods, even in so early a spring!

"Slush!" said Maria, sententiously. "And there's plenty of that out the back door."

So, saying nothing of her purpose, on this day she essayed the path where there lay the least possible snow and the deepest ponds of water compatible with a roadway. Half way up the hill, she heard the laborious tramp of oxen behind her, with Sam's step regardless of the water, and his bold "Gee, Bright!" She stepped to the extreme edge of the path and waited for them to pass. She had thrown back her jacket, and her cheeks were pink from the moist, warm wind, her lips parted by exertion. Even Sam, with his bashful half glance, took in her bright freshness.

"Ride?" he called, not stopping the oxen, but ready with uplifted goad if she should assent.

"Yes, indeed!" came the fresh young voice, much to Sam's surprise. Henry, sitting on the sled and dangling his feet, cast a reproachful glance at his brother before helping her on. But the deed was done, and the gee-hawing went on, Sam slyly congratulating himself on having chosen to drive. Henry would be obliged to talk to her, not he.

"How fast the snow is going!" began Sarah, as an easy commonplace.

"Most gone," returned Henry, briefly.

"Sleddin's over. We thought we'd be sure o' one more load," called Sam, willing to earn fra-



ternal gratitude. "It's the last we shall get on runners."

"I should think so, indeed. How far do you go for the wood?"

"Oh, a matter o' two mile, — through Uncle Ben's lot here, an' another pastur', an' then we come to our'n!"

Explorations in six inches of damp snow within the woods had ceased to hold a charm.

"Suppose I should go with you, would you let me ride back on the load?" she suggested.

Sam glanced at her dubiously.

"It ain't good for clothes, wood an' pitch ain't," he said, this time looking straight in her eyes, his own holding a spark of mischief. Sarah's laughed in answer.

"And my clothes are only good to go where I choose to have them."

So she kept her state, and was soon on an excellent footing with her charioteers. While they were loading, she sat by, musing admiringly over their splendid control of matter. They seemed great, rude forces; a choking arose in her throat when the thought suggested the trained muscle and fine poise of nerve in another man. He, too, had the true manhood, that intangible quality as elusive of definition as genius, and yet as palpable to the consciousness. But, the load ready, she woke from her musings, climbed to her perch, and

the oxen swung slowly back over the fields. After that, Sam came bashfully in for an evening; Henry followed, and her place in the family circle was secure. So her double life began, active, wholesome, and sweet on the surface; filled with cries of longing for the pleasant land behind her, of prayers for his consolation who was left sole watcher by a lonely hearth.

## CHAPTER XX.

### FROM DAY TO DAY.

**S**TEPHEN had lent his aid to an act of abstract justice, which could do no one, so said his practical sense, an iota of good. Some unknown consummation was to be reached through an infinite amount of suffering. Was it all worth while? He had scarcely returned to his lonely house, haunted still by her warm presence, before the doubt assailed him. Worse, he knew that the struggle must continue, as the doubt should grow, unless that could be at once strangled. The staff on which he leaned was the certainty that it was like a loyal lover to submit to the dictates of a good woman. She might have set her soul to folly, believing it to be a higher wisdom. If that were so, she should turn her steps homeward of her own accord. Unless he should be overcome by his weakness of longing, he would not influence her choice. He did not delude himself into feeling that his acquiescence arose from any aspiration for a satisfied sense of right. A sweet human happiness would have contented him. It had contented him, and he would again have been supremely satisfied to sit with her beside his hearth, feel-

ing that the gods could bear no enmity towards such unambitious serenity of joy. But she had wished something different. She longed for a wine of sanctification; he would not put the cup away from her lips.

To him came Bernard, more beside himself than usual.

"What does her note mean?" he asked, without preamble, running his hand through his long hair. "She wanted rest, quiet? Why? She wasn't ill."

"No, not ill," said Stephen, leaning wearily back from the table where his head had been resting on his arms. "It is true, she needs rest." He scarcely saw Bernard, vaguely conscious that he was being disturbed, and that the cause of annoyance lay in some one always slightly antagonistic to him.

"There is trouble between you," said Bernard, suddenly, watching him. In these days he was animated by something like the malicious cunning of the insane. "I see it in you, too."

The words roused Stephen like a sudden shaft of bright sunlight. He awoke from his torpor; a smile shot over his face.

"No, no trouble between us, thank God! That can never be. Whatever there is, is outside, and we bear it together."

"Well, and as long as I am outside, I suppose I am not to know," sneered Bernard. "You can't deny that something has happened."

"No, something has happened. She is in trouble, and she felt it could be borne best away from me."

Bernard walked to the farther side of the room. There he flung up his arms despairingly.

"My God!" he cried. "It is only a year, and what shipwreck has overtaken us both! We came here a year ago; we were young, and had no trouble except from losing her. And since then Sarah has lived centuries, and I am in hell!"

Stephen looked at him in some distaste. Bernard's paroxysms could scarcely have been interesting to any man, except a physician. There was something womanish in this yielding to overstrained nerves. Stephen thought it might prove salutary for the man to be placed under the pump, for baptism into brotherhood with the sane. Bernard walked back, and stopped in front of him.

"I lived in disguise for over twenty years of my life. Then I found out that I was rotten to the heart's core. I am haunted, I am cursed by my own thoughts; I am betrayed, ridiculed, forsaken. And all this is nothing to the thought that she is in trouble. You don't know what she was to me!" He made the last declaration slowly, looking Stephen daringly in the eye. He expected vengeance. But the poor creature was too broken to excite anything but pity.

"I know it," said Stephen, gently. "I have

always known all about it. I wish you could have been happier."

The surprise took Bernard by storm. He laid his head on the table and burst into weak tears. Stephen sat looking at him with listless speculation. "And yet she was fond of him," suddenly formed itself in his reverie. "She would wish him helped." He endeavored to recall his scattered energies, to throw his own trouble behind him and cast sad fancies out of the moment. When Bernard had recovered himself and sat up shamefacedly, it was to find Stephen standing before the fire, graver than usual, but possessed of all his ordinary coolness of demeanor.

"Now, Ellis," he said, in a most business-like tone, "you and I have been hard hit, in different ways, but we've got to live through it. Would you do a fellow-creature a favor, even if that individual happened to be the one before you?"

"I don't know. Anybody else might, but I don't reckon myself among other people."

"That's nonsense; you are no worse off than other men, and you have no more right to excuse yourself from common courtesies. You may have more black humors, but there are practical troubles that overbalance such a million times over."

Bernard clenched his hands, in his hopeless inability to explain.

"If you only knew!" he began, sure that his sum of miseries must "make Ossa like a wart."

"I don't want to know. There's no reason why either of us should read the other's private history in order to behave like a human being. Now you don't like me, and I don't especially like you, but for my own satisfaction I want you to stay here a week. Will you?"

"In this house? Here, with you?"

"With me, so to speak. I sha'n't lay very heavy demands on your society."

"I can't do it. There are duties before me that must be done. Anybody else would have done them long ago. I have a debt to pay, of money that I should not have used."

"Ah?" said Stephen, regarding him keenly. "Is that your trouble? If it lies in a stolen money-bag I don't wonder at your heroics."

Thereupon, in a manner forced to it, Bernard told him a part of his haunting story, touching chiefly on the point that he had no right to the money he had inherited, and must provide himself with an honest living.

"More abstract justice!" thought Stephen. "And I the instrument to help work it out." The last struck him as being irresistibly amusing. He remained in thought so long that Bernard, feeling himself forgotten, rose to go. Then Stephen looked up.

"I have been wanting for some days a man to take charge of the correspondence at the mill, and to attend to various items not the business of the book-keeper. Will you take the place? It's no favor to you."

"If I could go in as a workman, where I belong."

"Mere sentiment," interrupted Stephen. "If you want to earn your living, here is a respectable chance, — that is, if your handwriting is decent and you can compose a coherent letter. Take it, or leave it."

The tone disarmed Bernard of his suspicion that the offer might have arisen from pity. He would have refused, but Stephen's practical, off-hand manner made him ashamed of meeting it sentimentally.

"Very well; shall I begin to-morrow?"

"Yes, be there at eight. And you refuse to come here as my lodger?"

"I must."

"Very well." They said good-night with no expenditure of feeling on either side. Neither man was much more surprised at what had passed than the other, Stephen at his own offer, and Bernard at his acceptance. After all, Stephen was not sorry that Bernard had rejected his proposal of making his house a home. It had arisen from a feeling that in his present frame of mind Bernard



might do harm to himself. In that would lie another sorrow for Sarah, which perhaps could be averted.

Bernard was at his duties early and late, showing an irritable dissatisfaction if he finished work in time to give himself rest within the prescribed hours. It made him suspicious of leaving some credit on Stephen's side; there should be no favor between them. In his hatred of himself he took a fierce delight in working his energies to their fullest extent, going home enfeebled and dazed of mind. He was away from Miss Phebe's early in the morning, and returned late at night, to avoid Linora. He feared her laughter almost as much as his own malicious ghost. With his growing weariness of nerve, that apparition increased in clearness of outline. It seemed to feed upon him, vampire-like, distending itself on his blood, and smiling in bloated fatness while he paled and shivered before it. It had not at first been visible to his bodily eyes; he had then been conscious that it lay within fancy's field of vision. Now, so diseased had all his senses become that he could have sworn to a visible shape standing before him. How could that fail to complete his potential belief in spiritual phenomena? He had been told to frequent circles where good spirits would appear. More than one evening in the week found him with a medium, sometimes receiving raps

from mysterious hands, often watching shadowy forms appearing and disappearing, — and always in weariness of heart. His spiritual guides gave him ambiguous counsel, but none in which lay strength or comfort. He came away from them each time, not with any weakening of belief in their honesty, but with his faith in the nobility of existence, in this or any other sphere, hopelessly damaged. The plane of his conception of life sank by steady degrees. Stephen, seeing such change wrought in him, exerted himself as a physician might, to minister to him secretly. He sent him out of town on slight errands, making various pretexts for his driving a horse which brooked no listlessness nor inattention. Stephen had an unspoken theory, which he constantly acted upon in his own case, that there exists no more effectual remedy for a sick mind than lies in the company of a horse full of nerve and muscle.

And in the mean time how should Linora amuse herself? She had no new confidant, and her uncle had taken up his residence at the nearest hotel, whence he made a daily pilgrimage to Miss Phebe's parlor. There was, indeed, the briefest sort of satisfaction for the retired actress in playing her new part of repentant sinner with such quiet cleverness as to ward him off from discussion of her errors, and in preserving with Miss Phebe her most

Madonna-like deportment. It did indeed puzzle that lady to find the niece on terms of good-fellowship with an uncle who had been painted as a serpent full of guile ; but here she brought to bear her theory of the sweet resignation and forgiveness which made up Linora's character. That the uncle showed no trace of his innate depravity did not surprise her, since deceit lay at the very foundation of his character, the point on which all this villany hinged. Contrary to her nature as it might be, she did not give way to her outspoken opinion of him. She meant, for Linora's sake, first to tolerate, to rouse in him some sense of the girl's worth, then to speak her mind with a vengeance and swear him to future well-doing. Miss Phebe had constituted herself a reformer. She realized the humor of the situation, and smiled grimly.

One day she found Gale waiting in the parlor, idly and execrably picking out an air upon the piano. She had intended dusting the room, but confined her operations to the hall till he should have gone. Linora, she knew, was not in, but she waited for the servant to tell him so. The false notes and purposeless retracing of steps went on at the piano till Miss Phebe could bear it no more.

"You'll never get it in the world," she said, suddenly appearing in the doorway, duster in hand,

her head enveloped in a blue kerchief. "It's as wrong as it can be."

"So I see," said Gale, with unimpaired good-humor. "But I wish it wouldn't haunt me. I daresay I shall get it by and by, if you don't mind my trying." And he placidly began his stumbling way again.

"Not if I go up into the fourth story," muttered Miss Phebe.

"Perhaps you will play it for me?"

"I can't play. Why, see —" the temptation becoming too strong for her, "listen; it goes like this."

She burst forth into the soaring melody, and, with no more attention to her listener than if he had been a statue, sang on to the end. She waved her turbaned head in time, she held the duster like a banner, she was grotesque in the extreme; her voice, in its contrast with the common surroundings and her own person, seemed almost divine.

"Ye gods!" muttered Gale, startled out of his composure. "More, more!" he called, as stormily as if he represented an entire gallery. "Go on; I will have more!"

Miss Phebe had forgotten; it was true that she had not sung for years. She began an aria from "Semiramide." What she had once hoped from her voice came back to her. She was a girl again, dreaming ambitious dreams. When she had fin-

ished, Gale laid his hands together in noisy applause, and Miss Phebe looked at him for one instant, buried her face in the duster, and sobbed aloud.

"Shut the door!" came incoherently from the folds of her temporary refuge. "Shut it! lock it! Somebody's coming down stairs, and I wouldn't have the angel Gabriel see me so!"

Gale promptly shut out the public, and then, too much distressed to utter a word, stood waiting for the termination of the sobs. He had not long to wait. Miss Phebe presently emerged, her face covered with shame and tears.

"Am I all streaks?"

"On my honor, no; not a streak," said Gale, solemnly. If he himself had been in the habit of indulging in tears, he would have given way to them.

"It's well I've got such a clean house," said Miss Phebe, philosophically. "I shouldn't want to cry into some dusters." She had produced a handkerchief by this time, and carefully dried her face. "What sort of a memory have you got?"

"Short, deplorably short," answered Gale, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, by the next time I see you, or you see somebody else —"

"I sha'n't remember that I've heard a heavenly voice this morning!"

"Then I think I'll dust here. And Linora isn't in. I forgot to tell you."

Gale walked out, and had inadvertently gone two miles before he had collected his scattered wits.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### PROGRESS.

PROFESSOR LEONARD, medium, was in deep trouble of mind. It had frequently been suggested to him by Riker that they were not earning money enough to support their present style of living, and to carry on what Riker designated as his charities. He presented himself in the young man's room one evening, after rather an unsuccessful materialization, and threw himself, with an air of great frankness, upon his pupil's sympathy.

"Luck is going hard with me, Len," he said, stretching himself upon the sofa, and stroking his long beard.

"Maybe 'twill be better another night. Did you think it was because they didn't seem so strong? Did they draw from you as much as common?"

"It isn't that. The fact is, Len, our income isn't what it ought to be."

"Oh, that's all right," said the boy, relieved. "Why, there's dozens of things we can live without! There's everything you've been planning for me."

"My dear boy," said Riker, in his most engag-

ing lecture-room manner, "I must tell you something I meant nobody should know. For five years I have been more than half supporting a hospital, —I won't tell you where. Its expenses are increasing, and my income isn't. Can I leave those poor people to be turned away from its doors because there isn't room for them? Can I beg the purse-proud millionaire for a pittance of his gains, to be refused in scorn? No!"

It was a burst of truly inspirational eloquence, which would have elicited rounds of applause from his kind. Leonard paid tribute in quickly starting tears.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he cried. "Use the money you've been investing for me. I take this hard of you, Riker!"

The money he had been investing! Riker looked sharply at him at that clause, but the innocence of his face was reassuring.

"No, Lenny. Your savings never shall be touched. If I should die, you would need a little capital to start on again, and you might fall sick, you know." Leonard entreated, but to no purpose. "But I won't deny," added Riker, frankly, "that if you made more than you do at present, I'd take a percentage besides what I mean to lay up for you. I wouldn't ask you to see more people, Len, if I wasn't sure you could do 'em justice, and with your talents, I know you can. When I think of



those orphans and widows turned away from the hospital doors, my heart bleeds, Len, bleeds!" striking a resounding blow in the locality of that organ.

Len, too, had some experience of the figurative discomfort in question as he lay awake that night, with him an unusual proceeding. His fancy formed a procession of the halt and maimed, refused healing and comfort because he, Professor Leonard, was too sparing of his talents. Hitherto he had denied himself to those he was sure he could not serve through lack of the one vision. The next day, he recklessly invited in one after another, beyond his hours of seeing visitors. There were runs of custom, as in all trades, and just now the world seemed bound on spiritual investigation. Leonard silenced his inward protest by an indignant remembrance of last night's appeal; he felt that he should despise himself if he did not respond to it. Therefore it was that to the last two or three of his visitors he contented himself with uttering some of the platitudes which Riker had set him as lessons. And at night he ran with his gains to his master, his heart overflowing, begging him to use them at once. Riker's face glowed with approval. At last he had a hold on his creature, on whose simple and stubborn honesty no wile had hitherto been able to produce much real effect.

"My dear boy! my son, I should be proud to call you!" he cried, again in his lecture-room manner. "You never can guess how you can relieve my load! This very afternoon a call came for medicines and wine. My last cent is gone except what I must use to pay my honest debts, and this saves me. I need not refuse my poor."

His transport was no more than equal to Len's honest delight. Len seemed to himself a new man, with a part of the world on his shoulders. The deed not only ministered to his vanity; it satisfied a legitimate quality of the human mind, — the longing to be of use. He worked unweariedly; there was no need of justifying himself for making little distinction between the lessons rooted in his own mind and what he believed to be spiritual utterances. Doubtless he might have done that and still considered himself honest, but constant occupation saved him the trouble. His overpowering interest in the unknown hospital occupied his mind to the exclusion of metaphysical problems.

Soon after this, Bernard was present at one of the many "dark circles" he was in the habit of frequenting. Riker was becoming exceedingly versatile in the various branches of his profession. He had attempted some of the physical feats indulged in by mediums, but always apologetically, referring to them as the lowest form of manifesta-

tions, which were yet sometimes necessary for the conversion of sceptics. The usual formula followed the darkening of the room. Previously, however, visitors had been seated according to Riker's direction, who announced that he was guided in his choice by Mixy-Maxy, an exceedingly hilarious and unconventional Indian maiden. Her dialect lay in an indescribable corruption of the English language, which Mrs. Riker interpreted at intervals, always with the air of standing on hot coals and waiting for permission from her master to seek a cooler resting-place.

"That ol' chief one with white top-knot, he set down by little papoose. Why, you big squaw, too!" This to a rather diminutive woman whom the eyes of the crowd, concentrated to a focus on herself, greatly embarrassed. "Well, you sets yourself right down 'ere. Ol' chief, has you ever been in a snircle before?"

"Circle, she means," explained Mrs. Riker to the tittering assembly.

The monologue was hailed with the enthusiasm elicited by the points of good comedy. Finally, when the circle had been formed to Riker's satisfaction, — and it was to be observed that no acquaintances sat together, except such as were known to be fervent spiritualists, — each member was directed to hold the wrist of his next neighbor, and in like manner to allow his own to be held on

the other side. Riker adjured the company on no account to drop this hold, as it would break the current and the circle at once. Leonard was placed between two strangers, Riker knowing well that nothing short of paralysis could weaken his grasp when once he had been told to keep it. The usual line of action followed, though none of the phenomena were of a complicated nature. Riker was not yet an adept, and was too cautious to trust himself on uncertain ground.

Balls of fire were to be seen hovering over the heads of the company, and were greeted with little shouts of delighted wonder. Riker, who sat in the centre, kept up an incessant patting of his hands, to keep up also the delusion that he had no share in the coming manifestations. Presently one cried out that his face had been touched; then a hoarse whisper was heard, now here, now there. Riker had taken a ring from his finger, and one of the company had placed it on his own hand. A spiritualist at some distance from him requested that the ring should be carried to him, and, after several seconds, delightedly thanked the unseen messenger. One of the women present had brought a bag of candy which she laid in her lap, as an offering to the very active Mixy-Maxy. From time to time was heard a rustling of the bag, accompanied by an exuberant, "Dear little soul, help yourself!" from the donor; and the generous

Mixy distributed the candy about the circle. Meanwhile Bernard sat in the midst of this rather broad comedy, listless and sick at heart. Believing that the phenomena were really manifestations of an inconceivably noble science, he would not have owned that they were disgusting to him. He would probably rather have ascribed the feeling which they certainly inspired, to his own imperfections. He had come here hoping for some sort of spiritual stimulus to whet his purpose. Suddenly he was roused from the dead level of revery by a whisper in front of him, "My son, do you know me?"

"Speak to me!" called Bernard, loudly and impetuously, as if to arrest the voice before it fled. "Tell me what to do."

"You know."

"Shall I go back?"

"Yes, go back, but don't stay. Come here often for strength." And it would speak no further.

Bernard went home determined. He seemed to be nearing the end of a narrowing path. Celestial fingers pointed out his way, and always in one direction. He must go back to his mother. With a half formed purpose of asking Stephen for leave of absence, he went next day to the office. He found Stephen there alone, and as soon as he set eyes upon him, felt and saw a marvellous change. Stephen's struggle of renunciation was growing

no easier. It was like a constant gnawing of pain, in the midst of which a tearing tooth would sometimes more cruelly lacerate the flesh. He had set himself the task of neither writing nor seeing his wife until she herself should give him leave. Perhaps in that lay not only loyal submission to her wishes, but a knightly desire to purge himself from a sin against love by an act almost too great to be accomplished. He was becoming conscious that he, too, had been born with an enthusiasm for noble deeds, though he had recognized the longing, as it lay half formless, only as love of the beautiful. He had begun vaguely to feel that it was changing in form, growing to be less sensuous of outline and warm of color; that it need not demand serene conditions of life for its ripening, but, like a severe goddess, was able to reflect the godlike in the midst of arctic snows. Was it one and the same thing they worshipped, he with his emotional temperament, and this New England girl, whose will was as unyielding to sunshine as the granite of her own hills? But there were times, in spite of this growing change, when heart and brain cried together in loud protest against his loss. Often he felt that going to her would be the only deed that the universe held for him. He loved too well to feel a small pride where she was concerned; there would be no shame in confessing to himself, "I failed because my will was weaker

than my love." But here a dull restraint lay heavy upon him, in the thought that she might feel shame for him. The bliss of their meeting might with her be secondary to the wish that he had not yielded. That must never be.

This morning, the inward protest against his task had quite destroyed his composure. He was in a state of quivering sensitiveness which no one could understand better than Bernard, and which could not be more despicable to any one than to Stephen himself. It seemed to Bernard that he could almost see the quiver of the nerves beneath the thin face.

"Have you heard from her?" he asked, hastily, breaking the restraint of weeks in his instant thought of her.

"No; and I'll sell my soul to anybody who has seen her and can tell me how she is." Then he recollected himself, and returned to his desk, ashamed enough of the self-betraying outbreak to remain sane for the rest of the day. Later, Bernard told him that he was going to his mother, and asked leave of absence, which Stephen granted without looking at him.

But Bernard's plans had changed in that momentary perusal of Stephen's face. He had restrained himself from questioning about Sarah, and even from writing to her. If he had not been born with the instincts of a gentleman, he would

supply their effect by power of will. There was a fierce emulation of Stephen in this thought. Since Stephen chose to reserve his confidence, he, Bernard, would reserve his curiosity. But now, with a blind grasping after knight-errantry, he determined on going to Coventry, to bring Stephen news of his wife.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### A MESSAGE.

**B**ERNARD arrived at Coventry without previous announcement, and walked from the station. Sarah was stricken white and trembling with joy at sight of him, but, as he was able bitterly to tell himself, a joy not for him.

"Have you seen him, Bernard?" she whispered, as soon as they were alone. He stoically began the recital of all that had happened. Her eyes flashed with delight when he came to his own engagement at the office. It was for her sake, she knew.

Later in the evening, when the family sat together, Bernard watched her absently while the others talked. He remembered, with a start, the old simile of the lamp burning within its fine porcelain vase. Her face had become refined to something pure and transparent, through which shone an eager soul. The ultimate stage had been reached; she had at last realized, in spite of insistent and unreasonable hope, that the step she had taken was final. The heart of many a woman possessing as great strength of will might have died down, leaving the token of its fall in a shat-

tered frame. But there was a strong joyousness inherent in this soul, which never asserted itself more actively than now. Having sacrificed to a god, every fibre of her nature insisted that the struggle must avail; to believe otherwise was to hurl blasphemy against nature's mercy. Over the sharp undertone of her pain soared this triumphant melody of prophecy. Such dramatic living might, indeed, of itself wear her out. The body might be wasted and consumed by such vibration; but it was not likely. She had been born a creature of fine flesh, fitted to endure the burning of the intense spirit.

Half unconsciously to himself, Bernard was soothed by the atmosphere of the place. He had grown of late to regard outward objects with the eyes of a dreamer. They were unsubstantial, wavering; assuming lessening proportions as his phantom took on flesh. He hardly noticed Maria, who in turn was not attracted to him. He impressed her as a poetizing mind is likely to affect one of aggressive practicality, as having no particular fitness in reference to things in general. But by Uncle Ben, with his love to all mankind, he was fathered at once.

As he sat by the fire, leaning his head upon the old-fashioned wood-work, and letting his eyes wander, he was arrested by the old man's voice.

"You two don't seem to favor each other much.

Well, well! one's father an' one's mother, I s'pose."

A dull blush stained Bernard's face. He seemed to be pursued by little imps of words, grinningly pointing at his griefs. With his belief in the supernatural, he could easily imagine that the most innocent speech had been suggested to its utterer by his own evil spirit, with an occult meaning manifest to him alone.

"Whenever I think o' the young," went on Uncle Ben, "it seems to me to be a great privilege—great—to be in their places. Folks talk about gettin' wisdom as they grow older. Now I never took it that way; 'pears to me there's a wisdom young folks bring right from their Father in heaven."

Maria was trying a blue mitten on his gnarled hand, to fix upon the length of the thumb. She stroked the hand, ostensibly to smooth its covering, but honestly, perhaps, as some admissible expression of her father-worship.

"An' they have so many privileges nowadays, that I often think how deservin' of credit they are not to cut loose from us an' our old-fashioned ways."

"I should think so!" muttered Maria. "Precious credit, indeed!"

"There seems to be somethin' in relationship that makes folks tender, even when there's nothin'

in common between 'em. An' whatever they say about unthankfulness, I'm sure I've seen more child'en honorin' their fathers an' mothers than I've seen hard-hearted."

Bernard moved uneasily upon his chair. The homely philosophy touched him like a sting. Was it indeed in nature that a tie of blood should presuppose kindness? In this, too, his denial of his own, was he against nature? He left the family circle soon after; the sweetness of its air had become oppressive.

Next day Sarah took him for a long walk over the muddy country road, bordered on either side by a narrow path of spongy sward. They wanted to be alone together, and the damp spring air seemed a freer medium for speech than that within doors. Bernard was surprised, after a longer interval of her presence, to find that Sarah's position within his horizon had changed. For so many weeks had his eyes been turned inward upon his own diseases, and towards that misty boundary beyond which seemed to lie the spiritual, that earthly things had dropped away from their former relation with him. Sarah was no longer a woman of flesh and blood whom he guiltily loved; she represented, in a somewhat abstract way, one more of the many goods which had been denied him. With his growing faith in spiritual phenomena, there seemed to have woven itself over his eyes a film

which he did not even care to pierce. He had just told her the story of his haunting demon. Sometimes it seemed to him that the ghost might be laid if he could place its existence upon another's consciousness.

"O Bernard," she cried, stopping short to look at him, "how strange and dreadful it is that we two should have walked into this snare,— this spiritualism! Other people seem to believe in it, and continue to carry on their lives. We have meddled with it, and it has poisoned us."

He looked at her curiously. "So you are bitten, too; that is your trouble!"

Sarah blushed a little. She had not meant to commit herself; but she went on bravely, because he might need her own experience, spoken from a still bleeding heart.

"I made a decision against my own conscience. My conscience seemed to go to sleep, and I believe, though I was half way on the road to the same decision, that I should have kept my clearness of sight if this jugglery had not interfered."

"Did you ask advice?"

"I went to a medium out of curiosity, not to ask anything. It seemed so low a thing, that I should have been ashamed to hint at one of my own affairs. But he told me what had the appearance of coming direct from heaven."

"You may have been advised by an evil spirit."

"Bernard, don't! It makes me sick to hear their queer clap-trap and ignorant definitions of what meddles with our sacred lives. I don't mind Uncle Ben's talking about it; his life is so beautiful and sheltered that I don't believe it can ever harm him. With you it is different. It breaks my heart to think you may believe it, and be led away and destroyed."

"Do you mean to say that, having found one flaw, you would condemn the whole system?"

"No, only that I shall never meddle with it again. If it is to be investigated and immortality proved, I leave the deed to stronger hearts and wills than mine."

"It is true, Sarah," said Bernard, doggedly, not as if he greatly cared, but as if the truth compelled him. "I have seen what amounts to scientific demonstration."

"It may be so; until my own share in it so disgusted me, I used to hope it might be so. But this is the only conclusion I have been able to reach,—and I have had a great many dull, still hours for thinking, down here. If it is a fact, such a great fact can't exist without tremendously influencing moral relations. Don't you see that it brings into play all the strongest emotions we have? Old people see their dead through it; young, imaginative people find something more bewitching than there is in all the natural world;

and it is a thing which is unfit to influence our moral lives."

Bernard looked at her in surprise. She had changed as much as he. Once — her emotions light and iridescent as bubbles, her ideas of right and wrong like inspirational flashes — she would never have formulated her opinions.

"But if it is true, why shouldn't it influence moral decisions?" he suggested.

"Because it would be next to impossible to reach its truth. Think what a chance mediums have to lie! To consult them is to place ourselves at the mercy of an ignorant, possibly a designing, set of men. And somehow, though I can't support it, I have a feeling that we are intended to live now only in this world, and under its laws."

"But spiritual intercourse may be an undiscovered law. The fact that a thing has not been demonstrated does not prove its non-existence; I heard you say that once, about this very thing."

"It is true in theory, I suppose; it may be true as applied to this particular case. I only feel that it would take the announcement of an archangel to make me a believer, — and an archangel of solid, reliable flesh and blood, too!" she added, with her old laugh.

Another theory was growing up in her mind, though as yet too much a matter of feeling to be put in words. Suppose this were indeed a truth,

she thought, and the universal uncertainty of immortality were to be quite set at rest, the battle of life would be reduced from its proportions of deadly struggle to a harassing fight enough, but one assured of victory. Would earthly warfare be then as noble? Could humanity grow to such godlike stature as that reached by great souls, when its most gigantic foes should have proved phantoms? With her, such a suggestion had weight; the greater the odds against which it coped, the more eagerly rose her soul in bright armor, crying "I will not faint!"

For Uncle Ben, Bernard's coming made an era; the young man was fresh from one of the centres of spiritualism, where signs and wonders were of daily occurrence. Then, too, he brought direct news of Leonard. He talked of it all as if it were a duty to answer, being asked, but he showed no especial interest of his own. Spiritualism involved many an hard saying, only to be entertained because they were unfortunately true. One conversation began in the barn, and as it progressed in interest, Uncle Ben brought two milking-stools to the door, outside which the spring sunlight fell over a great heap of brown manure where the hens scratched, and prated of spring. With the stirring growth of the season and the contact of these simply good lives, Bernard felt again the moving of healthier impulses within himself, the shadow



of a wish to touch with his own hands the happiness that is goodness. But he discoursed of spiritual phenomena, and, led on by the same motive which had drawn him into confiding in Sarah, went on to speak of his ghost. Uncle Ben listened, and at the end of the story sat looking down at his feet, absently chewing a straw. Finally he looked up with a bright smile that seemed to flow in little runnels all over his face, in the dry water-courses of wrinkles.

"If I was you, I believe I wouldn't have a thing more to do with circles!" he said, placing a sympathetic hand on Bernard's knee.

"You, when you believe in it!"

"Yes, I do believe in it, sure enough; but what's one man's meat's another man's p'ison. We wa'n't all created to live in one climate, else why should the equator ha' been made?"

"But they told me to seek out good spirits!"

"Yes, yes, an' so we all must; but we've got to use our common sense, even if we are spiritualists. Now there couldn't any spirits do more for you — I won't say they couldn't do so much — as new-laid eggs, an' good air, an' hearin' young folks laughin'."

Bernard had it on his tongue's end to say, "I supposed you thought of nothing else!" but he recollected himself, and forbore.

"It's a fact, I do think about this new revela-

tion night-an' day," went on the old man, as if he were capable of mind-reading; "but that don't keep me from lovin' the good world. I seem to love it more an' more, the older I grow an' the likelier to leave it." He was looking at the ever-greens beyond the orchard, his blue eyes dimmed with happy tears.

"Tell me what to do!" burst out Bernard, moved by an impulse beyond his control.

"I wish I could; but I'm as ignorant as you can think! Seems to me, if you was my boy, I should want to get your body into a good nat'ral state, an' then I should try to have you set your mind on doin' for other people." He looked away in uttering the last sentence. There seemed an indelicacy in hinting that the youth struck him as being too impregnated with fears for self alone. "Why, sometimes," he went on, quickly, "sometimes I feel such a love for the ground, the dirt under-foot, that it seems as if I must ha' been born from it. The earth is like a great, good mother to us. You see, if you had a mother I should tell you to go to her, an' find out if she couldn't make you well; as long as you ain't, what is there better than goin' into the country? No matter how homely the earth is, she'll do you good, just as your mother could help you as nobody else could, even if she was homely an' old."

"Go back to my mother!" said Bernard, musingly; "I wish I could!"

"I wish you could," said Uncle Ben, rising to finish his work. "An' if she was old an' there was things to do for her, you'd seem to stan' on your feet right away. There's nothin' like havin' to do for the folks the Lord's given you."

There began in the younger man's heart that day the least possible vibration of the string that forms the tie of blood. Slight though it might be, it was indeed a recognition of the sacred duty arising from birth and nourishment.

"I am going back to-morrow, Sarah," he announced, when they were next alone together. "What message is there for him?"

The girl stood with hands tightly clasped before her. "Tell him —" she began, and then stopped. "I will not send a message, except that I am well."

Next morning, however, when he was bidding her good-by, she gave him a note.

"I changed my mind," she said. "I could have given it to you by word of mouth, but I think he will like it so."

That night Bernard sought out Stephen as he was leaving the office, and gave him the note, saying only, "I have been down to see her for you."

The flash of the other man's eyes was ready on the instant; then he said, searchingly, "Why, did you say?"

"I saw you were in misery because you wanted to know, and so I went to find out." The statement was full of a studied carelessness.

Stephen's hand had closed upon the note, which shook in his grasp. He could not now waste time in gratitude, nor even in loving queries; he must first read that by himself. He hurried away, and at home read with blinded eyes:

"I begin to see why Christ died, for I would die for you to save you this pain, or any sin. I shall live, and so must you."

The words were like wine. He lived on them for hours, and then went to Bernard, saying abruptly, as he entered, "Tell me all there is to tell."

Bernard did so obediently, though rather drearily. He described the people and the place, not knowing Stephen had seen them; he repeated her words, carefully omitting those which touched upon spiritualism. Instinctively he felt that this one topic must be avoided, as being too closely connected with what he had no right to know. When he had finished, Stephen rose like a man in a happy dream. "Good-night," he said, offering his hand. That was the only sign that he knew how honestly the other man had served him; but even Bernard was sure he did know.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### BEYOND RECALL.

**T**HERE came a day when sorrow and confusion swept down upon the peaceful house at Coventry. Maria had what she called one of her "turns," and in the midst of it her life went out like a candle.

"He does take it hard, don't he," whispered Aunt Lomie to Sarah, eying Uncle Ben with some awe. "I always had it in mind he'd be calm," with an audible "l," which added to the force of the word. "He seemed so somehow lifted up by believin' on unnat'ral things. But he's human, after all."

Ah, he was indeed human, lost in speculation on the workings of a law beyond his grasp. Loneliness seized upon him, that of the young child without the mother, of the husband without the wife. There had been greater than a filial bond between them; the relation had been a deep and clinging friendship.

"My faith don't fail me, not a mite," he said, with a pitiful smile. "I know she's passed over into the spirit life, but she ain't here!"

Aunt Lomie, most conscientious of women, es-

sayed comfort by the aid of the faith she despised. "Benjamin, time an' again you've said they're all round us, — dead folks, you know. Accordin' to that, Maria ain't gone away."

"No," said the old man, a glow sweeping over his face. "No, she ain't gone, an' I thank my God for His mercy in not lettin' us die down into the dust forever! But somehow I ain't able to feel calm, Lomie, not yet. Maybe the evil spirits have got dominion over me."

Leonard was summoned, and Riker gave an immediate consent to his going. There was now no reason for keeping the boy away.

When the funeral was over, the near future arranged itself, with Aunt Lomie's help. She proposed that Uncle Ben should make one of her household. Sarah saw him shrink, before she took up the word and answered for him.

"If you will let me stay! There is very little work that I cannot do."

Uncle Ben made no civil demur; he wanted her, and believed in her sincerity. "I seem to be greatly favored," was all he said; and Sarah became his housekeeper. Personal intercourse with Leonard was what she would have dreaded, had she been warned of it; coming unexpectedly as it did, she was surprised at bearing it so well, and hating him so little. To her shame at having been influenced by him, had been added a disgust

at remembering that he must have been of common fibre. As one is apt to do after a distance of time, she had allowed her inclination to wash out the tints of memory, before fancy painted thereon a new image. The Leonard she remembered was a coarse creature, the contact of whose mind had soiled hers; the Leonard she saw with her bodily eyes awoke, against her will, the mysterious confidence she had previously felt in him. It was not to be explained, this effect he still produced on minds as far above his own as he above the oyster that contributed to his dinner. In spite of his growing faults of character, men felt in him an intrinsic sincerity and simple reverence for high things. In those days of his stay in Coventry, Sarah repeatedly saw him at the little kitchen mirror anxiously disposing his hair, spreading his blue tie in more luxurious abandon, and pulling his extensive watch-chain a trifle this way or that, but, strange to say, she never despised him. She told herself over and over again that he must be classed either as a clever deceiver, or the instrument of some mysterious law. There was quite as much reason for placing him in the first category as in the second, and yet she believed in his simple tenderness to Uncle Ben, his unrestrained sorrow over his dead friend, and his bashful reverence for herself.

On the night after the funeral, the three sat

alone in the dusk. Aunt Lomie had lingered to put things in order after the great funeral supper, and the boys had done the "chores," with some undefined feeling that Uncle Ben had been physically incapacitated by his trouble. But now even these had gone, and left the inner circle alone to adapt itself to its woful break.

"I've been wishin' for this all day," began Uncle Ben, with the smile which had lost its brightness for a sad patience. "Lenny, I guess we'll have a little circle."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't; not to-night!"

But the old man was busy in drawing two chairs nearer the sofa where Sarah was sitting. Leonard unwillingly took one as Uncle Ben did the other.

"You don't need a table, do you? We used to be so careful to draw round a table, but that was in early days. You don't mind our talkin' while the influences gather? We might sing, but I guess we don't any of us feel as if we'd got much voice to-night."

"No, talk," answered Leonard. He felt a little sick at the prospect. He was tired of exercising his trade, and would gladly have rested from it; more than that, he was conscious of a creeping dread in the thought of summoning Aunt Maria from the unknown land. The dead we have never seen, the dead who have lain years in their graves,



may be safely dealt with; the dead one has just looked upon in the majesty of sleep, bear an awful distinctness of personality. Sarah added a dissuading voice. In her pity for Uncle Ben, she could not refuse sharing the experience, if he should insist. Her own righteous anger against the whole system gave way to the necessity of nursing him through his trouble.

"The quickest time's the best time," Uncle Ben said. He had lowered his voice, that it might not disturb the crystallizing of influences. The tone and the twilight made the moment impressive. "How often we hear about their waitin' round for a chance to communicate, an' not gettin' it for years an' years! Now how hard that seems, an' how careful we ought to be to open the way to 'em!"

Leonard was growing more and more sick with dread. He had an insane impulse to rush from the room, never to come back. Vain as he was, wholly as he believed Riker's assertion that he was one of the great men of the age, he was writhing under the consciousness that too much was expected of him. Had it not been that the day had inspired him with awe, and a loving tenderness for Uncle Ben, he might have begged off, with the peevishness of a child. As it was, he only dared sit in silent misery, waiting for things to take their course.

"Anything yet, Lenny?"

"No, nothing."

"We mustn't be downhearted," went on Uncle Ben, some of his old brightness of demeanor returning with the impatience he could not curb. "I had a feelin' Maria would be right back, but perhaps she ain't got her bearin's yet. Sometimes they don't get into a sphere where they can communicate for a good while, but I thought Maria would be round with the rest, right away. She's so chirk, she'll never lay by if she can help it."

Sarah felt the choking of a great pity, a wish to save him from such magic. Deception would make him happy; but though she wanted him happy, she could not have him deceived. She almost smiled at her own childishness when she caught herself repeating under her breath, "Oh, let it be true! Let it be true, just for him!"

"It's no use, pa," said Leonard, after half an hour's silence, when he had suffered an agony of suspense too great to be borne longer. "It's no use. Give it up!"

"Do you think so?" with great wistfulness. "Perhaps you're too anxious yourself; perhaps, bein' so fond of her, you can't give yourself up to control. You just try a minute more, an' pretend not to care, if you can. — Hear me tellin' a great medium how to do!" he added, apologetically, with a nervous laugh.

Leonard wretchedly set himself to his task. He tried to clear his mind of thought and fear, and did succeed in so blurring them that they remained only as vague and general pain. No, the shadows in the room were the honest shadows of this world, enfolding no pale shapes from another. He heard the ticking of the clock, but no spirit whispered. Even the wraith that had haunted him from childhood, figment of his brain or visitant from another world, even she was not present. The reality of things, the solidity, embodied by the heavy old furniture, oppressed him as they had never done in all his life. Much as his very marrow shrank at thought of her, he would have given all his small fame for the power of conjuring up the spirit the old man awaited.

"It's no use, I tell you!" he broke out at last, with a cry. "I can't do it, pa; I can't!"

"Well, well, never mind! don't you feel bad. It'll come; she ain't got her bearin's yet. She'll be round before we know it."

Sarah brought the lights, and made a great stir of excitement over Trot, who was discovered to have carried her four kittens in from the barn and surreptitiously put them to bed in Uncle Ben's room. What with Trot's underhand ways and the charms of her Maltese family, the evening passed not too dismally, and there came the blessed time for sleep.

Next morning Uncle Ben said at table, "You won't go back yet, Lenny, now will you? An' every night we'll have a sittin'. We've got to be faithful, or how can we expect them that are in the spirit life to keep us in mind, an' wait for their chance to come?"

Leonard murmured something unintelligible; but receiving a letter from Riker that forenoon, he announced that he must return on the evening train. It was true that Riker had, on the contrary, given him permission to remain some days, the real reason, which it is needless to say he did not state, being a new attempt at some daring departures in the way of materialization. His pupil, not being as yet his accomplice, would only be in the way. Leonard, however, stoutly declared that he must be gone. He felt unable to bear another word of importunity.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FOUR THREADS.

THE tableau that confronted Stephen Mann as he entered Miss Phebe's parlor one evening, did not astonish him. Used to Linora's dramatic climaxes, he was passively expectant of them. She was kneeling by a large chair, in which Miss Phebe had evidently been sitting. That lady was now seated on a sofa at the farthest possible point from Linora, bolt-upright, her hands on her knees, her face wearing an indescribable confusion of expressions. Stephen hesitated on the threshold.

"I came to make you a call, Miss Phebe," and Miss Phebe starkly motioned him to a seat. Linora rose from her posture of humility with great self-possession.

"I wish you had come earlier, Mr. Mann," she said, sweetly. "Miss Phebe has received a great shock."

Miss Phebe's eyes began to glow with wrath. "I have; a great shock. I don't know as I shall ever believe in anybody again."

"Oh, yes," Linora said; "believe in me!"

Something of the grim humor of the situation seemed to strike Miss Phebe also. She smiled

slightly, and Linora, seeing the opportunity, made haste to put in a wedge.

"Miss Phebe's kindness has made me so ashamed," she continued, her delicate nostrils dilating, her fine eyes growing suffused, "that I felt obliged to confess to her that I am, to speak mildly, a little humbug." At the close of her sentence, catching Stephen's glance, she could not restrain a smile of genuine mirth, and Stephen found himself answering it. Her effrontery continued infinitely to amuse him.

"I hope Miss Phebe makes some allowance for the temptations of a dramatic temperament," he remarked.

"I don't know what I make allowance for; I don't know whom I believe. Yes, I do; I believe in your wife. How is she? where is she?"

"Well, and away with some quiet people in the country."

"So she has been for weeks," said Linora, complainingly. "Is she never coming home?"

Stephen was saved from the necessity of answering by Miss Phebe. She had evidently thought for no one but Linora; she could not take her eyes from her. "And you've had your own way and been comfortable all this winter! and I've been awake night after night, almost saying my prayers for you! Mr. Mann, you'll have to excuse me. Come another day. I must go up stairs and settle

my head." She left the room precipitately, shaking the head in question as she went. Left alone, Stephen and Linora smiled again, though his look contained a real and grave reproof.

"Linora, why don't you take less honest people to humbug, if you must do it?"

"I wouldn't have done it for the world, if I'd thought. But honestly, now, I didn't realize that such good people existed. Uncle Will is respectable enough, but he has a spice of the unmentionable one which makes him kin to me, and I never have much compunction about deceiving him."

"Why confess?"

Linora made her eyes very large and her mouth very small. "There was a reason," she whispered, solemnly. "My uncle, I am convinced, is about to marry a wife. That wife will be — Miss Phebe!"

"Impossible!"

"I saw his intentions; I saw that she tried to smother her preference, because she had preconceived ideas about him, gathered from my airy fabrics of fancy. If I had been his rival, I should have gloated over my hold on her. Being his niece, I preferred placing myself in an unfavorable light, that his suit might prosper."

"You're a very generous creature," said Stephen, dryly.

"Not altogether so," returned Linora, with great impartiality. "I had reasons of a prudential na-

ture. I realized that love would win. Love usually does win, you know. And in the confidence existing between husband and wife, Uncle Will would be sure to give her my mental photograph. I preferred giving it myself. And then I enjoyed the surprise. Mr. Mann, do you think your wife hates me?"

"I don't think she does in the least," returned Stephen, restraining his hand from its quick movement towards his throat. He wished at least for freedom from the constriction that answered there the mention of her name.

"Do you think she will see me when she comes back?"

"Certainly; she would have done so before she went away, but she decided suddenly. Do you ever meet Bernard now?"

"Never; and he has moved, you know."

Stephen did not know it, and, wondering if the reason might lie altogether in avoidance of Linora, it occurred to him that, so far as his knowledge of Bernard's whereabouts was concerned, the man might be buried every night, to be resurrected at the office hour. He could not forget the service Bernard had done him; that had built up in his mind an enduring gratitude. He was conscious that he could never like him, and the thought clung to him like an irritating reminder that, for Sarah's sake, he must not lose sight of him. As



some concession to a requirement that was distasteful, next night he walked away from the office with him. The haunted man had wofully changed since his return from Coventry. He had seen in Uncle Ben's words the green fields and brilliant skies of a new land of hope; the possibility of not sinking in these dark waters, but of reaching the shore. Such a first trembling of hope, instead of quieting the fever of his blood, shook him painfully. He had been sinking in despair; having resigned his will to the machinations of evil, he had little more to suffer with the old acuteness. Visions might press upon his eyelids, but the dull eyes beneath would only feel an accustomed weight. If, however, he must force his way through these forms of horror to a possible goal, his eyes must be fully opened upon the phantoms, the brain must be roused to comprehend them. Thus a new warfare had begun within him.

"Your work wears on you," said Stephen. "Or is it the hot weather?"

"It is the impossibility of living. Mann, the whole universe sickens me!"

"I should like to see you in some practical trouble. Forge a note, or go out West and get scalped. Then you might not devote so much time to the pleasures of the imagination."

Bernard scarcely heard him. "To think of all things as noisome, as containing a horror!" he

mused. "To be compelled to that, and yet not dare to die, for fear the one spark of hope you had might have been justified."

Stephen thought of his own desolate home, of the common pleasures which would be sufficient to fill him with a heart-breaking joy. "What do you chiefly complain of?" he asked.

"Of having no part in what is clean, and healthy, and fair; of a ridiculous body and a filthy mind; of being haunted by a ghost that I see plainly, — plainer than I see anything real, nowadays."

"Ellis," said Stephen, with a sudden thought, "how should you like to go West and raise stock?"

"The air is cleaner there; it has not been polluted by the breath of men."

"I have a stock-farm out there, and I used to think of going myself. It is leased to John O'Brien, and his lease expires in November. If you like, you shall take it and manage it for me. O'Brien would probably stay some months to get you started."

"Do you mean that I could work, and earn money honestly?"

"I mean just that. For heaven's sake, don't keep on accusing me of being a charity bureau."

"I'll go; that is, unless I am wanted at home. I must find my mother first, and see if she needs me. If she does, I shall settle among my own people, — working men and women."

"And what to do there?"

"Learn a trade, it may be."

"Stuff!" said Stephen. Mr. Gale had overtaken them, and Bernard, not stopping to exchange a word with him, disappeared round a near corner.

"Peculiar, your friend?" asked Gale, with a whimsical lifting of his brows.

"Peculiar."

"I seem to remember him. Wasn't he present at the dramatic disclosures at your house?"

"Yes."

"The social world, that small orb we all have to deal with, seems to me more and more worthy of study. I discover queer breaks in its spectrum every day, indicating, no doubt, new elements. I begin to regret writing a history of races. It would have been of more interest to make a social study."

"A novel?"

"No, a disquisition, an analytic comparison of strange elements in character. Mann, I am under the impression, though it has nothing to do with the present subject, that I am to be married."

"I congratulate you. Nobody deserves happiness more."

"Many, my dear fellow, many do; but I consider myself very fortunate. I feel, too, that the preliminary stage has had a good effect on me. Do you see no change in my manner?"

"A great change; I was about to remark it. It strikes me that you have brightened, lost your indifference."

"Yes, I think I have; I feel freshened, invigorated. The lady — I forgot to tell you it is Miss Phebe — has all the effect of old wine on me. No, I withdraw the comparison, — of good, stout old cider."

Stephen wondered how much in earnest he might be. Judging from his word and air, he was entirely so.

"I see in her," continued Gale, "a vista of healthy, happy things. Still keeping up the simile of cider, I see great plump-cheeked apples, and a carnival of harvest time; I see pink blossoms, and a pageant of spring."


Much as he admired Miss Phebe, Stephen could not help wondering that she should prove such an efficient guide into regions of poetry.

"I am sure she will be good for you," he said. "She is hearty and wholesome. I always feel that seeing her is like breathing good air."

"I confess I have lingered here entirely on her account," said Gale, evidently much interested in his own state of feeling. "I haven't thought of womankind since I was in my early twenties. I felt in her from the very first a sort of repression; I was sure she had a thousand springs of concealed romance in her nature. I think she has."

He seemed to have become ten years younger. Stephen devoted his thoughts, for the rest of his walk, to the rejuvenating power of love. How long could he follow the course of fancy in regard to the romance between any man and woman, without touching on his own tragedy? Love had changed Gale as completely as if some veil had been drawn away from his earthly garments, disclosing the gorgeous apparel of a shining young bridegroom.

What deed had Love wrought in his own life? She had led him into a fair country, by gently flowing streams, where he might bathe from his limbs the dust of travel and pollution. And in a moment the heavens had frowned, the flood had pursued him; Love had left him in a barren land of sand and darkness. A great wave of pity for himself surged over him as he entered his house that night. He half expected to find a letter from her. Though she had said she would not write, the world seemed to have come to a stand-still, and miracles might follow. No letter was there. Trying to smile at himself for his weakness, he went from room to room looking for a token. He opened her closets, and pressed her dresses to his lips with a despairing prayer for some breath of hers left in their folds. In vain; the house was desolate. He tried to reason himself into a sanity of endurance, by remembering that she was



still alive, that not many miles divided them, and, if his heart and will failed utterly, he might creep there to her feet. No help in that! If he broke his pledge of abiding by her decision, he was no more worthy even to lie there.

Sometimes, closing the house seemed the only possible thing to do. Living there held in it but an agony of comfort. Her presence still lingered there as it could nowhere else, but as nowhere else her absence stung him. And it might be — a pitiful sob rose in his throat at that — it might be she would return, and then her hearth must be found lighted.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### BERNARD GOES HOME.

ONE day it happened that Linora and Stephen met on their way across the Common, and that she made his path her own, saying frankly that, as he walked presumably for business and she for pleasure, it was only fair that she should make the concession.

"Needs must," she said, skipping over a puddle with great dexterity, "since a certain estimable person has become my coachman. If I want company, I have to swallow my pride and go out of my path to get it. By the way, that worthy brother-in-law of yours avoids me as the plague. Where is he?"

"At this moment? In my office. To-morrow he goes down to Freeport, to visit his mother."

"Really?" Linora stopped an instant, and then went on, with a somewhat soberer face. "Still sentimental over certain ideas?"

Stephen shrugged his shoulders, with a look which might mean anything. Incapable of sympathy with Bernard's diseased views as he pronounced himself, he still felt the demands of a certain loyalty concerning them.

"Do you know, I think I must see him before he goes," she continued. "But then I can't; he won't come, if I ask him. Why do all you people regard me as a leper because you think I tell lies? And after all, it's only your thinking so that makes the mischief. I don't half believe I do!"

"And I don't believe you believe so. I'll wager much, your conscience is white as any lamb. As to Bernard, besiege the castle if you like. You can see him alone in the office. I hope I'm not offending any special propriety by suggesting it."

"I hope not! Yes, I do like. I'll go with you now, if you let me."

Stephen opened the door, and left her to make an entrance. Bernard sat with his head very low over his desk, not meditating on the morrow's step, but studiously writing up the correspondence, that he might leave his work square at the ends. Linora closed the door, put the point of her parasol on the floor, and, resting both hands on it, said dramatically, "Well!"

Bernard looked up with the start she mischievously expected, his face instantly taking its brick-red suffusion.

"Promise not to basely run away, if I leave the door?" she asked with her air of good-comradeship. Where was the pale, Madonna-like creature? Not certainly this little thing, in a gay spring costume, with a striped umbrella. Bernard was



nervously rolling his pen between his thumb and finger. Now he rose and drew forward a chair, hesitating beside his own seat while she took the other.

"Sit down, please," said Linora, graciously transforming the office into her own reception room. "I've come for a serious talk with you. I hear you are going away to-morrow."

"Yes," said Bernard, with difficulty. Noting the huskiness of his voice, he vigorously cleared his throat, and sat down with resolute hardihood.

"Now you know I know all your fancies and all your whims," Linora continued, with a cheerfulness of wholesale accusation which promised to leave him no loop-hole of escape. "But I wish you'd tell me further why you should go down there to make the acquaintance of your mother after twenty years or so."

"To find out whether I belong there; to learn whether I can work out something, in the class where I belong, from which my diseases spring."

"You think so, but it is nothing of the sort." The assault was so vigorous that he looked up at her in surprise. "You are going down to patronize them!"

After this extraordinary statement, she looked at him in silent enjoyment of its effect. Bernard only repeated her words.

"Yes," she went on. "I've been meaning to tell

you, ever since last winter, what an abominable way you have of throwing your sins on other people's shoulders. You used to tell me you were a monster; I daresay you are, but for heaven's sake don't cast all the credit of your monstrosity on your ancestors. I suppose your nose and eyes you were born with, but do give yourself the credit of committing your own sins." Linora was enjoying herself, confident that she was producing an effect. It is true that she had an honest purpose in mind, but she could no more help seeing it through the medium of its action on another mind than she could help breathing. "You think you are making a great sacrifice in going down there to present yourself to your relatives. I don't; no right-minded person would. The obligation is on the other side. They've done without you all these years, and no doubt they are enjoying themselves very well. If they take you in and put up with your whims, I'm sure it's very kind of them, and the nobility is their own. I'm going now; don't look dazed. I only came in to tell you not to patronize them."

When she reached the street and put up the gorgeous umbrella, Linora also offered a slight smile to the sunlit day.

"I flatter myself that was well done," she remarked to her inner hearer. "A very good part, and exceedingly like Miss Phebe. Indeed, I

think I not only said what Miss Phebe would have said, but *as* she would have delivered it."

Do not think too hardly of Linora if she could not separate her enjoyment of the shows of life from the serious matters of life itself. How could she, when the importance of her own amusement had grown to be of primary value? Possibly, if she could have seen the true, she might have chosen its severe beauty; but alas! there is no pit of distinct demarcation between it and the false. The soul does not often say, "I will tell a lie;" merely, at most, "How pleasant if things could look so!" or "How necessary!" — and presently the eye sees it, and the tongue declares it thus. There is apparently nothing so fraught with unconsciousness as lying.

Meantime, Bernard was left to feel the uncomfortable pricking of the little germ she had dropped. Whether it might be a germ of truth or not, it certainly contained an atom of justice which had not before occurred to him. Even after he had sufficiently recalled himself to go on with his work, his mind continued its brooding, its attempt at reducing his new purpose to some distinct formula. "I have chosen to go because my place is there; because I am unfit for the class of people into which I have found my way," he answered himself, with the aid of his previous theories. All vague, much too vague to bear utterance.

He had greatly changed in the past weeks, ever since that green spring morning with Uncle Ben. His will was as weak, his fancies diseased as before, but the alert imagination, having caught at that vision of hope suggested by the old man, had reanimated him for a struggle. Vague as the intention sounds, he was in reality going down to give himself to his people, to become one of them. After Linora suggested it, the truth remained with him that, after all, he had nothing to offer worth the taking. Worn in body, incapable even of using his eyes without deception, stained in thought, he was the wreck of the perfect man. On their part, she had said, would be the nobility in receiving him. Be it there : he would go to be healed, to be made capable of becoming something to them yet.

It was in a very humble frame of mind that he set out on his journey next day. The earth was bright with sunlight, the air sweet with the new growth of leaf and bud. Worn by thought, by work, and the spectre of his brain, he saw all darkly, felt only the lump in his throat which makes a horrible spiritual nausea, and was conscious that he was being whirled through a beautiful land, the forms of which were strangely undefined. It was six o'clock when he reached Freeport, a village resting between hills. The

very air was green from the million-leaved trees, green with new sunlight filtered through it; even in his feverish haste to have his errand done and reach his journey's end, Bernard stopped to draw a long breath of the sweet peace of the place. Then he recalled himself, and went to ask the baggage-master, "Can you tell me where John Mason lives, — a carpenter?"

"Down Summer Lane," began the man; but glancing across the track he amended his sentence. "There's Mason's girl; she'll show you the way. — Mary!"

Mary turned at once, and waited for further speech. Bernard took his bag, and crossed the track towards her. She represented the next point in his journey; let her be reached quickly. The girl, of fifteen perhaps, waited with a certain self-possession which might have passed for stolidity till you had seen her face, square of chin, with cheeks of splendid health. Her brown eyes had a straightforward gaze, and they, with the two thick, hanging braids of hair, made up her only beauty.

"Do you want to go to father's?" she asked, quietly, as Bernard reached her. His breath came a little faster. This was a slight check; "father" was a personality he would rather not consider at all.

"Yes, if you will show me the way."

"I could tell father, if it was an errand," she suggested, as they turned to walk on.

"No, I must see — them," said Bernard, it striking him with a shock that this fresh young creature must be his sister.

"You see, so many people want work done, and often they're glad to leave messages with mother and me; it saves time, instead of hunting father up. I shouldn't wonder if we overtook him, if we're sly. He's on Simpson's barn now. There he is! — Father!"

The clear young voice brought to a stand-still the workman just in front of them, as they turned the corner into the country road. Bernard could only see, through the blackness before his eyes, that he was tall and "workmanlike made," as he afterwards heard John Mason say of his own houses, and that he carried a tin dinner-pail. He saluted Bernard with Mary's own straightforward glance.

"Good-evening, sir." Then he waited. Bernard turned sick and faint. It seemed enough that he had come; why need he explain his way at every step?

"My name is Bernard Ellis," he said, not because that offered any solution in his own mind, but because it seemed the most natural thing to say. But it evidently did offer a solution to Mason. He turned a keen, half embarrassed look

upon him. At last he said, with bluntness, — Mary eying them both as they went on, and wondering why they were so silent, — “I’m glad to see you, and my woman’ll be. I’ll say now — it’s been brewin’ in me ever since I had a child of my own — I didn’t see into family feelin’s as I do now, or I never should have asked her to give you up. Maybe ’twas better for you, but folks want their own. I don’t believe your mother’s ever give up but what you’d come back.”

Presently, as Bernard made no answer, Mason began to watch him with as much curiosity as lay in Mary’s brown eyes. Bernard wavered in his walk, and was evidently half unconscious of what the other said. Mason wondered if he could have been drinking, and was hoping, with the righteous horror of slovenly living which seemed to go with his love of fine workmanship, that Bernard had no such bad habit, when they turned into the lane leading to a very nicety of a house. A comely woman, apple-cheeked, and fair of hair, was blood-thirstily killing currant-worms on the bushes lining the fence.

“Home together, then !” said a voice, as she rose — a voice with a suspicion of the Irish brogue, and full of Irish richness. Mason took a quick step in advance, while Bernard unconsciously faltered, trying to make out her face.

“Mother, it’s him !” said her husband, not with-

out some misgiving as to her manner of taking the news. She never had had hysterics as yet, but who can say when that latent tendency may not develop?

Mrs. Mason was staring hard into her son's face. "Saints help us!" she cried. Then, her woman's wit reading there symptoms invisible to her husband, she added, "Give him your shoulder, John." (She did say Jahn, though she had indeed little brogue. But that little was delicious.) "Give him a shoulder. Don't you see he's ready to drop? — Poor little man! poor sonny!" taking up her cooing just where she had dropped it.

So they took him into the house, Mary running in advance to open a bedroom door, and three more awe-struck children peering round a corner of the piazza; and Bernard went quietly off into brain-fever.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE ORACLE SILENT.

**R**IKER was still not altogether satisfied with his present manner of life. The certainty that he was not making use of all possible appliances for success in his profession, continued to grow upon him. More than that, he recognized the fact that one side of his nature absolutely refused to take an interest in his present severe and methodical efforts. From a boy he had received applause as a reward for the development and expression of the purely sentimental. He had made his bread thus, and a solid loaf it had always been. His beard, his smile, the whiteness of his hands, had also won him almost as many disciples as had his flowery eloquence and ornate pathos. This traffic in sentiments was attended by cash profits, a fact he never overlooked. Having, however, seen those of his own trade, more expert in deception, exhibiting a certain admirable mastery over mechanical means, he had striven to emulate them, with tolerable success but with growing distaste. There was too much hard work involved, and work of an unintermitting nature. He was obliged to be more eternally vigilant, having entered upon materiali-

zation, and that scarcely suited him. It was more in accordance with his likings to give a lecture here and there, to be entertained in this and that town, than to grub along from day to day in his own office.

It is not strange that adulation should have become a great part of his breath of life, for he had been used to it from childhood. His earliest recollections were of seeing all his small world set aside for himself. His widowed mother treasured him as her one jewel, as a nature of inconceivably finer fibre than herself. She wondered, in simple humility, how she could have given birth to such a prodigy. She could only read her Bible laboriously; he was studying wonderful sciences, whose names she revered too deeply to pronounce. Therefore she considered it bare justice that he should be shielded from the cold, from anxiety, and from the hard labor that her poverty necessitated.

Edward honestly agreed with her. He had clearer faculties, finer tastes than she; it was his duty to cultivate them. And so, without much hardness of heart, but only in intense appreciation of himself, he allowed her to scrub, and wash and iron, for meagre pay, until she sank quietly into her grave, humbly thankful to have been of use to him. And chancing always to fall among people of no high intellectual level, he had been

praised for his cleverness and admired for his condescension ever since. The transition from tacit deception, the mere cajoling of the weak points of his audiences to actual deception of their eyes and ears, was not a great one. It gave him no shock; in fact, he scarcely observed it at all as a moral phenomenon. It was quite in the way of business. Edward Riker must be fed and clothed, and he must also boast a train of adoring disciples. Deception and this necessary consummation stood for cause and effect. The effect proved absolutely necessary; therefore the cause must be evoked. For all that, he had at times serious ideas of going back to his lecturing, and cast about in his mind for other hands in which to leave materialization, thus supporting two geese of the golden-egg variety. About this time, the company who were accustomed to assemble in his parlors were astounded by the report that Mrs. Riker had suddenly shown astonishing mediumistic powers. She, it seemed, could evoke spirits with even more facility than that possessed by her husband. A trial of her skill was promised for a certain Wednesday night, and at the hour appointed the rooms were filled. Riker and Leonard were engaged in setting up the cabinet, while the last guests arrived, the former full of gushing volubility.

"So many years as I have waited for this!" he exclaimed to those who stood near him. "It has

always been the desire of my heart that Julia should become a medium. I have had intimations of it, though, so that my faith doesn't deserve too much credit. I have been sustained from time to time."

Leonard, too, was radiant, but with an honest joy. He was fond of the timid little woman who had become so favored. He felt, with a slight self-reproach at judgment of his master, that Riker might like her better now. Mrs. Riker entered several minutes only before the hour appointed for the ceremony. She was deadly pale, and evidently beside herself with some emotion which might be terror, but which Riker explained as the effect of having fallen at once "under control." She did not notice the men and women about her, but whispered to her husband, "Let me begin now."

Riker nodded knowingly at the circle with a triumphant, "You see!" led her at once into the cabinet, and drew the curtains. Falling himself "under control," he designated the seat each particular member of the circle should occupy. Coming suddenly out from his trance-like state, he stationed Leonard at the farther end of the room in charge of the light, and then, having lowered the gas, fell again into an abnormal condition. Several spirits asked permission to come through him while the "squaw-mejum," as Mixy-Maxy

called her, should attain the requisite state of mind and body. Mixy, in the name of the squaw-mejum, apologized for the possible imperfection of the manifestations, and begged the audience to remain sitting, in no case attempting to touch the spirits. That might be permitted at some future time, when the medium should be more fully developed. Now, owing to her inexperience, she would need to work under favorable conditions. As there came a pause in Riker's harangue, a slight stir was heard from within the cabinet. He instantly ceased speaking, and the eyes of the spectators riveted themselves upon the mysterious closet. The curtain was emphatically thrown aside, and a white figure appeared in the doorway. It stood motionless for several seconds, and then, throwing up the hands with a nervous motion, disappeared. A murmur of interest rose, but Riker cut it short.

"Sing!" he called, hurriedly, "all sing!" Thereupon a hushed chorus arose. As the voices died away at the end of a stanza, the curtain was again removed, and a second form appeared, distinctly an Indian, in blanket and feathers.

"Mixy herself," said Riker. "Come, Mixy, can't you speak? Are you glad to see us to-night?"

"No," came a hoarse whisper.

"What! what! In a naughty frame of mind, I'm afraid, Mixy. Not glad to see your good

friends? Well, tell us something, any way. Are you happy?"

"Happy! O my God!" came in the same suppressed tone, and the figure flitted back into the cabinet.

"I think," began Riker, in easy explanation, "I am pretty sure that wasn't Mixy, but her sister. And I'm sorry to say that I happen to know her sister is a bad spirit. I hope we sha'n't have any more bad spirits here to-night. If we do, we shall have to punish them in some way." With the last sentence, he raised his voice warningly. After this the manifestations came fast and furious. Hands were waved from the cabinet windows; spectral faces were visible there, and there was heard the continual rustling of garments. Frequenters of this and similar places confessed that never before had anything so satisfactory taken place. Before the usual time had quite expired, Riker interrupted proceedings to say that he perceived the medium to be losing strength, and must defer further appearances to another evening. There was a murmur of disapproval, but he was firm, and ordering the lights to be turned up, went inside the cabinet to assist the medium in regaining her composure. After a few moments, during which the company remained seated, he emerged with her, no longer pale, but flushed and shaking, and led her quickly up stairs.

And while Leonard was delightedly receiving the wondering comments of the dispersing crowd, Riker remained with his wife, stifling her shrieks with a towel, and endeavoring to shake her out of hysterics.

Next morning Leonard came to Riker in great agitation, holding an open letter.

"He's coming here!" he began.

"Who?"

"Uncle Ben. I must go away. I can't see him."

"Can't see him?" repeated Riker, turning upon him. "Why?"

"He will ask me about her — Aunt Maria — if I've seen her. And I haven't, and I can't. How can I tell him so again?"

"I think," said Riker, fixing his eyes upon him with the old concentration of look, "I think you can see her, if you try. Have you tried?"

"Till I couldn't breathe," returned Len, in a whisper. "And I'm afraid to do it, too; she'd kill me! But he wants it so, and I must do it!"

"Yes, you are right; you must do it. Can't you see now just how she looked?"

"Oh, yes; but —"

"Brown calico dress, plaid necktie, hair braided and crimped, garnet ring on left hand," said Riker, sending his mind back some years. It was an

unerring messenger ; accuracy in details made part of his business.

"Of course I see that !"

"Then you can hear her voice, too? You can think what she would be likely to say to her father?"

"But I can't really see her ! I can't really hear her !" cried the boy, in desperation.

Riker made one more effort. "Think what you owe him," he said, solemnly. "Think how he depends on you. There's nothing in the world he wouldn't do for you, and yet you refuse him this little favor ! Len, I didn't think it of you !"

He went out and closed the door. That act stood for precaution as well as policy. He felt it necessary to utter in solitude the imprecations brought to his lips by the boy's folly.

Uncle Ben's note did not long precede him. Len, distressed and tearful in his own room, heard his step and stick coming up the stairs. The sound sickened him ; his only thought was one of escape. Uncle Ben did not stay to knock.

"Any news, boy?" he began, as soon as his foot was fairly over the threshold. "No? well, we must be patient. You ain't had a hint nor a sign?"

"No, sir," answered Len, chokingly.

"Oh, well, don't feel bad. She's busy, I s'pose,



but I can't think, bein' one o' the active ones, what keeps her away so long. Perhaps, bein' active, they want her there to go on missions."

"Perhaps," answered Leonard, scarcely knowing what he said.

"Now I've come up here with a plan for you an' me to carry out. It's for us two to have a sittin' together every day for a week, an' see if we can't make out suthin'."

"Oh, I can't, I can't!"

"I know 'twouldn't be right to give up your other business, as long as you're sorter in partnership. That's what you think. But I've thought that all over, an' this is how we'll do it. I'll pay you as much as you commonly make in that time, an' it'll be all right. Now don't you say 'No,' Lenny. It's no more'n right to do that."

Leonard, indeed, said nothing, after his first gasp of involuntary protest. He seemed to be caught in too complicated a snare to admit even of struggling. Just at the moment, Riker, who had the faculty of appearing at critical times, opened the door, to hurry forward and greet Uncle Ben with ostentatious cordiality. "You, my dear sir? How glad I am to see you! And what message has our Len for you?"

"Nothin' yet, but there's no hurry," said Uncle Ben, laying his hand on Len's shoulder, with vague appreciation of his distress. "I ain't so old yet

but what I can wait, an' Lenny mustn't take it hard on my account."

"If you will allow me to offer," said Riker, "I venture to say I could get a message from your daughter."

Uncle Ben hesitated. Then the smile which must have disarmed resentment, even in a man less conciliatory than Riker, rippled over his face.

"You mustn't be put out," he said, gently, "but I don't believe I should be willin'. You know Maria didn't take to you. Nothin' against you, it ain't, for we can't control our feelin's; but I should feel as if I hadn't done the fair thing by her if I asked her to do it."

Riker's face had darkened momentarily; but before the old man had concluded, he was ready for a cordial grasp of his hand.

"You're right," he said, in his frankest voice. "I honor you for it. But Len is at your service, and I heartily hope he may be successful."

Leonard, still without protest, heard himself condemned to his week of torture. He had laid down his own will in subjection to Riker's. Obedience had become second nature, and he no more thought of resisting his master than the demands of his own appetite. He realized, with that heart-sinking which accompanies a dismal foregone conclusion, that the morrow would see him sitting near his old friend, unable to offer him the cup of

water for which his lips thirsted. The next day and the next would bring the same ordeal. How could he endure the seven?

Foreboding did indeed speak true. Day after day he watched the old man growing more nervous and impatient; day after day he sat beside him, giving, with parched tongue and aching throat, that cruel negative. Strange that the possibility of lying did not present itself, but it never did. Had the suggestive devil of an active imagination been more vigorous within him, it might have forced some new vision upon his senses. As it was, he waited for the voices of the dead, and they were dumb.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### NEMESIS LOOKS ABOUT HER.

**I**T is a question whether there are more than one two souls in thousands with whom a just renunciation becomes final with the resolve. A minority of these there assuredly is, and they must imply the existence of a kindred type, but their fellows are rare. Most of us, no matter how firmly the obstinate will clings to its purpose, are obliged to hear again and again the waging of a war of argument.

It is true that Sarah had ceased to debate first principles. The traitorous faction of her mind had exhausted reasons in its first specious pleading. Time had passed; the fall had come again, and with every flying second she realized more and more that the step she had taken was final. As that came to pass, nature rose up in revolt, crying out, not against right, not against her judgment, but in some inarticulate protest, which was enough to rend her day by day. She was passing out of that state of extreme youth, wherein we believe something must happen because we wish it, because its refusal to happen would be so unbearable. Time himself declared that no deliverance was

possible. She must not yield, and circumstances could not.

In such extremity, it was a merciful provision that Uncle Ben should need a housekeeper and friend. Her nature, demanding so much of life which life was refusing, found its only relief in passionate devotion to him. She performed her homely duties with a religious fervor. Her mother had been used to say that she would make a fine little housekeeper. Now she thought eagerly of the saying, and consulted Aunt Lomie as to old-fashioned modes of cookery, and Miss Maria's habits. Uncle Ben saw much and guessed at much, but took her efforts as evidence of the goodness inherent in humanity. That she could give such loving service for his sake, he was too humble to suspect; still less that she was so deep in trouble as to do it half for her own. Service simply stood as expression of the universal love and brotherhood pervading the race, like some vital fluid.

Aunt Lomie said, "Benjamin is a good deal broke up by Maria's death." It was true. He began at last to waver under the weight of years. A febrile unrest came upon him. It would be a mistake to say that all his stock of philosophy failed him at his need; it was only true that he suffered from impatience. When the message should once have come from Maria that she had met the dead face to face, and had been herself

permitted to return, he felt that his life would settle into a smoother channel. He looked at himself sometimes in simple wonder. He had not, since his young manhood, been used to taking life excitedly. What had come over him?

"You see it makes an old fellow like me feel he ain't got the backbone he ought to have, if he can't wait," he said to Sarah, one morning, with a somewhat pitiful smile. "But you know how you'd feel if somebody near you was crossin' the water; you'd want to hear as soon as they'd landed. Now I ain't a mite o' doubt about Maria's bein' all right, but I want to know when she's got settled, an' what sphere they've put her in." Sarah felt herself choking with a great pity for him, and a sickening distaste for the whole subject. "Yes, yes," he said, cheerfully, chancing to catch her eager glance. "I know you feel for me, an' I ought to do better than keep drawin' on your pity. But it won't be so long. I've got a sort of impression that's goin' to send me up to Boston to-day, if you'd as soon stay with Lomie."

"To Boston?"

"Yes, it's beat into me Maria'll come back through Lenny. It's nat'ral she should, just as you'd go to your own brother to help you carry out anything. I may stay a week, as I did before. Lomie will be glad enough to have you come in an' be with her."

She was obliged to smile sorrowfully at herself, in recognizing her own feeling as to these pilgrimages. It was a worried mother-love, the precise type of love that might watch over the path of a son setting out on periodical fits of dissipation.

Aunt Lomie dearly liked her presence in her house, and in her calm way gave token of it by sundry attentions which few people elicited from her. There was something in Aunt Lomie's manner of entertainment which put cultivated graces to shame. She was a simple gentlewoman, equipped not only with kindness of heart, but with a manner in which drawing-rooms could have found no fault. In her youth, her soberness, it seems, wrought her no good among the lads. Lomie, of all the family of handsome sisters, had the smoothest skin and the brownest eyes, — "sweet eyes," the yellowed poem of a dead and gone young minister called them. Therefore it was that when a stranger came to town he always asked to be introduced first to Lomie, though, when he had talked to her half an hour and found her not sprightly but very sedate, he was likely to desert her for the more lively sisters. But, as Aunt Lomie herself would say, "that's neither here nor there." It only pertains to this story to state that she set dulcet purple grape preserve and amber quince before her guest, insisted on her taking afternoon naps, — a weakness she would have scorned in her

own case, — and quietly invited the boys to put on their slippers before they came to the table. The boys did not object. They had an excellently well-founded regard for Sarah, and, as she demanded no concession to her superiority, they were quite ready to make any sort of free-will offering of the kind.

Sam, at the present time, had something on his mind. The "Original Villardini Comic Concert Company" had advertised an entertainment to be given in the town-hall, on a certain evening. There were to be songs by Billy Harrison, a banjo solo by the renowned Joe Bombei, a comic operetta, in which the most celebrated of modern actresses would take part, together with sundry other choice titbits. Sam was convinced that nothing of equal worth had appeared in Coventry since the settlement thereof, and he conceived the daring project of inviting Mrs. Mann to accompany him to that select entertainment. He was only deterred by some doubt of his own appropriateness to the occasion, his hands and feet seeming particularly large whenever he thought of her, and a still more potent reason lying in the doubt whether even such an entertainment could be considered worthy of her. Yet he knew she must be the better for a comic opera. She was pale, thin, and not even "set up" by thoroughwort. As an entering wedge, he brought in one night, with an air of



bashful unconcern, some handbills setting forth the glories to be. She took one, and read it with conscientious interest, to lay it down at the end, feeling herself one white heat from head to foot. The world-renowned actress who would illuminate the operetta was Dolly Dennis. This was her husband's wife.

"What think of it?" called Sam from the kitchen, where he was noisily washing his hands. But Mrs. Mann had gone up to her room, and Sam, ruefully regarding the bill dropped by her chair, decided that it had been found wanting, and disappointedly charged himself also to stay at home.

As for Sarah, she longed only to hide herself from pursuing circumstances. She threw up her hands to heaven in denial of the justice of a punishment which decreed that she should be haunted by the embodiment of her sin.

"I have gone away," she whispered, as if to some present Nemesis. "I have tried to make it right, as far as I could. I will take any punishment but this. I cannot bear this!"

Infused through her horror at having sinned against marriage, strengthening it into an agonizing intensity, was the traditionary protest of the nations which abide by one wife. She had inherited the fine ideal of love we cling to in theory, however our practice may argue the right of a

plurality of affections. Her own existence and that of the woman in question were offences against each other, and against transmitted law. There arose in her a physical repulsion for the bond that thus united them.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### UNDER THE RED CROSS.

**I**T is true that there are moments when the sky pours joyous revelation, saturating souls ready to be confident.

Sarah could feel nothing but dread of her future, and a horror made intense by the presence of the third actor in her tragedy. This was the witness to confront her as tangible evidence of her own sin. No logical expedient helped her. As the one subject preyed on her bodily strength, and she could neither eat nor sleep like a healthy woman, passion alone assumed control of her, — a fierce disgust for what had spoiled Stephen's life, rebellion against the chance that had given its sanction, and her old self-loathing for having yielded to weak or base influences. When the night came on which the Villardini Concert Company were to make the hall vocal, she went early to her room to look distractedly in the faces of the images which her imagination suggested. The woman might now be standing before her rough audience, tawdry, smiling, and bold. Some reflection struck her of the pain Stephen would feel could he know what was taking place.

Sam and Henry had gone to the "show," the former having been unable to resist the combined influence of his brother's unctuous recapitulation of the possible attractions, and his own conception of them. Still, it was from some unconscious suggestion of chivalry, that while Henry went whistling from the door, Sam had proposed meeting him a "piece down the road," and had softly gone from the shed, across lots. Sam gave himself no reason for such proceedings; in fact, he knew no more necessity for chatechising himself than his neighbor.

Some hours of the night had passed for Sarah, in that struggling that seems so futile because its immediate result lies only in weariness. At length she opened her eyes from the bed where she had sunk, endeavoring to make her senses oblivious to life. Moonlight and peace confronted her; they filled the room. She rose hastily and went to the window, her strained hands locked in front of her. The world also was full of light and peace, and it seemed very good. Possibly the time had come when the tense sensibilities could bear no more, and ecstasy might come after pain, as it came to the saints in torture. That makes the fact no less wonderful; if revelation may be born of fine fibres of the body, one can imagine no more divine a string for such vibration. Suddenly a quivering sob burst from her lips, and hot tears came of an ecstatic joy.

"I will not be ashamed!" she said. "I meant to be right; my heart was holy, and our life together is sacred. There is no stain." She sank on her knees at the window, bending her head and sobbing, "No stain! I am sure of it!"

There are some souls to whom confidence and joy are most natural. Such have an audacity of hope which the fearful call impious. They have so much to do in the present, such triumphant surety in the possibilities of existence, that regret has no place with them. Sarah stood by the window until her sobs had spent their force, and then began making ready for bed, as quietly as she might while her nerves were still quivering. One purpose was paramount, — that of forbidding failure to rest upon her life. If she had decided unworthily, it had been honestly. She would indeed no longer acknowledge the unworthiness as criminal, even to herself. Let circumstances militate as they would, forcing from her ignorance still more unripe fruit of deeds, and she would be content. She would behave honestly at the time, whatever the time demanded of her. If in the clearer light of further experience she should find herself forced to hate her past, that must be accepted as one of the inevitable penalties that accompany human living. Remembering that men and women are the sons and daughters of God, she would hold her head proudly, not like a

craven. So she slept at last, grown to fuller stature.

In the morning, Henry met her with face and mouth full of news, Sam preserving a countenance of stolid neutrality, as if such items lay far beneath his notice.

"No show last night," said Henry. Sarah felt herself painfully flushing over brow and cheeks. "No," he went on, answering her glance, "company's all broke up and gone to the dogs. Dolly's the head one, you know, an' she's run away."

"Run away?"

"They can't find out that she's robbed the till. Fact is, I don't believe the whole company's got enough to buy a baby's frock. They couldn't pay their score for last night's tavern-keep. They took the mornin' train, an' Prescott let 'em go scot free."

"He's a gump!" came Sam's reedy voice, followed by an embarrassed laugh as he realized that the word might not be sufficiently elegant. "Prescott might ha' kep' their trunks. It's likely there's a good deal o' gold an' silver trimmin's in 'em 'twould ha' paid to have."

Sarah walked to the window, and watched the two men as they swung away from the house. Perhaps she did not really see them; her will was intent on the proud resolve that she would to-day be her ordinary self, in spite of thought. Aunt

Lomie was putting up peaches, and Sarah pared till her hands were black, and weighed, and screwed cans with all the strength of her small strong wrists.

"I don't know as you can ever go away now," said Aunt Lomie. "I ain't missed the girls so much since they went, as I shall after you're gone, too."

The days were growing brighter and colder; the air held an invigorating sparkle with its breath of decay. Autumn was at its height. A very royal splendor it held this year; one that has been commemorated in eulogies from all New England.

One day Sarah started alone for a purposeless walk. She was enveloped in purple mist, the bloom of the air; she scented the fruit flavor and drank in the leaf-rotting. A fine, intense exhilaration fired her like a presentiment. "I should think," she said, "that I must be going to the opera to-night, if this were the land of operas."

The little laugh on her lips suddenly died at the suggested remembrance. She went on her way, effectually sobered. A mile from home, and the familiar rattle of Sam's wagon was to be heard, coming round a corner from the Exton road. Dill had a way of throwing up her head at every step, and presently Sarah descried her, making courtesies as she came.

"Ride?" called Sam. "I'll turn, an' go round through the North road, if you say so."

"I do," returned Sarah, her laugh coming back. "Don't get out, Sam. I can mount better if you give me a pull."

"Beats all how the trees look up Bear Hill way," and Sam gave the unwilling Dilly a flick. "The Lord!" he ejaculated, pulling the animal up with a jerk. "Dill, no wonder you didn't want to turn. I'm a beast, an' you're a Christian." He rattled the astonished animal round once more, describing a curve which forced Sarah to catch simultaneously at the seat and her hat. "Tell you how 'tis; you see, I've made a discovery. That woman that run away from the Concert Company is sick an' out of her head, down to Joe Mitchell's house, where nobody lives. I was walkin' the horse by there, an' heard a groanin', an' so I got out an' went up to peek in the window. There she was, on the old bedstead they left. She must ha' been crazed when she crawled in there. I knew her in a minute, — see her at the depot the day she come. I was goin' home to get ma'am to go down, an' it don't seem nat'ral, but when I come across you it knocked her out o' my head."

Sarah was a woman of lightning impulses. "Sam," she said, putting her hand on his to hasten his pull at the reins, "take me back there now! Don't go for your mother; it isn't her place; and



if you see her first, she'll try to prevent my going. Take me back now!" Dill had obeyed the detaining rein, and Sam sat with eyes and mouth sufficiently opened for definite facial expression. "I know her; nothing must happen to her. If you don't take me, I shall walk."

Sam's chivalry overbore his convictions as to the fitness of things. They were within five minutes' drive of the Joe Mitchell house, when Sarah broke the silence.

"I'm right, Sam, and you must help me. Will you?"

"I'll do any fool's errand you're a mind to send me on," said Sam, in cheerful resignation to his puzzle. "An' now I've said it, go ahead an' tell me what to do. We're both in for it."

"First, you must go for the doctor, and after he tells what things may be wanted, you must drive home to get them. And, Sam, above all, prevent any one else from coming to help me. I must go through this alone."

After all, it was perhaps a romantic impulse which made her sure that her young shoulders must bear the load. Destitute also of practical calculation was she at the moment, for concealment from many people seemed to be absolutely necessary; what might not be told in the wildness of delirium which would prove an additional disgrace to Stephen? The poor child quite forgot, as she

had been for weeks forgetting, that a very large part of the world was in ignorance of her troubles.

Sam was still in grievous doubt as to his own conduct in leaving her alone at the house, when they finally stopped before the dilapidated pile. However, the time for remonstrance had passed, and he stood in wholesome fear of Mrs. Mann's higher nature. They left Dilly cropping the brown grass near the fence, and went silently up to the blackened front door. Sarah was sick with fear, and wondered, a little weakly, if she must faint. That was an unknown process to her healthy young body, but such weakness of nerve and muscle must portend something.

Sam broke a pane from the kitchen window, to admit his hand to the fastening. Thus another window had been opened by the strange guest within. A minute after his long legs had disappeared within the window, Sarah heard a bolt withdrawn, and the door swung open to admit her. She walked bravely in; indeed, there was a good deal of courage involved in the one effort of moving. Sam softly opened the door of the bare bedroom. There lay the woman, staring straight in front of her with unseeing eyes, and talking by snatches. Sarah stopped by her side; she had an absolute terror of encountering the eyes, which searched Sam's face with no speculation in them. Sam turned, and noted her pallor.

"Come, give it up!" he whispered.

The words recalled her to shame at her physical weakness. "No," she answered, taking off her hat and gloves. "Go for the doctor. I shall stay while you are gone."

Sam, very dissatisfied with himself, did go, after one or two lingering looks which held a prayer that she might have changed her mind. Once outside, having also made his decision perforce, he lashed Dill over the road to Doctor Bright's at a pace previously unknown to her. Half-way there, Sam broke out with an exclamation the very sound of which led him to a more excessive use of the whip. "Good Lord! maybe it's catchin'!"

Meantime, Sarah, to quiet her own wildness of heart, and to familiarize the dreaded eyes with the sight of her, moved to a point within their gaze, where she began spreading a wrap over the woman's form. The eyes met hers, full of a fearful blankness. It flashed into her mind that Stephen had spoken of their wonderful blue. Now they were black. No trace was left of the beauty he had loved and hated; wrinkles, the ravages made by unhealthful living, had crossed out all delicacy of hue and outline, as if a ruthless hand should draw rough lines across some priceless sketch. Sarah brought a chair near the bedside, and sat down where the woman could regard her. She had an unexplained feeling that, even in her

delirium, the other must feel loneliness and be somewhat comforted by a human being.

"It is strange," broke the hollow voice, "that they should go without me! Why couldn't they wait?"

"They will wait," said Sarah, rising to place a cold hand on the burning forehead. The bridge had been crossed; she had spoken to her and touched her.

While she sat waiting for Doctor Bright, she thought, with a deep relief, that the words of delirium were not as likely to be barbed with poison as she had feared. Old records in the brain came to light, — childish occurrences, and those of girlhood. The girl prepared her dress for her first ball, smoothed her hair with weak hands, and lived her triumphs over again. Stephen's name was not mentioned. Was it because he had, after all, made slight impression on her real life, or because the busy brain, in its ransacking of odd corners, did not chance to bring certain records to light?

It was two hours before Dill came back at a swinging trot, and behind her rang the precise hoof-beats of Doctor Bright's roan. Sarah wondered, in the idle speculation which fills up excited moments, why physicians and roans as invariably go together as bread and butter. Doctor Bright came in first, and began at once feeling his patient's

pulse. Sarah stood watching him, her mind hastily recounting whatever she had heard of him in Coventry. Personally, he was an elongated skeleton; so thin a man that Coventry said to itself, in mild speculation, that "whatever Dr. Bright's victuals went to the making of, it wasn't fat!" The doctor was variously condemned and universally loved in the county; one party disapproved of his prescription of mild doses, and another considered him fatally slow in making up his mind, as well as too reserved in speaking it. Neither, however, would have been persuaded to admit another practitioner to his house, under any circumstance but that of Doctor Bright's departing this life.

"Wasson says you are to be with her," he said at last, looking up from his case of vials.

"Yes, I can do it," began Sarah, fearing further objection; but the doctor nodded her speech short, and went on in his gentle sing-song:

"I will give you directions later." He sat down at a little side table, and began writing, Sam by this time filling up the doorway and regarding him with extreme impatience. Sam felt that, after his own and Dill's exertions, he might reasonably expect a verdict of life or death. The doctor wrote slowly, and with microscopic fineness. At length the paper was concluded, and he carefully dried it, causing Sam new qualms of impatience.

"Articles you will need to bring from home. It will be impossible to move her. I will stay with the young woman till you come."

Sam took a step, and hesitated. "Ma'am will ask what the matter is," he faltered. Even those of full strength and stature were not exempt from awe of Doctor Bright.

"Typhoid fever; that's all I know. Don't ask me if she'll live. Don't ask me how she got it. I can't tell you."

Sam and Dill having once more set out, Doctor Bright turned to Sarah with a slip of written directions. "I have put down what you will need to do, in case you shouldn't be able to trust your memory. Are you going to stay with her right through?"

"Yes." Sarah was prepared to defend her position, to passionately assert that though she might be young she would not prove untrustworthy; but Doctor Bright believed in the desirability of allowing man and woman to settle their own affairs.

"Very well; you will need help soon, however. Don't be romantic about devotion; don't despise sleeping when you can, and going out for fresh air."

The patient moaned and talked on, and Sarah sat by the window, afraid of the doctor, and afraid of her task when she should once be left alone. So the hours passed until Sam returned, on a wagon

piled with bedding and articles rapidly suggested by Aunt Lomie's practical mind, which never moved slowly in time of need. Then Doctor Bright began to work, with telling strokes of his own, and placidly neutral directions to the two in awe of him. He had left word for Aunt Jane Hinckley to lend her aid, and while they were busy about the sick woman, Sam coaxed a flame into life in the kitchen fireplace.

Doctor Bright looked at his patient with some quiet satisfaction, when she was finally resting on Aunt Lomie's sweet bedding. At least that was dry and pure, whatever the air of the house might be. "It's an even chance," said the doctor to himself, in tranquil enjoyment of speculation, "whether it would have been better to give her a mild shaking up, and let her die in a comfortable house, or try to make this air fit for her breathing. However —" dismissing his problem for future solitary enjoyment, and turning to Sarah, — "keep up a fire for dryness, and open the windows for air. It isn't such a bad house as it might be, for the family have only been out of it a month. I'll be over in the morning."

His carriage drove away, and presently Aunt Jane, finding nothing further to do, went also. Then Sam and Sarah looked at each other, somewhat fearful of the responsibility they had jointly undertaken.

"Ma'am wanted to come, an' I wouldn't let her. She was a good deal put out; said you wouldn't stan' it."

"We may want very much to have her come later. I was foolish to say I must do it all alone. I meant that everything hard must be mine. But somebody who knows more may be needed. Don't wait, Sam, if you need to be home."

Sam arrested his steps in sheer surprise, and finally said, with extreme nicety of emphasis, "I sha'n't go out of this house till you do. Leave you alone nights with a crazy woman, half a mile from a neighbor? Good Lord! that would be smart!"



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### PROSPECTIVE REFORMATION.

GOING home one morning from a business trip that had occupied several days, Stephen found a rather urgent note from Miss Phebe, asking him to call on her the previous evening. Excuse having been impossible, he ran round immediately to offer his regret in person. There seemed to have been some unusual occurrence at the house. The maid who admitted him was agitated, and Miss Phebe herself, whom he found in the parlor with Gale and Linora, wore a flush high upon her cheek-bones, and upon her head a new bonnet of subdued autumn tints.

"Too bad you couldn't come," she said. "Somehow you seemed to be the only one left of the old family, and I wanted you to come in while things were just as they were."

"Things being now as they were not," put in Gale, with a much gratified coolness. "Let me introduce my wife. We walked to church this morning, and came away hopelessly changed."

Thereupon Stephen congratulated the happy pair, wondering all the time why Linora was stripped of her usual volubility, like a bird plucked

of gorgeous plumage. She was not silent long, however.

"Yes, I go with them," she exclaimed, nodding. "I know that's what you want to ask. We go this noon to form a model household on the Hudson, and there we remain all winter, uncle studying, Aunt Phebe reforming, and I being reformed. Somehow I like the passive voice better; it implies more repose, — less effort."

Gale's face relaxed in the slight indulgent smile which her general worthlessness usually served to call forth; but his wife looked at her gravely, saying, "Yes, Linora, I do mean to reform you in your ways, if that's possible."

Linora nodded again, and laughed gayly as she rose to leave the room. Before going, however, she stopped before Mrs. Phebe to deposit a little kiss on her shoulder. "You don't know how nice I think it is of you to let me go too!" she said. "In the midst of domesticity, who knows but I also may be domestic! I fancy I might evolve moral truths in the process of jelly-squeezing. Mr. Mann, I shall see you again. I have a little packing to finish, and an errand to do, and when I hear your retreating steps, I shall run down to accompany you to the corner, in pursuance of the latter."

When she was out of the room, Gale regarded his wife with a mixture of drollery and fondness,

saying, "Phebe will have it that there is missionary work to be done for our young friend. I tell her it should have been begun fifteen years ago."

"Don't I know it!" returned that lady, with emphasis. "Do you suppose I think her poor little twisted soul can ever be put straight now? But she shall have a home, and healthy, common things to think of. We'll keep hens and pigs, — you said there were horses? — and she shall help feed them. And her poor little body shall be nursed up, after its cigarettes and being awake at all hours, and starving herself at the table to eat when folks didn't know it. Oh, I know her! And I am fond of her, too, in spite of it all."

"If she is to be reformed, it is perhaps well for all of you that she is such a good-natured girl," suggested Stephen.

"Good-natured as the day is long," returned Mrs. Phebe, in quick corroboration. "We can call it quits; she'll be a lesson to me as to temper."

"And so Number Forty is at an end, as far as old associations go," said Stephen, looking about him, and fixing again in his mind the stiff details of the parlor, with a sad foreboding that he might sometime need every remembrance of the past.

"Sold out, and the landlady coming in this noon. The lodgers are put out, but that doesn't signify; they're not my old lodgers, and I've no sort of affection for them. Mr. Mann," as he

gave her his hand in good-by, hearing Linora's step, "I should like to feel that your wife was well."

"I can assure you of that. She will be glad to know you are so happy." He made his leave-taking short after that, anxious to escape the harrying of kind questions, and presently went out with Linora.

"And now that you have wished us happiness, and promised to visit us, which you won't do, and thought it an extremely good thing for me to have married my uncle off my hands to somebody who will take charge of me, — well, after all this, you're rid of us!" said she.

"But, seriously," returned Stephen, looking at her with challenging frankness, "isn't it a good thing for you?"

"Seriously, it is; and though you wouldn't think it, I quite appreciate it. I am getting old enough for the pastoral side of life to have some charms as well as appropriateness for me. I may even marry a rector, if such exist in our calm retreat."

"Not a priest?" suggested, Stephen, with a mischief he felt to be not too chivalrous.

"Not a priest, I think," she said coolly, with not even the suspicion of a blush. "There would be a monotony of treatment in that subject. But what I wanted really to see you for, was to ask you to give my love — my real love — to your

wife. There's not much of me, and I am afraid she knows it; but what there is, is loyal. I should like to have a chance to show her that I'd do anything in the world for her."

"I believe you would," said Stephen, as she stopped at her destination. "You have proved it by being so silent."

They hurriedly shook hands, and he left her, anxious again to get away after the last subject broached.

"So one person of the little knot of us who got so tangled there, seems to see her solution," he said to himself, as he went on. "Linora may not be very much changed, — she may not want to be, — but she is to have Mrs. Phebe's righteous arm to lean on henceforth, and I believe she likes it. But that solution involves somebody else in a new coil, — Mrs. Phebe. Still, she will be happy, for Gale sees all domestic and womanly graces in her, and she won't disappoint him." And the thought set him again upon the worn track of his own sorrow.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

LEONARD had become involved in the destiny which his own simplicity had marked out for him, and it was too late to arrest his steps with ease. Indeed, he saw no reason for pausing; he was only aware that his profession was productive of great discomfort, and though that was possibly the penalty of genius, he nevertheless chafed under it. In that week of daily companionship with Uncle Ben, he had become nervous to a degree incompatible, to casual eyes, with his placid fatness. This time, Uncle Ben was not to be balked of his purpose; he had come to receive a message from Maria, and the message he must have. Great issues were at stake; communication between the kingdoms of heaven and earth was to be indubitably proved by a word from a soul he trusted, through means as clear as crystal. He did not doubt Riker; without positive proof he would doubt no one; but he had, as he had stated, the certainty that Leonard's testimony must prove the keystone to his life's structure of belief. Leonard could see nothing, and reiterated that inability until he feared to meet his old friend, and made

engagements to escape from him. In his new state of extreme nervous irritability, he saw everything else, it seemed, that the imagination could compass; so that Riker, overhearing his statements to visitors, felt obliged to curb their wildness by a gentle admonition.

"That's what the old lady said," Leonard would invariably reply, with an obstinacy which Riker did not dare combat too far.

Why should he not have seen what he had most reason for seeing, when his mind, like a disordered machine, seemed capable of flying in any direction, in obedience to the greatest pressure? Possibly he was too anxious; possibly the magnitude of the requirement so awed him that he sifted whatever his imagination offered, down to its ultimatum of chaff. Possibly, also, his first terror of Maria had developed into a fear of misrepresenting her. Riker had endless communications from her, — somewhat slipshod ones, which, gratuitously offered him, Uncle Ben swallowed with patient courtesy. Riker felt so sure of making his control absolute over the old man, that he scarcely took the trouble to remain plausible. He interpreted Uncle Ben's growing simplicity of manner as a weakness of mind, corresponding to his increasing feebleness of body, and fed it, half contemptuously, with diluted milk fit for babes, who by dying would best fulfil the decrees of a wise Providence,

In pursuance of this more careless line of action, he volubly apologized, in Miss Maria's name, for her previous lack of charity towards the medium. Even Uncle Ben, with a somewhat pitiful smile, said that Maria was changed; but not to himself did he own that the change was scarcely to his liking. He was not conscious of finding fault with Riker and his own scheme, but of an uneasiness in the atmosphere.

"Just let it all be awhile," said Leonard one morning, when the two sat together in one of their interviews. "Wait till summer, and I'll come down and spend a month, and then we can talk it over. You don't seem well; you're not fit to worry."

"No, I ain't well, Lenny; but it's what I've got to expect. I am over eighty; my time ain't long here."

"Then have a good time, and don't fret! We know Aunt Maria's well off, and when the time comes, perhaps you'll hear from her."

"Yes, yes, we know she's well on't. I should like to have patience, boy, if I only could. It's the decay beginning, — the decay. It makes my faculties weaker; I can't seem to stan' things as I could. An' you can't hear?"

"I can't hear a thing. I wish I was dead!" cried Len.

"No, no!" said Uncle Ben, recalling himself,



and straightening in his chair with the responsibility of supporting the younger mind. "That ain't right. Live till the Lord calls you, an' be glad to live. There's worse things than this to bear, an' you've no call to take it hard."

He made no further embarrassing demands, and went home that afternoon. Leonard breathed more freely, after he was fairly away, and then felt with shame his want of gratitude.

Not a week had passed before his new peace of mind was overthrown by a telegram from Coventry. Uncle Ben had had a shock. Would he come? Riker took the news with a strange sort of excitement, which struck Len as the result of grief, and awakened a new flow of tenderness towards his benefactor. Len would have said, had he been in the habit of expressing himself freely on any subjects but those connected with celestial spheres, that Riker's heart was large enough to take in the whole sorrowing world; one little circle of friends could not fill it, and its tendrils crept far and wide to draw in the needy to its folds.

Professor Riker hastened his pupil's departure, and bade him good-by, with excited face and voice. He had debated within himself the wisdom of going also, with the final decision that it was better otherwise. Len's presence would be the natural and expected event; no one of the simple

relatives would dream of wills or property. But if he, Riker, should make a prominent figure in the scene, his presence might suggest to Uncle Ben some disclosure of his intentions. Then who knew what persuasions and reconsiderations might not follow? There were situations in which Len's vacuous simplicity would work far more good in mere avoidance of disturbing crystallizing atoms, than would the cleverest care. Once set a train in motion, and Len would not interfere, save from some innocent blunder. With Riker, the chances were always against blunders.

When Len reached the old farm-house, he found life flowing smoothly on there, under Aunt Lomie's guidance. Uncle Ben lay motionless in bed, using his eyes and sometimes his feeble lips; but there was none of that excitement of illness which Len's childish imagination had depicted. He was ready to sob aloud when he went, with blundering softness, to the bedside. The smiling lines on the old man's face had not forgotten their office. A subtle change passed over his features, like the flowing of faint sunlight.

"I never shall go back to leave you, pa," the boy burst forth, as expression of the utmost consolation in his power. The feeble lips moved.

"Put your head down," said Aunt Lomie, who stood by the bedside, a cup and spoon in her hands. "He wants to speak."

What Len could distinguish of the broken sentence started a new apprehension within him. It was the old question; had he heard from Maria?

"No, not yet," said the boy. He longed, at the moment, to utter a renunciation of the whole system, — money, the good he might do, his great fame, — but the force of habit and fear of harming the sick man closed his lips. In the following days, he sat hour after hour by the bedside, always in an agony of anticipation. Uncle Ben was uneasy without him, and, when he was near, lay with questioning blue eyes fixed on his face. Len shuddered under that kindly, wistful gaze. He alone knew what it meant, and that every silent moment was a denial to his old friend's last request.

The news of illness at the farm-house could not greatly startle Sarah, still face to face with noisome fever. It seemed the natural event that there should be trouble and death; she could not see beyond them. Mrs. Hinckley had taken up her residence with her, sharing the nursing, and bearing the burden of house duties; and Sam was a tower of strength.

Doctor Bright did not commit himself as to the probable issue of the illness. One might have supposed that Aunt Jane, after manifold experiences of the cut direct, would have avoided asking

his opinion; but she could not resist her inner longings for news.

"Think she's goin' to get over it?" she remarked, confidentially, as he was closing his medicine case, with the vigorous snap which was the only sudden expression he allowed himself. The doctor made no answer for some minutes, and one might have thought he had not heard.

"If she is strong enough to recover, I have no doubt she will," he returned with unblemished neutrality.

Sarah, in her place by the bed, felt a sudden throb and stand-still of her heart. In the strain of intense living, the question, as a blank form of words, had not occurred to her. She was conscious now of that deep fear which seems to attend great issues with which our wishes are liable to meddle. At such times, the higher powers seem immeasurably awful, and we dare not overrule their decisions, even by a breath of prayer.

She had thought before that some one should be notified of the woman's illness. It must not be Stephen. She had set her mind against drawing him into connection with it, even such as lay in answering a question. She wrote to Skeriton, under cover to the post-master, and an answer came. It contained money, and was signed by the woman's brother. He could not come, but must be kept advised of her state. In case of a

fatal issue, she must be sent home. So Sarah had despatched daily word, wondering if all affection were dead there also.

What could all this rouse in her own heart but an intense pity? Thrown on her hands, dependent on her for the maintenance of the feeble flicker of life still in the poor body, she could not cherish harshness towards the helpless creature. And when, in the dead stillness of the night, she sat by the wreck of womanhood, the true, divine charity awoke in her. That may be the far-reaching, patient love of God, — His daily thought of His creatures, only to be attained by them at brief moments.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE USUAL RESULT.

**I**T would be gratifying if there were something besides deadness of mind to chronicle of Stephen; one would hope there might have taken place some clarifying of the mist about him, some tiny, special revelation which should enable him to bear his lonely days with more high-minded fortitude. There was nothing of the sort; he was simply able to cling to resolution, and to do no more. One can but feel great kindness for that sort of nature which loves so warmly as to follow love's dictates with more eagerness than those of reason. Such souls lie in daily danger of loss, through devotion to what is not high, if it has once been invested with ideality. Stephen felt secure of the worth of his passion. His power of loving was the strong force of his nature; this time he trusted it to bear him on to noble ends.

To him, sitting one morning in his office, came an unexpected visitor, — Bernard.

"And may I ask where you dropped from?" said Stephen, getting out of his chair, and letting surprise do the work of cordiality.

"Almost from the other side of Styx," answered

Bernard, with a laugh. "I have been ill all summer. I nearly died of fever."

"I'm sorry, decidedly sorry, you've had an uncomfortable time. And you show it, though the change is becoming to you."

The change was great, to be found not only in thinness of flesh and the effects of a general bleaching process, but in Bernard's new expression. He was — though that is stating a fact but vaguely — more human of glance and response. He met Stephen's look frankly; the expression, at least, of the old moodiness and distrust was quite gone.

"And how about your trip West? Are you inclined to carry out the proposition one of us made, as to stock-raising?"

"That was partly what I came for. Now that I am well, I want something to do, and the idea of that suits me exactly. We have talked it over at home, and they have half promised me that if I make a home out West, sometime Mary shall go and live with me."

"Mary?"

"She is my sister, — my half-sister, that is, — and like a woman. I think she has done me as much good as my mother. They all took me in, Mann, and made me one of them."

Stephen's mind flew rapidly back to the figure Bernard had made in his own mental horizon, just before that visit to Freeport, and he could but

credit the Masons with an excess of charity. However, he could and did say, in all cordiality, "I am heartily glad of it."

"I found my mother so good, and sweet-natured, and unselfish," continued Bernard, as if the flux of adjectives was too pressing, and he could only select what were, after all, inadequate. "And Mary is a woman and a child in one. I think I should be happy anywhere if I could have her with me. But I want work."

"Very well; as soon as I can settle up and get you started; I suppose there's no pressing necessity. You can wait a month?"

"Yes, I could wait two, though I am impatient. The fact is —" laughing somewhat uneasily, and carrying embarrassment in his tone, "I haven't laid aside my idea of giving up the property that came to me by inheritance. I don't feel about it as I did, and precisely because my feeling has changed, I think I ought to carry out what I had resolved on."

"As a sort of exquisite penance? Can you afford to amuse yourself in that expensive way?"

"I must, to keep my self-respect," said Bernard, with none of his old irritability. "You see, I thought I shamed Mrs. Ellis' choice through badness of blood. Now I know I don't; I am sure I have as much claim to generosity and delicacy through inheritance as any man. So I feel as



though I had a foot-hold once more, a birthright, and I can't curse myself or anybody else. But just because I have changed, I don't want to make capital out of repentance, and say I will not keep a promise which is not for my advantage."

"I see ; having once been a fool, you are determined to pay the full penalty, though, being now sane, you see no valid reason for doing so. That is an extreme of honesty for which the powers above won't give you credit. They are more likely to make a man pay twice over."

Bernard could give gentle judgment to the bitterness in his tone. He himself had suffered far too much to be obtuse to a man's wretched moods.

"Nevertheless, I think I am right," he said, brightly, "and if paying back the money helps me keep my self-respect, what does it matter whether I am foolish or not?"

But Stephen did not discuss the subject, turning to one where he was sure Bernard must agree with him, and probably find some amusement there, as one may in past foibles which have not been too deep or ridiculous. "And now, after the indisputable proof of brain-fever, I suppose you will agree with me that the spectres you used to see were also the coinage of your fancy?"

"Not at all! I might, if my belief in spiritualism rested on them alone ; but what will you do

with the materialized forms I have seen walking out of Riker's cabinet?"

Stephen leaned back in his chair, regarding Bernard with more interest than he had ever before felt in him. Once his vagaries had appeared to go well with his general unsoundness of mind; now, when he seemed to look at the world like other men, such aberrations were in the last degree astonishing. He seemed a subject deserving of the active charity of endeavor.

"Do you mean to say that you see disembodied spirits in that vulgar trickery?"

"I do; I can but trust the evidence of my senses."

"That phrase is the expression of a very old fallacy. Science has determined that there is nothing more unworthy of trust."

"But when I plainly am haunted by shapes," urged Bernard, "as I know I was!"

"Find me a physician who will tell you that there are not constitutional causes for false seeing," interrupted Stephen, with more heat than he often showed, "and I should not be willing to trust my constitution to his mercies. I suppose total ignorance of the freaks the nerves and organs may play isn't culpable in a wholly unlettered man; in you and me, who have access to scientific books, it is culpable. How far did you ever try

to test your vision by scientific methods, or parallel them in history?"

Bernard hesitated. "Well, I believed in them at once," he confessed.

"Yes, your imagination was on their side! I can't conceive of being so gulled! It is an anachronism; one might expect it in the Middle Ages, or under the guidance of such a prince of magic as Cagliostro!"

Bernard had not come prepared for argument, and, taken by surprise, did not retort to any purpose. But he did fall slightly out of temper; it is not in nature to hear one's self reproved as unscientific or simple-minded, and still preserve patience.

"When you prove positive falsity in what I have seen, I will believe you in the same wholesale manner," he contented himself with saying. "I suppose you wouldn't object to that."

"If you pin your faith to what any medium may have told you of your past or future, you can explain every hit of that kind by a practised cleverness in making use of the victim's disclosures, or by lucky guesses, or even by some mysterious mental power, if you will. I am willing to concede any sort of unclassified force to the human mind. But if you rely on shadowy figures from dark cabinets, go yourself and seize one. No honest spirit would grudge himself as subject of

experiment, as no generous man would deprive the dissecting table of his tissues."

"Go with me, if you think you can arrest a materialized form," returned Bernard, with the feeling that he must not resist this trial between his own gods and Baal. "Professor Riker's materializing can stand the test."

Stephen considered a moment. He had been through the experience in his college days, when it assumed the proportions of gay adventure. It held no sort of interest at present; nevertheless the deed seemed worth doing.

"Very well," he said. "To-night?"

"Yes, unless his times have changed. I'll find out about that."

Stephen could scarcely have told why he so earnestly resisted the fact of Bernard's binding himself over to a paltry form of belief. Probably he would have said, if pinned down to statement, that credulity in regard to spiritualism was not "good form;" still, his motives for bestirring himself lay deeper. He appreciated the dignity of a clean habit of thought; he knew what it was to be drawn far out of his way by the affections, but that could only happen when beauty wrought upon his senses. In matters which were merely affairs of eye and judgment, he saw piercingly through from premise to conclusion. That a man should be deceived by a showman and his puppets, when there

might be at the same hour, round the next corner, an exhibition of natural magic by a conjurer who advertised himself as nothing more, stood with him as the result of a perverted manner of thinking. It was like drinking ditch-water when one might dip his cup in the spring, — and any man should be willing to take a few extra steps in showing the unlearned and simple the way.

Bernard came for him early that evening. He, on his side, had a far greater burden than that of defending his faith. He was wondering how he could ask news of Sarah, if Stephen should not broach her name of his own accord.

She must still be away; he was sure of that, for otherwise Stephen would have told him. And if that were so, the mysterious trouble between them must have continued. How could he bear knowing nothing of it or her? On the other hand, how could he force himself where neither invited him?

"One thing must be understood," said Stephen, when they were on their way to Riker's. "You will not, under any temptation, say that I do not believe. I saw enough, years ago, of the suppression of people who honestly confessed that they went to investigate. It is of no use to expect a medium to meet you fairly."

Bernard acquiesced against his judgment; he

could have sworn to Riker's impartiality, so accurate are sometimes impressions of character.

The scene at Riker's bore its old aspect. The regular patrons were there, with the usual scattering of new-comers. Mrs. Riker, who had continued to develop as a medium, was somewhat worn and apprehensive of look, but more confident of manner. Riker met Bernard with effusion, remembering him as a staunch believer. Stephen his glance sharply questioned. The younger man's carelessness of manner had redoubled, at which Bernard wondered, contrasting it with his heat and earnestness of the morning. The stranger had evidently come to be amused, to pass an hour, thought Riker, after exchanging some sentences with him, and finding him good-humored and indifferent. He decided that it might not be worth while to consider him especially, nor to take any precautions against his possible interference. This was not, indeed, a night when Riker should have been put to the test; half his mind was busy with conjectures as to what might be happening in Coventry, and it is an established fact that mediumship between two worlds demands the undivided attention.

Various versions of what followed can be read by overlooking files of the daily papers; one exposure of materializing is very like another, the means at the command of most mediums being

identical. Several figures appeared in the doorway of the cabinet; as many believers went forward to receive greetings of more or less cordiality, until, in some confusion of changing places, Stephen, unobserved, took the end of the row of seats. Gradually the spirits became holder, and one advanced along the line of chairs, when Stephen suddenly stepped forward and threw his arms about her. Confusion reigned; Stephen, throttled, beset by blows, — for Riker had rushed upon him with the desperation of a prophet who hears the crashing of his fair reputation, — Stephen held his head down and clung to his captive. Bernard had consented to do his part in turning up the light, and, though he pressed his way to it with all possible haste, chaos seemed to have had its way for hours before he succeeded. At its first truth-telling disclosure, believers and indifferent alike ranged themselves on the side of Stephen; the reality was too patent. The most unworldly eyes could scarcely resist the evidence presented by the tableau, — Stephen, now with one arm free, defending himself from Riker's assault, while the other held Mrs. Riker, clothed in a loose white tunic. She had proved accomplice, too, Riker thought with rage, by fainting at the wrong moment. If she had kept her senses and muscles under her own control, he was sure she might have cleared herself. A murmur arose among the spectators;

some one laid a hand upon Riker's collar and jerked him aside. He had lost his disciples.

"I am sorry to have alarmed the spirit," said Stephen, depositing her upon the sofa. "Will some one bring a glass of water?— You see?" he added, in a quick aside to Bernard, "you recognize the ghost?"

Bernard could scarcely articulate; his open eyes and mouth struck Stephen with a sense of amusement, and were sufficient evidence of his acceptance of the testimony. Some one was working over Mrs. Riker, and her husband was haranguing the knot about him, interrupted by indignant denials and repetitions.

"Let us go," whispered Stephen. "Slip out, and I'll follow."

Their escape was managed as quickly as conceived, and Riker was left to face his patrons, who felt a double grief in having lost the hero of the hour. Still, it was unanimously decided that he must be a newspaper reporter, and that his account might be bought in the morning for the sum of two cents.

"Bah!" said Stephen, shaking himself, when they reached the clear night air. "Dirty sort of business, isn't it? The worst thing about placing yourself in a genuine row is that you feel, when all is over, the entire responsibility of it. I could swear it was I who played the ghost, instead of



that poor woman. No, I can't ride down; my coat seems to be torn."

Bernard was absolutely silent on the walk home, and Stephen, accurately interpreting his mood, was only amused. Bernard was neither ashamed of his false gods, nor doubtful that he had seen the failure of their test; he was simply bewildered. Possibly his frame of mind bore some relation to that of the child who discovers the inner mechanism of his kaleidoscope. He only said at parting, "I shall be round to-morrow," leaving Stephen to literally wash his hands of the affair.

Next morning Bernard appeared as he was setting out for the office. "I am greatly obliged," was his greeting, half awkwardly given. No one can resign even a pewter god with dignity.

"About the ghost? Not at all. I only hope she is in better spirits this morning."

"It throws the whole thing over for me. I never shall even look into it again. I own I am relieved; it isn't comfortable to feel the invisible at your elbow."

"No, especially as you've no guarantee that it isn't the devil!" Stephen was inwardly as much amused at Bernard's complete denial as at his former partisanship. Still, it was too desirable a state of mind to be disturbed by insisting on a wide embrace of evidence.

"But this morning I came chiefly to ask other questions," said Bernard.

Stephen was prepared by intuition. "I know," he said. "About my wife. I have been thinking of that. It seems now only fair that you should know why she is not here. I mean to tell you, though not quite now."

Bernard was silent, his heart beating faster. He longed to hear, yet he could not beg Stephen to go on.

"I know she is well," Stephen continued, "because, in any other case, I was to be informed. She is still at Coventry. I will tell you all I know about it later, — not to-day. To-night I go to New York. I shall be home next Saturday. Come to dinner with me on Sunday, and we will talk. You have not written to her this summer?"

"No, I wasn't able, you know," answered Bernard. "I wrote to nobody." He did not add that one deterring impulse had been the feeling that Stephen would not have wished him to write. If a mysterious something separated the two, it seemed to him a matter of delicate scruple that he should not hold constant communication with her.

Where did she stand now, in his thoughts? Sacredly preserved like a vision, but at an infinite distance from himself. He had felt, since the summer with his mother, that he had passed through a purification of body and mind. The joy in living,

and sense of the honor of life, which come with returning health, animated him to the desire of pure deeds and thoughts. In that rapture of feeling new blood feeding wasted tissues, nothing seemed comparable to the delight of noble living. The earth bore that dear and familiar aspect which she wears to eyes which have been long closed to her by pain, or exile on tossing water, and it seemed impossible ever again to regard her through such miasmatic vapors of passion. That homely family life at Freeport had changed the aspect of family ties. A man's wife seemed no longer the legitimate object for even a concealed passion from a second lover, and he set himself to remember chiefly the dear companionship of his childhood with her.

There was, for him, a new heaven and a new earth. Through the changed atmosphere and clearer sunlight, he must henceforward regard men and women with a difference. Even Stephen, viewed by the aid of an unbiased common sense, had ceased bearing the proportions of a gigantic insult to awkward and ugly mankind.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### LEONARD SEEKS REFUGE

WHEN the reporter besieged Riker's house, the next morning after the crisis of events, that gentleman had gone, and no one was admitted. Riker had fled to Coventry to make sure of his harvest there, leaving his wife at home instructed to communicate with no one. He had considered that his best course lay in bravado. It was against probability that the city papers should at once reach and influence Coventry. Uncle Ben was growing weaker, so Len's letters stated, and Riker was sure that if he could stave off disclosure until the final event should take place, and Leonard had inherited the property, all would go well. They might even go abroad, and establish their business in England. With the small fortune once within his grasp, he did not greatly fear the effect of disclosing his own true character to his pupil. Money held over himself such godlike sway that, in the face of Len's density to advantages not honestly attained, he still trusted in them to influence him.

There came in Coventry a day when Sam urged Dill at a good pace — which she must privately

have thought was becoming too habitual — to his own home, where he found his mother hastily doing some necessary housework, that she might return to Uncle Ben's. She and Henry were there constantly now.

"Dr. Bright says she won't live the day out," began Sam. "Ma'am, you must go down. Mrs. Mann is white as a sheet. You go, an' I'll bring up Jane Hinckley to see to things here."

Aunt Lomie considered a moment before answering, "I don't know but I'll go," which was tantamount to consent.

There was no change apparent in Uncle Ben, except such as lay in his "sinking;" and it might be that he would live some days. Leonard was with him constantly, and could do everything necessary, with Aunt Lomie's place taken in the kitchen and at the table. He was conscious of a start in his pulsations, when she drew him from the room to leave with him the needful directions. It was not purely of fear, though he had become accustomed to a flavor of uneasiness in approaching his old friend. Every instant, he keenly felt, proved a denial of the demands of gratitude and affection. Compared with the bird of gay plumage he had been as Professor Leonard, he was now but sick and bedraggled.

Aunt Lomie had gone, and Henry was busy at the barns. Len sat beside the sick man, feel-

ing his own heart every minute beating faster and faster, as if it stole pulsations from the weakening one beside it. The drowsy sunshine lay upon the floor, neutral and sickly; the bare chestnut limbs tapped on the window from time to time, and, within, only the cat stirred in luxurious stretching and recurling on the bright chintz lounge. Len felt an increasing horror of everything, even of the sick man, whose bodily state created an awe and mystery of its own. He had played too long with the supernatural; it had done him service, and now, like many another wary tamed monster, had turned about to begin a horrible mastery. But the fearful ticking of the clock, the fearful return of Uncle Ben's slow breathing, suddenly ceased to his ears, as the old man's eyes unclosed and fixed themselves upon his. They held an anxious question. Len bent forward to meet it, knowing well what it must be.

"Maria!" was formed by the feeble lips. Len hesitated; the time for final decision had come. He was unused to symptoms of illness, but something assured him that the change in the dear face was made by approaching death. His haunting question would never be asked again.

He began speaking clearly and deliberately. "Pa, I've seen Aunt Maria." The stiffening face brightened, the gaze grew more eager. "She is

very happy, and she is waiting for you. She says spiritualism is all true. She is here now."

These were the great tidings for which the passing soul had longed. Socrates himself at the last, assured by indubitable proof that his conclusions were true, could have been no happier. The news had even the power of awakening the last faint look of joy in the peaceful face, before it ceased expressing the soul forever. He was dead. Len stood looking at him with swelling dread, as the fact stamped itself upon his mind. The remembrance of his own last words returned upon him like an echo, "She is here now!" and with a cry of fear he ran from the house to find Henry and alarm the neighbors.

No one felt surprised at his frantic grief; it was but additional sign of his "good-heartedness." In the midst of a haste of preparation, Riker arrived. Len hurried to him as to a deliverer, and with his first breath began confessing his sin. Riker could not understand, and dared not press him, in the shrewd hearing of neighbors who had flocked in to be of use.

"Tell me about it by and by," he said quickly. — "And so our dear old friend has passed away!" he added, in affectionate sadness, turning to Henry Wasson, who happened to stand next him.

"Seems so," answered Henry, who had not Sam's vigor of utterance and cheerful willingness

to speak his mind. Privately he remembered Maria's estimate of the professor, and wished his brother were there to suggest appropriate and stinging retorts. Henry was conscious of not being equal to all occasions, unsupported by Sam, but he had the comfort of undeviating faith in his hero. He was convinced that, in all cases, the unimpeachable thing would have been done had Sam been present.

Riker lounged about the rooms, gently sympathizing with Len's loud and boyish grief, and wiping his own eyes. But he seemed to be in bad odor, as he was not slow in observing. The neighbors, though not sharing Henry's prejudice, were neutrally interrogative as to his reason for coming at all. Presently he drew Len out of the house to finish the interrupted confidence.

"I've told him a lie!" the boy began at once, his pink and white face scalded and blurred by tears. "He looked at me, and I told him I saw Aunt Maria. I wish I was dead, and I'm afraid to die!"

"Never mind," said Riker, some rough insolence appearing in his manner. He had not recovered from the smart of the previous night's disclosures. Surely it might be expected that a man with a lost reputation and problematic future should visit his wrath against circumstances in the abstract on some concrete inferior. Men of a larger calibre have been known to find relief from strenuous



events in kicking a dog, before Riker's day. "Never mind." You seem to be in moderately good health. I'd save my fear of dying till there was a question of needing it."

Len's tears ceased, and his blue eyes took on wide astonishment. The words might have passed; the tone was a revelation. "But it's the last word I ever said to him," he continued, presently, bent on drawing Riker into his own channel of thought. "I never lied before."

His density grated on Riker, in his present ill-humor with the world; it seemed insufferable idiocy.

"Never told a lie in your life!" he laughed, all unctuousness swept away from his tone. "You half-idiot! you fool! you have lied every day of every year since I've known you, and been paid for your lies."

Len's world reeled. The fact that his perceptions were not of the most delicate order rendered it no easier for him to understand that his beloved friend and tutor was a myth. What can be more bewildering? You love and trust, and Fact turns her clear mirror at a different angle, saying, "He never existed."

"You have taken in hundreds of people," Riker went on, pitilessly, impelled to pass along with interest the flagellation he had received. "Almost as many as I have. And then you come to me and whine, 'I never lied'!"

"Don't you believe in it? The spirits, — they were materialized, — you did it yourself!"

"I did it myself! Yes, I did. I walked out of my cabinet with a sheet on, and again with an Indian's blanket and feathers. I taught my wife to carry in with her enough for half a dozen disguises, and I made her work to earn her honest living as I earned mine. I'll show you twenty places in the cabinet where I can pack a spirit's entire wardrobe, and the fools that investigate may tap and pry over them a week, and then they won't find them."

Len had grown white and rigid; his eyes searched Riker's face in agonized wonder. He turned suddenly away from him; Riker turned also and grasped his shoulder.

"Don't go in there to make a fool of yourself," he said, harshly. "Do as I tell you. Take a walk, cool yourself off, and come home and say nothing. If you make a fuss, I swear I'll kill you," he added, as a final preventive.

Len turned obediently, and walked away through the cart-path over the hill. Riker wandered about a few minutes to spend his irritation, before entering the house. He was not alarmed as to the consequences of disclosure; his power seemed to have narrowed to a very small circle about the boy, and this sudden twist had but tightened the ring. In the future, he could work to better advantage,

unhampered by daily subterfuge ; possibly, also, the loss of the boy's simplicity would not prove disastrous to his powers after all.

As for Leonard, he walked steadily on, encompassed by fear. He had been told that the whole system of spiritual communication was but fraud, and so crippled was his mind by the stroke from Riker's lash that he could not separate his own share in the deception from the general wrong. He could not, at the moment, have sworn that he had ever seen miraculous sights or heard the whispers on which he based his messages. His little world was destroyed. Possibly the loss of intrinsic purity would not have driven him to despair ; no one can predict with much safety that most ravages in the soul may not be condoned by habit and false methods of thought. It was fear only which overthrew his reason. The habit of believing in the presence of spirits was too strong to be easily broken. His inflamed fancy pictured Uncle Ben and Maria as avengers of his deception ; being dead, they were unspeakably horrible. He was afraid to go back and afraid to run away, — shuddering at the thought of Riker, and yet, with a child's terror, sure that no distance could remove him so far that Riker would not finally reach him. So thinking swiftly, — his thoughts like a mad progress, a dance of death, — he reached Fenn's Hole, the one deeply dangerous place in the little

river which cut Uncle Ben's land. At the moment when the water struck his eye, a new thought flashed upon his brain. Uncle Ben and Maria had always been kind ; wronged, deceived, their mercies would be tenderer than Riker's love. The eye and the brain had proposed his solution, and he took it ; Fenn's Hole received him and his perplexity, giving the one verdict from which there is no present appeal.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### SAM TO THE RESCUE.

THE night came, and Len had not returned. Riker, looking to him for countenance in his apparently needless stay there, awaited him with an increasing irritation. Circumstances seemed vilely against him. He was conscious of clenching his hands with the determination that, when the winning side should be again his, he would wreak certain small vengeance on the nearest available creatures. The house had settled into quiet, and was doubly lonesome without Aunt Lomie. She had gone in time to be present at that other death, which could cause no sorrow. Sarah looked up and smiled faintly as the dear old lady entered the room. Then they sat together waiting, Sarah with nerves as tensely strained as if the tragedy were about to begin, instead of wavering to its close. The flickering breath ceased.

She shuddered as Aunt Lomie's grave voice broke the stillness telling Sam, at the door, to summon a neighbor.

"You don't feel bad, I hope," said the old lady, as she came back. "You've done all anybody could

do for her. She was a poor sufferin' creatur', but now it don't signify."

What should be done with Sarah? When that house, also, assumed the order and stillness brought by death, it was Sam who took the reins of government. It is a pity that it should be so chronicled, but it is nevertheless true that he told a great many merciful lies in the following days.

"She can't go through one more thing," he said to his mother. "Look at her eyes! Hear her talk! She'll be crazy. Just get her away from this house, an' fix her up."

But Mrs. Mann would not be taken away. She quietly insisted on remaining till the next morning, when the last prayer would be made for the departed soul, and the body would be sent to its home in the West. "I will lie down," she promised of her own accord. "I won't be foolish, but I want it to seem like other people." Nobody understood the last reason. It was true that she did feel a desire that this unloved dead should receive to the last all the semblances of affection which might justly have belonged to her had she not chosen to throw off family bonds.

So Uncle Ben had died! She looked at them when they told her, with the tears welling up in such loving eyes that Sam felt it would be easy for him also to cry. Yet she was glad; the dear old man must be safer in another life among different

conditions, than beset by the cajoleries of the present world.

When the three were left after the funeral service, — for the cordial neighbors were not bidden to the ceremony, — Sam delegated all details of closing the house to an acquaintance, and himself took his mother and Sarah home. She had expected to occupy her old room at Uncle Ben's, but the staunch Sam had forbidden it.

"There's everybody there," he said, vaguely, "mediums an' such. It ain't as it was. You couldn't even see him. (Lord forgive me!)" which was his Protestant equivalent for crossing his sinful self.

But the morning had also come without the appearance of the missing Len. Riker had grown apprehensive, and the neighbors, even more impressed with Len's queerness than he, prophesied evil. The verdict was unanimous that he had "made way with himself." The professor, viewed askance and left severely to himself, longed to scout the notion, but nobody asked his opinion, and he was silent from policy.

"Who see him last?" queried Sam, the one of many resources. Riker felt it best to confess that he had seen him follow the cart-path over the hill. Sam did not waste words in conjecture, but merely saying, "He al'ays was a queer one," signaled Henry to follow him, and left the house.

"You don't think?" suggested Henry, interrogatively, as they took the hill path.

"Shouldn't wonder," answered Sam. "Shouldn't be surprised at anything."

Neither had thought where they were to go; it was only an undefined impulse that bade them follow, — and Fenn's Hole was near their path. The sequence of events forms such an obstinate chain that it is unusual for every link to be destroyed. The man had sunk; his hat had floated and caught in a net-work of fallen branches. Henry was sure that if he had been alone he must have turned coward and fled to tell the news; but Sam's own unconsciousness of any course but the straightforward one could but inspire courage.

"Seem's a pretty sure thing what's become of him," said he, peering forward into the still water. "Wonder what he done it for. I didn't know he set so much by Uncle Ben as that. Good Lord above!" A white gleam caught his eye; that dead sickness of a hand leering up through the glassy surface.

With no more words he waded in; that was not sufficient, and he returned to take off his coat and boots and dive, bringing up — what? A sorry object enough, pitiful indeed for our regard who believe our proud selves to be the incomparable work of creation. They laid it on the bank, and with one accord started running, Sam because



the water had been like ice and he dared not delay, and Henry from force of example. The alarm given, there were men and women enough to help; and again death was brought into the old house. Little Coventry was almost bursting with its sense of dramatic climax. A mystery had grown up in its very midst, — nay, two. A stranger had died within its limits, and another stranger had served her in her illness for no known reason. And now suicide from grief had followed the death of an old man who was "queer," — as doubtless some of the more moderate contemporaries of Jesus may also have considered Him.

Riker, calm of demeanor and faultless in apparel, was coming from the house when the sad procession reached it. He had concluded to bear the shocks of fortune with more equanimity, and had been able to find some comfort in the luxuriance of his beard and the whiteness of his hands, which would doubtless again assist him to some eminence of reputation. Nobody regarded him, but the instant meaning of the burden they carried struck him back with a shock. He grasped the side of the door, falling against it, ashen.

Some one pushed him aside, and the little knot passed in. What they carried seemed like a welcome guest, — one whose presence must bar the portals of whatever abode it found against his entrance. There were relics enough of the com-

mon theology in his mind to prompt the flashing of the question whether it would sometime in the future close against him those heavenly regions on whose possession every man in some measure counts. Into what could the confused blending of emotions have been separated, — remorse, a pang of affection for the boy, rage at the escape of a victim? Whatever it was, passed quickly; the habit of self-control proved his friend. He went in, joining the group of excited talkers about the kitchen stove.

"Nat'ral enough," said one voice. "He was fond o' the old man, an' bein' sort o' half-witted, it upset him."

"That ain't all," said another, with meaning. "There's monkey at the bottom, depend on't." And just then, Riker walking up to the group, an uncomfortable silence settled down, made expressive indeed by nods and half glances.

"I have noticed," began the professor, sadly, "I could but be aware, seeing him so much, that our poor young friend's mind was affected. Of course I said nothing about it to Mr. Adams, but he was often a care to me." Still silence, broken, when it had become too prolonged for even that stolid rural composure, by a woman's voice.

"Maybe it's well he's gone, if Uncle Ben didn't think to provide for him by will. It's hard enough to earn your livin' when you've got all your wits,

an' if he wa'n't quite right I do' know what he could ha' done, unless Lomie'd took him in."

Riker turned towards the woman, and stared at her with a look which arrested her open mouth and eyes, fixing the latter upon himself. His was but the look of an intense introspection; she had merely suggested the supreme fact for him in all this drama of mistakes and sorrow. It was not merely his pupil and Uncle Ben's friend who had died; it was the heir of Uncle Ben's property and Riker's prospective ward. Another shabby trick had been played him; again the victim had outwitted him. Why that fact had not suggested itself first of all, it is difficult to say; it must be remembered, however, that Riker was unused to the buffets of fortune, and it took a very plain, bare statement of facts to convince him that there was nothing further to gain. When he next spoke, his suavity of manner was gone.

"Can you carry me to the depot?" he asked of Henry.

"Can't," said that young man, evincing no great regret. Riker turned to one and another in the room and made the same request. Unwelcome as he was, not one man among them would allow him to ride behind his horse.

"An' I don't know," came Aunt Lomie's even voice, as she paused on her way through the room and caught the dialogue. "I don't know as it's

fittin' for anybody to go away now. 'Pears to me there's always some kind of a trial when anybody's made way with himself."

"So there is!" came in such hoarse and ready response that Riker was again tempted to launch a wholesale curse. Unfamiliar with country ways, he was not sure that he might not be detained and lynched for complicity in Leonard's disagreeable act. But in some attracting of the general attention to another object than himself, he slipped away and walked to the railroad station, where he took the train for Boston.

It seemed to Sam at this stage of the proceedings, not that the last miserable news should be broken gently to Mrs. Mann, but that she should flee from it altogether. He took his mother and Henry into the plot, and though they did not see her great need of consideration as he had done, they were yet willing to be guided by the head of the family. Unless she should insist on going out and thus seeing other people, there was no need of her knowing yet what had happened. And while his mother was baking the biscuits for tea, he dared broach what seemed to him a most audacious plan.

"Mrs. Mann," he began, stroking old Blue with exceeding zeal, which Blue mistook for tribute paid her charms, purring accordingly, "if I was you, I'd go away from here for a visit."

The silence that followed was so long that Sam had time to wish himself at various corners of the earth. It is true that she had not dared to think of her husband and all that their release implied. The weary course of events seemed to have been dragging on so long that, having reached its end, she possibly needed some electrifying shock to bring her into fitness for great joy. This suggestion of her home proved the shock. "Why?" was all she said, however, and though her tone was very soft, it told nothing, and her hand shielded her face from the firelight. "Why?"

"Well," answered Sam, relieved, "you don't look well. You've lost sleep for a good long spell, an' you've took her sickness hard. Now seems to me what you need to do is to get away from here."

"Yes, I shall go soon, immediately after the funeral. I shall go home." She had begun to say "to my husband," but changed the phrase. She had a foolish fancy that the word should first leave her lips when Stephen was by to hear.

"Now why not before?" suggested Sam, persuasively. "Why not right away? There's no need o' tellin' you we'd keep you till Gabriel blowed, if 'twas best for you. But go on a visit an' then come back. Now there never was a funeral that needs us any less than uncle's. Can't you hear how he used to talk about his poor old

body, an' how he'd laugh at us for payin' much attention to it?"

Sarah smiled in loving recollection, but shook her head. Uncle Ben might not care, but she did care to do him reverence. And so Sam told her the last pitiful act of the drama, in as simple a way as his rare common sense suggested. Knowing no more than he of the miserable under-plot which had determined the deed, she saw in it not only a token of the boy's dog-like devotion to his friend, but proof that he was not a responsible agent in his deception. But, to her after surprise, and possibly self-reproach, it did not waken much excitement in her. External tragedy, the convulsions of nations, would have been dwarfed beside the wish that kept her heart beating like a runner's, — the wish to see her husband. Having reached the end of her sentence, for the time being she cast remembrance of its cause away from her, and began to live from the moment that had parted them. Aunt Lomie said she was "all nerved up" from her past experience; but it is probably true that the girl's fine organism could have borne a greater strain than that without yielding, had not that of anticipation been ready to add its force.


"Could it be to-night, Sam?" she said, after they had come home from laying Uncle Ben and Leonard away to become earth. "Could I go to

Boston to-night? My trunk is packed, and — oh, if I could go to-night!”

Sam went, with the same zeal with which he would have put a girdle round the earth had she so commanded, to put on Dill's harness, who, clever horse, thought of her late excursions in search of Doctor Bright, and pricked up her ears. She was driven at a smart trot to the station, for Sam wished to say his farewells and be done with them as soon as possible. It is no light matter, when a goddess leaves your house where she has chanced to sojourn, and goes back to her own bright regions. But Sam's words of parting were brief, and even gruff; he had no blank verse in which to couch his feelings. When he reached home that night, however, he felt that life would not be quite desolate so long as mothers proved so satisfactory. Aunt Lomie's eyes were very bright and blue, and she said, —

“I only hope she'll remember what I told her, — if so be that she ever wants a home, to come here.”

Sarah's heart outran the magic horse. What would he be doing? She pictured him sitting, the light falling on his bright hair, the face — it must surely have gained some lines of pain, in waiting for her — turned to the fire, reading there no hint of her coming. The possibility of his



absence did strike her, but she thrust it aside, ready to cry passionately that she must die if she did not find him. So very strangely are we made! Had there come no reprieve, she might have endured a lifetime of exile; now that the days were ended, she became at once a child crying that joy should not escape her.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### AT HOME.

**W**HEN Stephen came home from his stay in New York, he found on the hall table a note from Linora, couched in her own characteristic phraseology. She was well and happy, as were the other members of the household. It was surprising to her that a severely reformatory atmosphere could prove so refreshing. She and Mrs. Phebe were making shirts for a family of eight motherless boys whom the latter had discovered, — that is, Mrs. Phebe was making the shirts while Linora unfolded to her, meantime, a scheme of philanthropy to which she had some thought of devoting herself. Philanthropy seemed a very fascinating subject, more so, indeed, than spiritualism. And, to conclude, she longed to hear from Sarah, and was to them both a most worthless but faithful friend.

Stephen read the note as he went slowly up stairs, smiling as his mind carried him to the writer, and supplied her words with dramatic accents. "There's a great deal of good in her," he was thinking. "I suppose it's just as truly good as if it didn't exist in that latent way."

The little warm room, clothed in reds, was lighted, and as he reached the threshold—his wife was there. She had heard his step, and was standing almost on tiptoe, winged for flight to him. Let the Creator of our flesh be thanked that there is such joy and peace in human warmth and contact; only the touch of hands and lips can soothe the great joys of meeting.

Could it be that there was some vague, unrecognized disappointment for Stephen, when he could put her far enough away to think of her, that she had denied her ideals and come to him through force of love? Whether it was that she felt the doubt at its birth in his mind or not, she cried in quick reassurance:

"It is right, dear; it is right. There is no one between us!"

"There never was," he said, obstinately recurring to his old ground.

She told him the story briefly, with pitiful, tender words, and he sat listening in great wonder that it could all happen while he had lived quietly on, with no hint from love's clairvoyance. The result of it all was, and always continues to be, a conviction on his part that his wife is not only an angel according to conjugal metaphor, but that she is literally of even finer clay than that appropriated to the race of good and lovely women. That she had loved her enemy, served to lift her into

the region of those ministrants who are said to devote themselves to mortal needs with impartial care. For Sarah, that view of the subject has some soreness; she can but feel that he gives her the credit which rightfully belongs to the influences of softening circumstances. She had only responded to the suggestions of external needs, disregarding which she must have held herself forever ignoble.

After all, how sweetly commonplace it was to see her in her own chair again, to hear her step and voice! Except for the great hunger still in his heart which uttered jealous complaint even when she left him to go into another room, he might have forgotten that she had ever been away. It would seem that happiness must be the natural condition of the soul; how, otherwise, could it so serenely sink into the ways of peace when that is permitted? Stephen henceforth abandoned himself to a strange serenity. It was, to be sure, an audacious state of mind, but he was convinced that they had once for all eaten their bitter bread. Now the powers above must, if only from economy, give them some time to grow and heal the hurts contracted in past struggling.

When Bernard came next day, very serious in anticipation of Stephen's story, he found himself rather at a loss, to be met by glorified faces and

voices containing that fulness of joy which is one expression of music.

"I have come home, and I shall be happy forever," said Sarah, when Stephen left them alone. "Is that enough?"

"Yes; the world seems a very different place. It was a good deal changed before, but I find now that I needed to know you were happy."

So no questions were ever asked, and no explanations given. After certain great convulsions, such as the nearness of moral or physical death felt by these two, the small curiosities of life seem of very slight importance. Ah, but it is a pity that we should so often need avalanches to teach our souls to build firmly!

They talked over the western plan, the three together, and Stephen finally bethought himself of Linora's note, which he read aloud. Bernard, in spite of his new composure, could not yet hear her name without wincing, but he took it bravely enough, and was able afterwards to laugh at himself for retaining the wounds of vanity longer than any more dignified hurts.

"I should like her, by and by, to visit us," said Sarah. "And, Bernard, — I meant to say it before, — let me have your little sister here for a day before you go. Then when we are once acquainted, Stephen and I can invite her here and feel as if we got a little nearer you in your western wilds."

So Peace was born, and was well pleased with her home. Guarded by her and Love, the great white goddess, could the home itself be anything but pure and fair to whomsoever dwelt in it or entered it?

The discomfiture of the wicked is sometimes not as inviting a subject to us, the more indifferent of modern times, as to the righteous psalmist. We are conscious of some soft-hearted commiseration in hearing that Riker found one resting-place after another desolated at his approach. When he reached Boston that night, it was to find that his wife had fled, taking the goodly hoard of money in the house, and leaving him but fifty dollars. Like many timid and downtrodden people, when she did revolt, Mrs. Riker accomplished it with a wholesale thoroughness which was astonishing to those acquainted with her feeble power of will. Riker, in deep disgust, there made a vow that he would never seek her. She had proved too unreliable an investment to pay for the discipline necessarily expended on her. He gave up his house forthwith, and went to another great city, where he took more humble rooms, and began again the exercise of his profession under a new name. It is a sad fact that it can almost always be said of a medium whose tricks are exposed, that he is able to gull a new set of believers without delay. Nay,

such have been known to continue the deception of their previous disciples, after trumping up some story of having for that one time yielded to fraud, because the influences proved inharmonious and the spirits had been unable honestly to materialize. The wholly unscrupulous are not often obliged to confess that their lives have failed, as they count failure and success. The punishment for them must sometime come in the opening of the soul's eye to the ravages wrought where it might have worked only good.

Of course the story of any group of people goes on indefinitely. One could tell how Bernard grew at last into a strong manhood, how he married a wife, — and the place and time of finding her would make another novel, — and how he sent eastward a little book of verses that has been greatly praised, as containing the sweetness and strength of the western air, and a flavor of hope and joy in living, that some greater modern poets have lacked. One might also tell how Mary became a sturdy little school-teacher, a great favorite with Mrs. Mann, with whom she spends her winter vacations. And of all lengthy psychological studies, what longer or more complicated one could be made than of the various emotions of the Coventry people in considering the stirring events there? For some of them they never understood, and have discussed them ever since, by winter fire-

sides and in long summer afternoons. It is quite as well for them, however, that such past history should be theirs, for it would seem that nothing has ever happened since.

That must be amended, however. Last summer Mr. and Mrs. Mann boarded some weeks with Sam Wasson and his wife, who live in Uncle Ben's house. It was Stephen who proposed the plan, and insisted on carrying it out, in order, he said, to take the taste of those sad months from his wife's memory; to force her to remember the place as one where he and she together — lovers still and always — wandered and talked through sweet summer hours. He is not willing that there should be a phase of her life which he has not shared.

And so they visited one after another of the landmarks remaining from her exile there. They had even pitiful thoughts and words for the strange boy who sleeps near Uncle Ben. His was a life they could not understand, but being stunted and unfortunate, it carried its own appeal.

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