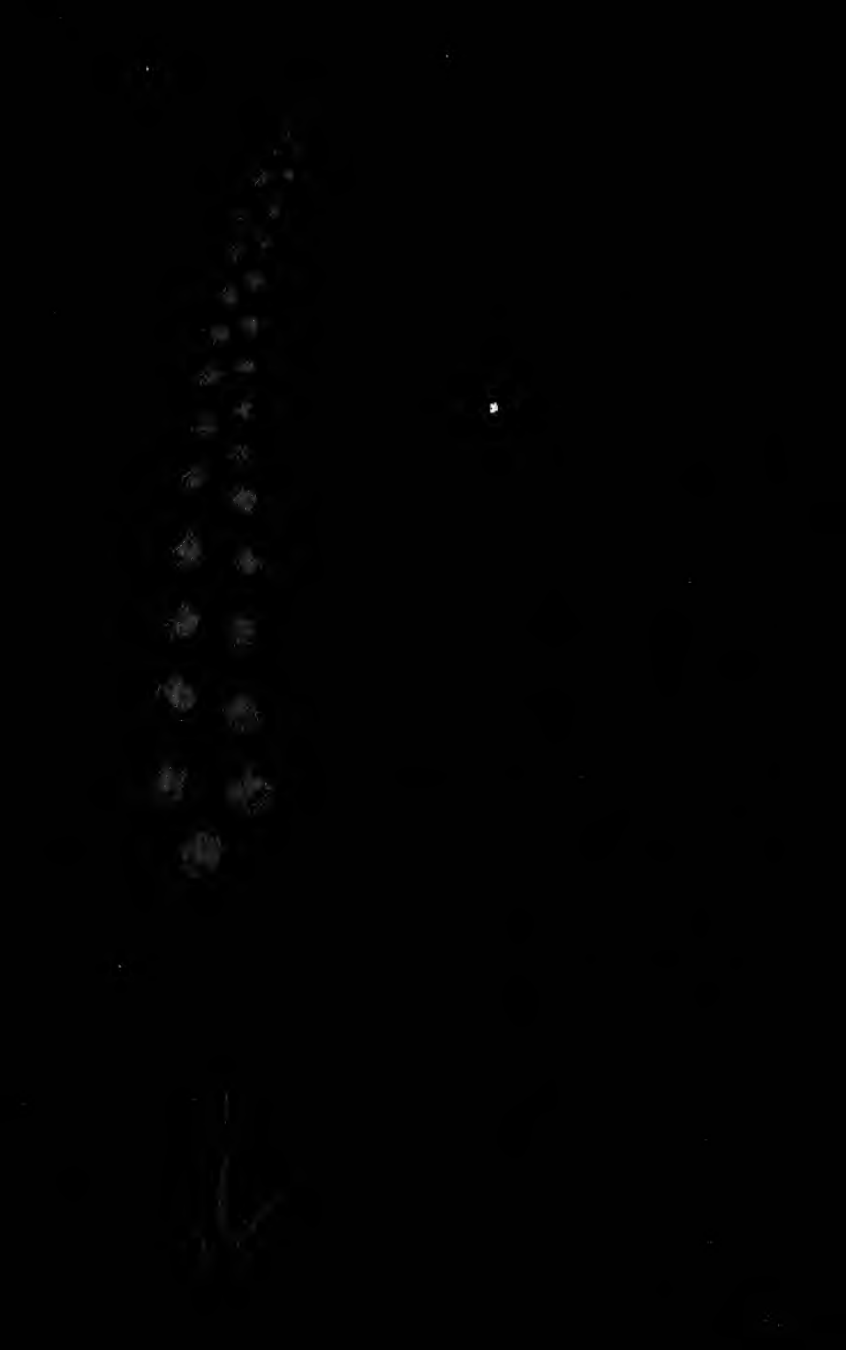

# FOXGLOVE MANOR

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## A Novel

BY
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AUTHOR OF
"GOD AND THE MAN," "THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD,"
"THE NEW ABELARD," ETC.



*IN THREE VOLUMES*
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# FOXGLOVE MANOR.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### BAPTISTO STAYS AT HOME.

As Haldane sat in his study, the evening previous to the morning fixed for his journey to London, Baptisto entered quickly and stood before the desk at which his master was busily writing.

"Can I speak to you, señor?"

Haldane looked and nodded.

"What is it, Baptisto?"

"You have arranged that I shall go with you to-morrow, but I have had

during the last few days an attack of my old vertigo. Can you possibly dispense with my attendance, señor?"

Haldane stared in surprise at the Spaniard's face, which was inscrutable as usual.

"Do you mean to say you wish to remain at home?"

"Certainly, señor."

"Why? because you are ill? On the contrary, you look in excellent health. No; it is impossible. I cannot get along without you."

And Haldane returned to his papers as if the matter was ended.

Baptisto, however, did not budge, but remained in the same position, with his dark eyes fixed upon his master.

"Do me this favour, señor. I am really indisposed, and must beg to remain."

Haldane laughed, for an idea suddenly occurred to him which seemed to explain the mystery of his servant's request.

"My good Baptisto, I think I understand the cause of your complaint, and I am sure a little travel will do you good. It is that dark-eyed widow of the lodge-keeper who attaches you so much to the Manor. The warm blood of Spain still burns in your veins, and, despite your sad experience of women, you are still impressionable. Eh? am I right?"

Baptisto quickly shook his head, with the least suspicion of a smile upon his swarthy face.

"I am not impressionable, señor, and I do not admire your English women; but I wish to remain all the same."

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense! In serious lament,

señor, I beseech you to allow me to remain."

But Haldane was not to be persuaded at what he conceived to be a mere whim of his servant. He still believed that Baptisto had fallen a captive to the charms of Mrs. Ferne, a little plump, dark-eyed woman, with a large family. He had frequently of late seen the Spaniard hanging about the lodge—on one occasion nursing and dandling the youngest child—and he had smiled to himself, thinking that the poor fellow's misanthropy, or rather his misogynism, was in a fair way of coming to an end.

Finding his master indisposed to take his request seriously, Baptisto retired; and presently Haldane strolled into the drawing-room, where he found his wife.

"Have you heard of the last freak of Baptisto? He actually wants to remain

at ease, instead of accompanying me in my journey."

Ellen looked up from some embroidery, in which she was busily engaged.

"On no account!" she exclaimed. "If you don't take him with you, I shall not stay in the place."

"Dear me! said the philosopher. Surely you are not afraid of poor Baptisto!"

"Not afraid of him exactly, but he makes me shiver. He comes and goes like a ghost, and when you least expect him, he is at your elbow. Then, of course, I cannot help remembering he has committed a murder!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Haldane, laughing and throwing himself into a chair. "My dear Ellen, you don't believe the whole truth of that affair.

True, he surprised that Spanish wife of his with her gallant, whom he stabbed; but I have it on excellent authority that it was a kind of duello; the other man was armed, and so it was a fair fight."

Ellen shuddered, and showed more nervous agitation than her husband could quite account for.

"Take him away with you," she cried; "take him away. If you never bring him back, I shall rejoice. If I had been consulted, he would never have been brought to England."

A little later in the evening, when Haldane had returned to his papers, which he was diligently finishing to take away with him, he rang and summoned the Spaniard to his presence.

"Well, it is all settled. I have consulted your mistress, and she insists in your accompanying me to-morrow."

A sharp flash came upon Baptisto's dark eyes. He made an angry gesture; then controlling himself, he said in a low, emphatic voice—

"The *señora* means it? *She* does not wish me to remain?"

"Just so."

"May I ask why?"

"Only because she does not want you, and I do. Between ourselves, she is not quite so certain of you as I am. She has never forgotten that little affair in Spain."

Again the dark eyes flashed, and again there was the same angry gesture, instantly checked.

Haldane continued.

"You are violent sometimes, my Baptisto, and madame is a little afraid of you. When she knows you better, as I know you, she will be aware that you are rational; at present——"

"At present, señor," said Baptisto, "she would rather not have me so near. Ah, I can understand! Perhaps she has reason to be afraid."

Something in the man's manner, which was sinister and almost threatening, jarred upon his master's mind. Rising from his chair, Haldane stood with his back to the fire, and, with a frown, regarded the Spaniard, as he said—

"Listen to me, Baptisto. I have noticed with great annoyance, especially of late, that your manner to madame has been strange, not to say sullen. You are whimsical still, and apt to take offence. If this goes on, if you fail in respect to your mistress, and make your presence uncomfortable in this house, we shall have to part."

To Haldane's astonishment, Baptisto

asked an explanation, and, falling on his knees, seized his master's hand and kissed it eagerly,

"Señor! Señor! you don't comprehend. You don't think I am ungrateful, that I do not remember? But you are wrong. I would die to save you—yes, I would die; and I would kill with my own hand any one who did you an injury. I am your servant, your slave—ah yes, till death."

"Come, get up, and go and finish packing my things."

"But, señor——"

"Get up, I say."

The Spaniard rose, and with folded hands and bent head stood waiting.

"Get ready like a sensible fellow, and let us have no more of this foolery. There, there, I understand. You are exciting yourself for nothing."

"Then, I am to go, señor?"

"Certainly."

Early the next morning Baptisto entered the carriage with his master, and was driven to the railway station, some seven miles away. As they went along, Haldane noticed that the man looked very ill, and that from time to time he put his hand to his head as if in pain. At the railway station, while they were waiting for the train, matters looked most serious. Suddenly the Spaniard fell forward on the platform as if in strong convulsions, his eyes starting out of his head, his mouth foaming. They sprinkled water on his face, chafed his hands, and with some difficulty brought him round.

"The devil!" muttered Haldane to himself. "It looks like epilepsy!"

Baptisto was placed on a seat, and

lay back ghastly pale, as if utterly exhausted.

"Are you better now?" asked Haldane, bending over him.

"A little better, señor."

But seeing him so utterly helpless, and likely to have other seizure, Haldane rapidly calculated in his own mind the inexpediency of taking him away on a long railway journey. After all, the poor fellow had not exaggerated his condition, when he had pleaded illness as an excuse for remaining at home.

"After all," said Haldane, "I think you will have to remain behind."

Baptisto opened his eyes feebly, and stretched out his hands.

"No, señor; since you wish it, I will go."

"You shall remain," answered Haldane, just as the whistle of the coming

train was heard in the distance. Perhaps, if you are better in a day or two, you can follow; but you will go away now in the carriage, and send over to Dr. Spruce, and he will prescribe for you."

Baptisto did not answer, but, taking his master's hand, kissed it gratefully. The train came up. Haldane entered a carriage, and, gazing from the window as the train began to move on, saw Baptisto still seated on the platform, very pale, his eyes half closed, his head recumbent. Near him stood the station master, a railway porter, and the groom who had driven them over from the Manor, all regarding him with languid curiosity.

But the moment the train was gone, Baptisto began to recover. Rising to his feet, and refusing all offers of assist-

ance from the others, he strolled out of the station, and quietly mounted the dog-cart. The groom got up beside him, and they drove homeward through the green lanes.

Now, Baptisto was a gentleman, and seldom entered or tolerated familiarity from his fellow-servants. Had it been otherwise, the groom might have asked the explanation of his curious conduct; for no sooner was he mounted on the dog-cart, and driving along in the fresh air, than the Spaniard seemed to forget all about his recent illness, sat erect like a man in perfect health, and exhibited none of the curious symptoms which had so alarmed his master.

And when the groom, who was a thirsty individual, suggested that they should make a detour and call at the Blue Boar Inn for a little stimulant,

chiefly as a corrective to the attack from which his companion had just suffered, the Spaniard turned his dark eyes round about him and actually winked. This proceeding so startled the groom that he almost dropped the reins, for never in the whole course of his sojourn had the foreign gent condescended to such a familiarity.

They drove round to the Blue Boar, however, and the groom consumed the brandy, while Baptisto, who was a tee-totaller, had some lemonade, and lit his cigar. Then they drove home to the Manor, Baptisto sitting with folded arms, completely and absolutely recovered.

About noon that day, as Mrs. Haldane moved about the conservatory, looking after her roses, a servant announced the Rev. Mr. Santley. Ellen flushed, a little startled at the announcement,

coming so soon after her husband's departure, and her first impulse was to deny herself; but before she could do so the clergyman himself appeared at the door of the conservatory.

"You are an early visitor," she said coldly, bending her face over the flowers.

"It is just noon," answered the clergyman, "and I was going home from a sick-call. Has Mr. Haldane gone?"

"Yes. Did you wish to see him?"

"Not particularly, though I had a little commission which I might have asked him to execute had I been in time."

Surely the man's fall had already begun. Ellen knew perfectly well that he was lying. In point of fact, he had seen the dog-cart drive past on the way to the station, and he had been unable to resist the temptation of coming over without delay.

With face half averted, Ellen led the way into the drawing-room, and on to the terrace beyond, from which there was a pleasant view of the Manor, the plain, and the surrounding country. Just below the gardens were laid out in flower-beds and gravel walks; but the dark shrubberies were beyond, and at a little distance, well in the shadow of the trees, the old chapel.

There was a long silence. Ellen stood silent, gazing upon the woods and lawn, while the clergyman stood just behind her, evidently regarding her.

At last she could bear it no longer, but, turning quickly, exclaimed—

"Why did you come? Have you anything to say to me?"

"Nothing, Ellen, if you are angry," replied the clergyman.

"Angry! You surely know best if I

have cause. After what has passed, I think it is better that we should not meet," she added in a low voice. "At least, not often."

He saw she was agitated, and he took a certain pleasure in her agitation, for it showed him that she was not quite unsusceptible to the influence he might bring to bear upon her. As he stood there, his sad eyes fixed upon her, his being conscious of every movement she made, of every breath she drew, he felt again the deep fatality of his passion, and silently yielded to it.

There was another long pause, which he was the first to break.

"Do you know, Ellen, I sometimes tremble for you, when I think of your husband's opinions. In time you may learn to share them, and then we should be further apart than ever. At present,

it is my sole comfort to know you possess that living faith without which every soul is lost."

"Lost?" she repeated, in a bewildering way, not looking at him.

"I don't mean in the vulgar sense; the theological ideas of damnation have never had my sanction, far less my sympathy. But materialism degrades the believer, and sooner or later comes a disbelief in all that is holy, beautiful, and sanctified. It is a humble creed, the new creed of science, and fatal to spiritual hopes."

"Does it matter so much what one believes, if one's life is good?"

"It matters so much that I would rather see one I loved dead before my feet than an avowed unbeliever. But there, I have not come to preach to you. When does Mr. Haldane return?"

"As I told you: in a fortnight, perhaps sooner."

"And during his absence we shall meet again, I hope?"

She hesitated and looked at him. His eyes were fixed on the distant woods, though he stood expectantly, as if awaiting her reply, which did not come.

"Can you not trust me?" he exclaimed. "You know I am your friend?"

"I hope so; but I think it is best that you should not come here. If you were married, it would be different."

"I shall not marry," he replied impatiently. "What then? I am a priest of God, and you may trust me fully. If our Church commenced the confessional, you might enter it without fear, and I—I would listen to the outpourings of your heart. Should you in your grief be afraid to utter them?"

She moved away from him, turning her back; but betrayed herself. He saw the bright colour mount to her neck and mantle there.

"What nonsense you talk!" she said presently, with a forced laugh. "Are you going over to Rome?"

"I might go over to the evil place itself, Ellen, if *you* were there."

There was no mistaking the words, the tone, in their diabolic gentleness, their suavity of supreme and total self-surrender. She felt helpless in spite of herself. The man was overmastering her, and rapidly encroaching. She felt like a person morally stifled, and with a strong effort tried to shake the evil influence away.

"I was right," she said. "We must not meet."

He smiled sadly.

"As you please. I will come, or I will go, at your will. You have only to say to me, 'Go and destroy yourself, obliterate yourself for ever from my life, blot yourself out from the roll of living beings,' and I shall obey you."

Her spirit revolted more and more against the steadfast, self-assured obliquity of the man. She saw that he was desperate, and that the danger grew with his desperation. In every word he spoke, and in his whole manner, there was the sombre assurance of something between them, of some veiled, but excitable sympathy, which she herself utterly ignored. That moment of wild delirium, when he caught her in his arms and kissed her, seemed, instead of severing them, to have made a link between them. He had been conscious of her indignation, he had even professed

penitence; but she saw to her dismay that the fact of his folly filled him, not with fear, but with courage. So she determined to end it once and for ever.

"Let us understand each other," she said, trembling violently. "How dare you talk as if there was any community of feeling between us? How dare you presume upon my patience, Mr. Santley? It is wretched; it is abominable! When you talk of killing yourself, when you assume that I have any serious interest in you, or any right over you, you insult me and degrade yourself. We are nothing, and can be nothing to each other."

"I know that," he replied. "Do you think I am so mad as not to know that?"

"Then why do you come here to torture me, and to tempt me?"

The word came from her before she

knew it, and her face became scarlet; but he uttered no protest, and raised his white hand in deprecation.

"Tempt you? God forbid!"

"I did not mean that," she murmured, in confusion; "but you must know, you cannot fail to know, that it is not right for a married woman to receive such expressions of sympathy, however spiritual. It is that which makes me hate the Catholic Church. The priest promises you his office, and too often makes mischief under the guise of religion."

"Do you accuse me of doing so?" he demanded, in the same sad, calm voice.

"No; but you should remember that you have not the custody of my soul, and I have no right to influence your actions. Come," she continued, with rather a

forced laugh, "talk to me like a true English clergyman. Tell me of the old women of the village, and their ailments; ask me for a subscription to give to your new soup kitchen; talk to me as if Mr. Haldane were listening to us —of your schools, your parish troubles— and you shall find me an eager listener!"

"I will talk of anything, Ellen, so long as I may talk to you."

Again that manner of despairing certainty, of assured and fatal sympathy. The man was incorrigible.

She waited impatiently for some minutes, but finding he did not speak again, she held out her hand.

"Since you have nothing more to tell me," she observed lightly, "I think I will say good morning. I am going to order the carriage and drive to Omberley."

"When may I come again?"

"When you have anything really parochial to say to me. Please go now."

Their eyes met, and hers sank beneath his own.

As he crossed towards the door it opened, and Baptisto appeared upon the threshold.

"Did you ring, señora?"

At the sight of the Spaniard's dull impressive face Mrs. Haldane started violently, and went a little pale. She had heard nothing of his return, and he came like an apparition.

"Baptisto! What are you doing here? I thought——"

She paused in wonder, while the Spaniard inclined his head and bowed profoundly.

"I was taken with a vertigo at the

station, and the señor permitted me to return."

"Then your master has gone alone?"

"Yes, señora."

"Very well. Order the carriage at once. I am going out."

Baptisto bowed and retired, quickly closing the door.

Santley, who had stood listening during the above conversation, now prepared to follow, but, glancing at Ellen, saw that she was unusually agitated.

"That is a sinister-looking fellow," he remarked. "I am afraid he has frightened you."

"Indeed, no," she replied; "though I confess I was startled at his unexpected return. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, again taking her hand and holding it up a moment in his own.

Passing from the drawing-room, he again came face to face with Baptisto, who was lurking in the lobby, but who drew aside with a respectful bow, to allow the clergyman to pass.

He crossed the hall, descended the stone steps of the portico, and walked slowly towards the lodge. As he passed the ruined chapel, its shadows seemed to fall upon his spirit and leave it in ominous darkness. He shivered slightly, and drew his cloak about him, then with his eyes cast down he thoughtfully walked on.

He did not glance back. Had he done so, he would have seen Baptisto standing on the steps of the Manor house, watching him with a sinister smile.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CONJURATION.

It was a chill day in early autumn, and as Charles Santley passed along the dark avenue of the Manor his path was strewn here and there with freshly fallen leaves. Dark shadows lay on every side, and the heaven above was full of a sullen, cheerless light. It was just the day for a modern Faust, in the course of his noonday walk, to encounter, in some fancied guise, canine or human, the evil one of old superstition.

Be that as it may, Santley knew at last that the hour of his temptation was

over, and that the evil one was not far away. He knew it, by the sullen acquiescence of evil of his own soul; by the deliberate and despairing precision with which he had chosen the easy and downward path; by the sense of darkness which already obliterated the bright moral instincts in his essentially religious mind. He had spoken the truth when he said he would follow Ellen Haldane anywhere, even to the eternal pit itself. Her beauty possessed him and disturbed him with the joy of impure thoughts; and now that he perceived his own power to trouble her peace of mind, he rejoiced at the strength of his passion with a truly diabolic perversity.

As he came out of the lodge gate he saw, far away over the fields, the spire of his own church.

He laughed to himself.

But the man's faith in spiritual things, so far from being shaken, was as strong as ever. His own sense of moral deterioration, of spiritual backsliding, only made him believe all the more fervently in the heaven from which he had fallen, or might choose to fall. For it is surely a mistake to picture, as so many poets have pictured, the evil spirit as one ignorant of or insensible to good. Far wiser is the theology which describes Satan as the highest of angelic spirits—the spirit which, above all others, had beheld and contemplated the Godhead, and had then, in sheer revolt and negation, deliberately and advisedly decided its own knowledge and rejected its own truthright. Santley was, in his basest moods, essentially a godly man—a man strangely curious of the beauty of good-

ness, and capable of infinite celestial dreams. If, like many another, he confused the flesh and the spirit, he did no more than many sons of Eve have done.

As he walked slowly along he mused, somewhat to this effect—

"I love this woman. In her heart she loves me. Her superior spiritual endowments are mystically alive to those I myself possess. Her husband is a clod, an unbeliever, with no spiritual promptings. In his sardonic presence, her aspirations are chilled, frozen at the very fountain-head; whereas, in mine, all the sweetness and the power of her nature are aroused, though with a certain irritation. If I persist, she must yield to the slow moral mesmerism of my passion, and eventually fall. Is this necessarily evil? Am I of set purpose

sinning? Is it not possible that even a breach of the moral law might, under certain conditions, lead us both to a higher religious place—yes, even to a deeper and intenser consciousness of God?"

And again—

"What *is* sin? Surely it is better than moral stagnation, which is death. There are certain deflections from duty which, like the side stroke of a bird's wing, may waft us higher. In the arms of this woman, I should surely be nearer God than crawling alone on the bare path of duty, loving nothing, hoping nothing, becoming nothing. What is it that Goethe says of the Eternal Feminine which lead us ever upward and onward? Which was the highest, Faust before he loved Marguerite, or Faust after he passed out of the shadow

of his sin into the sphere of imperial and daring passion? I believe in God, I love this woman. Out of that belief, and that love, shall I not become a living soul?"

Was this the man's own musing, or rather the very devil whispering in his ear? From such fragmentary glimpses of his mind as have been given, we can at least guess the extent of his intellectual degradation.

As he walked along the country road, his pale countenance became seraphic; just so may the face of Lucifer have looked when he plumed his wings for deliberate flight from heaven.

He stepped into a roadside farm and had a glass of milk, which the good woman of the place handed to him with a sentiment of adoration; he looked so gentle, so at peace with all living things. His

white hand rested for a moment on the head of her little girl, in gentle benediction. He had never felt more tenderly disposed to all creation than at that moment, when he was prepared to dip a pen into his own heart's blood, and sign the little promissory note which Mephistopheles carries, always ready, in his pocket. He had hated his congregation before; now he loved them exceedingly—and all the world.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### AT THE OPERA.

On arriving in London, George Haldane was driven straight to the house of an old friend at Chelsea, where he always stayed during his visits to the Metropolis. This friend was Lovell Blakiston, as eccentric a being in his own way as Haldane himself was in his. He had been, since boyhood, in the India Office, where he still put in an appearance several hours a day, and whence he still drew a large income, with the immediate right to a retiring pension whenever he choose to take it. He was a great

student, especially of the pagan poets and philosophers; and the greater part of his days and nights were spent in his old-fashioned library, opening with folding doors on to a quiet lawn, which led in its turn to the very river-side. He had two pet aversions—modern progress, in the shape of railroads, electricity, geology; all the new business of science and modern religion, especially in its connection with Christian theology. He was, in short, a pagan pure and simple, fond of old books, old wine, old meditations, and old gods. However he might differ with Haldane on such subjects as the nebular hypothesis, which he hated with all his heart, he agreed with him sufficiently on the subject of Christianity. Both had a cordial dislike for church ceremonies and church bells.

The two gentlemen had another taste in common. This was the opera, which both enjoyed hugely, though Blakiston never ceased to regret the disappearance of that old operatic institution, the ballet, which, like a rich dessert wine, used to bring the feast of music to a delightfully sensuous conclusion. Haldane was too young a man to remember such visions of loveliness as Cerito, whom his old friend had often gone to see in company with Horne Took.

So it happened that two or three days after his arrival, Haldane accompanied his host to the opera house, where Patti was to appear in "Traviata."

Seated comfortably in the stalls, he was glancing quietly round the house between the acts, when his attention was attracted to a face in one of the private boxes. A pale, Madonna-like, yet

girlish face, set in golden hair, with soft blue eyes, and an expression so forlorn, so wistful, so ill at ease, that it was almost painful to behold.

Haldane started in surprise.

"What is the matter?" said his friend. "Have you recognized anybody?"

"I am not certain," returned Haldane, raising his opera-glass and surveying the face through them. Then, after a long look, he added as if to himself, "I am almost sure it is the same."

"Do you mean that young lady in black, seated in the second tier?"

"Yes. Oblige me by looking at her, and tell me what you think of her."

Blakiston raised his opera-glass, and took a long look.

"Well?" asked Haldane.

"She reminds me of one of your detestable pre-Raphaelistic drawings,

shockheaded and vacuous. She is pretty, I grant you, but she has no expression."

"I should say, on the contrary, a very marked expression of deep pain."

"Tight lacing," grunted Blakiston. "Your modern women have no shape, since Cerito."

Here Haldane rose from his seat. Looking up again, he had met the young lady's eyes, and had perceived at once that she recognized him.

"I am going to speak to her," he explained. "She is a neighbour of ours, and a friend of my wife."

He made his way to the second tier, and finding the door of the box open, he looked in, and saw the person he sought, seated in company with an elderly lady and a young man.

"Miss Dove!" he said, advancing into

the box. "Although we have only met twice, I thought I could not be mistaken."

Edith (for it was she) turned quickly and took his outstretched hand.

"How strange to find you here!" she exclaimed. "Is Mrs. Haldane with you?"

"No, indeed. I left her to the pious duties of the parish, which she is fulfilling daily, I expect, in company with your seraphic friend the minister."

Edith looked at him with strange surprise, but said nothing.

"When did you come to town?" he asked. "I thought you were quite a country young lady, and never ventured into the giddy world of London."

"I was not very well," replied Edith, "and my aunt invited me to stop with her a few weeks. This is my aunt, Mrs. Hetherington; and this gentleman is my

cousin Walter." Here Edith went somewhat nervously through the ceremony of introduction. She added, with a slight flush, "My cousin insisted on bringing us here to-night. I did not wish to come."

"Why not?" demanded Haldane, noticing her uneasiness.

"Because I did not think it right; and I have been thinking all the evening what the vicar will say when I tell him I have been to such a place."

Here the old lady shook her head ominously, and gave a slight groan.

"Is the place so terrible," asked Haldane, smiling, "now you have seen it?"

"No, it is very pretty; and of course the singing is beautiful. But Mr. Santley does not approve of the theatre, and I am sorry I came."

"Nonsense, Edith," said young Hetherington, with a laugh. "You

know you wanted to see the 'Traviata.' The fact is," he continued, turning to Haldane, "my mother and my cousin are both terribly old-fashioned. My mother here is Scotch, and believes in the kirk, the whole kirk, and nothing but the kirk; and as for Edith, she is entirely, as they say in Scotland, under the minister's 'thoomb.' I thought they would have enjoyed themselves, but they have been doing penance all the evening."

Without paying attention to her cousin's remarks, Edith was looking thoughtfully at Haldane.

"When do you return to Omberley?" she asked.

"I am not sure—in a fortnight, at the latest. I am going on to France."

"And Mrs. Haldane will remain all that time alone?"

"Of course," he replied. "Oh, she

will not miss me. She has her household duties, her parish, her garden—to say nothing of her clergyman. And you, do *you* stay long in London?"

"I am not sure; I think not. I am tired of it already."

Again that weary, wistful look, which sat so strangely on the young, almost childish face. She sighed, and gazed sadly around the crowded house. A minute later, Haldane took his leave, and rejoined his friend in the stalls. Looking up at the end of the next act, he saw that the box was empty.

The women had yielded to their consciences, and departed before the end of the performance.

That night, when Haldane went home to Chelsea, he found a letter from his wife. It was a long letter, but contained no news whatever, being chiefly occupied

with self-reproaches that the writer had not accompanied her husband in his pilgrimage. This struck Haldane as rather peculiar, as in former communications Ellen had expressed no such dissatisfaction; but he was by nature and of set habit unsuspicious, and he set it down to some momentary *ennui*. The letter contained no mention whatever of Mr. Santley, but in the postscript, where ladies often put the most interesting part of their correspondence, there was a reference to the Spanish valet, Baptisto.

"As I told you," wrote Ellen, "Baptisto seems in excellent health, though he is mysterious and unpleasant as usual. He comes and goes like a ghost, but if he made you believe that he was ill, he was imposing upon you. I do so wish you had taken him with you."

Haldane folded up the letter with a smile.

"Poor Baptisto!" he thought, "I suppose it is as I suspected, and the little widow at the lodge is at the bottom of it all."

After a few days' sojourn at Chelsea, during which time he was much interested in certain spiritualistic investigations which were just then being conducted by the London *savants*, to the manifest confusion of the spirits and indignation of true believers, Haldane went to Paris, where he read his paper before the French Society to which he belonged. There we shall leave him for a little time, returning to the company of Miss Dove, with whom we have more immediate concern.

Mother and son lived in a pleasant

house overlooking Clapham Common, a district famous for its religious edification, its young ladies' seminaries, and its dissenting chapels. Mrs. Hetherington was the wealthy widow of a Glasgow merchant, long settled in London, and she set her face rigidly against modern thought, ecclesiastical vestments, and cooking on the sabbath. Curiously enough, her son Walter, who inherited a handsome competence, was a painter, and followed his heathen occupation with much talent, and more youthful euthusiasm. His landscapes, chiefly of Highland scenes, had been exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy. His mother, whose highest ideas of art were founded on a superficial acquaintance with the Scripture pieces of Noel Paton, and an occasional contemplation of biblical masterpieces in the Doré Gal-

lery, would have preferred to have seen him following in his father's footsteps, and even entering the true kirk as a preacher; but his sympathies were pagan, and a gloomy childish experience had not fitted him with the requisite enthusiasm for John Calvin and the sabbath.

Walter Hetherington was a fine fresh young fellow of three and twenty, and belonged to the clever set of Scotch painters, headed by Messrs. Pettie, Richardson, and Peter Graham. He was "cannie" painstaking, and rather sceptical, and, putting aside his art, which he really loved, he felt true enthusiasm for only one thing in the world—his cousin Edith, whom he hoped and longed to make his wife.

As a very young girl, Edith had seemed rather attached to him; but of late years,

during which they saw each other only at long intervals, she seemed colder and colder to his advances. He noticed her indifference, and set it down somewhat angrily to girlish fanaticism, for he had little or no suspicion whatever that another man's image might be filling her thoughts. Once or twice, it is true, when she sounded the praises of her Omberley pastor, his zeal, his goodness, his beauty of discourse, he asked himself if he could possibly have a rival *there;* but knowing something of the relinquent fancies of young vestals, he rejected the idea. To tell the truth, he rather pitied the Rev. Mr. Santley, whom he had never seen, as a hard-headed, dogmatic, elderly creature of the type greatly approved by his mother, and abundant even in Clapham. He had no idea of an Adonis in a clerical

frock coat, with a beautiful profile, white hands, and a voice gentle and low—the latter an excellent thing in woman, but a dangerous thing in an unmarried preacher of the Word.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### WALTER HETHERINGTON.

When the party got home from the opera, it was only half-past ten. They sat down to a frugal supper in the dining-room.

"I am sorry you did not wait till the last act," said the young man, after an awkward silence. "Patti's death scene is magnificent."

"I'm thinking we heard enough," his mother replied. "I never cared much for play-acting, and I see little sense in screeching about in a foreign tongue. I'd rather have half an hour of the

Reverend Mr. Mactavish's discourses than a night of fooling like yon."

"What do *you* say, Edith? I'm sure the music was very pretty."

"Yes, it was beautiful; but not knowing much of Italian, I could not gather what it was all about."

"It is an operatic version of a story of the younger Dumas," explained Walter, with an uncomfortable sense of treading on dangerous ground. "The story is that of a beautiful woman who has lived an evil life, and is reformed through her affection for a young Frenchman. His friends think he is degrading himself by offering to marry her, and to cure him she pretends to be false and wicked. In the end, she dies in his arms, broken-hearted. It is a very touching subject, I think, though some people consider it immoral."

Here the matron broke in with quiet severity.

"I wonder yon woman—Patti, you call her—doesn't think shame to appear in such dresses. One of them was scarcely decent, and I was almost ashamed to look at her—the creature!"

"But her singing, mother, her singing; was it not divine?"

"It was meeddling loud; but I've heard far finer in the kirk. Edith, my bairn, you're tired, I'm thinking. We'll just read a chapter, and get to bed."

So the chapter was read, and the ladies retired, while Walter walked off to his studio to have a quiet pipe. He was too used to his mother's peculiarities to be much surprised at the failure of the evening's entertainment; but he felt really amazed that Edith had not been more impressed.

The next morning, when they met at breakfast, Edith astonished both her aunt and cousin by expressing her wish to return to Omberley as soon as possible.

"Go away already!" cried the young man. "'Why, you've hardly been here a week, and you've seen nothing of town, and we've all the picture-galleries to visit yet."

"And you have not heard Mr. Mactavish discoorse," cried his mother. "No, no; you must bide awhile."

But Edith shook her head, and they saw her mind was made up.

"I can come again at Christmas, but I would rather go now," she said.

"But why have you changed your mind?" inquired her cousin eagerly.

"I think they want me at home; and there is a great deal of church work to be done in the village.

Walter was not deceived by this excuse, and tried persuasion, but it was of no avail. The girl was determined to return home immediately. He little knew the real cause of her determination. Haldane's presence in London had filled her, in spite of herself, with jealous alarm. Ellen Haldane was alone at the Manor, with no husband's eyes to trouble her; and, despite the clergyman's oath of fidelity, Edith could not trust him.

Yes, she would go home. It was time to put an end to it all, to remind Santley of his broken promises, and to claim their fulfilment. If he refused to do her justice, she would part from him for ever; not, however, without letting the other woman, her rival, know his true character.

It was arranged that she should leave

by an early train next morning. For the greater part of the day she kept her room, engaged in preparations for the journey; but towards evening Walter found her alone in the drawing-room. The old lady, his mother, who earnestly wished him to marry his cousin, had contrived to be out of the way.

"I am so sorry you are going," the young man said. "We see so little of each other now."

Edith was seated with her back to the window, her face in deep shade. She knew by her cousin's manner that he was more than usually agitated, and she dreaded what was coming—what had come, indeed, on several occasions before. She did not answer, but almost unconsciously heaved a deep sigh.

"Does that mean that you are sorry too?" asked Walter, leaning towards her to see her face.

"Of course I am sorry," she replied, with a certain constraint.

"I wish I could believe that. Somehow or other, Edith, it seems to me that you would rather be anywhere than here. Well, you have some cause; for the house is dreary enough, and we are all dull people. But you and I used to be such friends! More like brother and sister than mere cousins. Is that all over? Are we to drift farther and farther apart as the years pass on? It seems to me as if it might come to that."

"How absurd you are!" said Edith, trying to force a laugh, but failing lamentably. "You know I was always fond of you and—and—of your mother."

Walter winced under the sting of the last sentence, so unconsciously given.

"I don't mean that at all," he exclaimed. "Of course you liked us, as

relations like each other; but am I never to be more to you than a mere cousin? You know I love you, that I have loved you ever since we were boy and girl; and once—ah, yes, I thought you cared for me a little. Edith, what does it mean? Why are you so changed?"

Edith was more deeply changed than ever her cousin could guess. Had he been able to see her face, he would have been wonderstricken at its expression of mingled shame and despair. She tried to reply; but before she could do so her voice was choked, and her tears began to fall. In a moment he was close beside her, and bending over her, with one hand outstretched to clasp her.

"Now, you are crying. Edith, my darling, what is it?"

"Don't touch me," she sobbed, shrinking from him. "I can't bear it."

"Forgive me, if I have said anything to pain you; and oh, my darling! remember it is my love that carries me away. I do love you, Edith. I wish to God I could prove to you how much!"

He took her hand in his; but she drew it forcibly from him, and, shrinking still further away, entirely losing her self-control, sobbed silently.

"Don't!" she exclaimed. "For pity's sake, be silent. You do not know what you are saying. I am not fit to become your wife."

He moved a few steps from her, and waited until her wild, hysterical sobbing should have ceased. She commanded herself quickly, as it the wild outburst which she had not been able to control

had terrified her. Then she rose, and would have left the room, but the young man stopped her.

"Edith," he said, "surely you did not mean what you said just now, that you are not fit to become my wife?"

"Yes," she replied quickly; "I did mean it."

She was glad that her face was turned from him, and that the room was in partial darkness. She was glad that she was able to steady her voice, and to give a direct reply.

He did not answer; she felt he was waiting for her to speak on.

"Even if two people love each other," she said, trembling, "or only think they do, which is too often the case, they have no right to thoughtlessly contract that holy tie. There cannot be perfect happiness in this world without perfect

spiritual communion. I know—I feel sure—that this does not exist between you and me."

The young man flushed, and his brow contracted somewhat angrily.

"Take time to think it over," he said quickly; "this is not your own heart that is speaking now. The seeds which that man, your clergyman, has been sowing in your heart have borne fruit. Religion is changing your whole nature. It is alienating you hopelessly from all to whom you are so dear; it is making you unjust, cruelly unkind, to yourself, but doubly so to others, under the shallow pretence that you are serving God."

She did not interrupt him; but when he ceased, she put out her hand and said, quickly but firmly—

"Good night."

"Good night," he repeated. "It is so early, surely you are not going to your room already? This is our last night together, remember."

"I am so tired," returned the girl, wearily. "I must get a good night's rest, since I am to start early in the morning."

"And you will not say another word?"

"I don't know that there is anything more that I can say."

"You are angry with me, Edith. Before you go, say at least that you forgive me."

"I am not angry; indeed, I am glad you have spoken. I know now I should never have come here. I know I must never come again."

So, without another word, they parted. Edith went up to her room. Walter

sought his, and there he remained all the evening, sitting in the darkness, pondering over the unaccountable change which had taken place in the girl.

Yes, she was changed; but was it hopeless, and altogether unexpected? Might she not, with gentle care, be freed from this hateful influence of the Church? Walter believed that might be so. Already he seemed to see light through the cloud, and to trace the secret of this man's influence over her. Edith was imaginative and highly fanatical; he had appealed to her imagination. Being a High Church clergyman, he had employed two powerful agents—colour and form. He had scattered the shrine at which she worshipped with soft and durable perfumes, and had set up sacred symbols; and he had said, "Kneel before these; cast

down all your worldly wishes and earthly affections." She, being intoxicated, as it were, had yielded to the spell. It was part of his plan, thought Walter, that she must neither marry nor form any other earthly tie; for was it not through her, and such as her, that his beloved Church was able to sustain its full prestige? The Church must reign supreme in her heart, as it had done in that of many another vestal; it was at the altar alone that her gifts of love and devotion must be burned. She must be sacrificed, as many others had been before her, and the Church would stand.

This was the young man's true view of the case. He believed it, for he had learnt in his home to hate other worldliness; but though he fancied he saw the nature of the discord, he could not

as yet perceive the directest means of cure.

The next morning, when Edith, looking very pale and weary, but still very pretty in her simple travelling costume, came down to breakfast, she was a little surprised to find Walter already there. His manner was kind and considerate, as it had always been, and he made no reference whatever to what had passed between them on the previous night. They sat and carried on a constrained but polite conversation; but both were glad when it was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Hetherington. The old lady was filled with genuine regret at her niece's sudden departure, and, while presiding at the breakfast-table, was so busy laying down plans for her speedy return that she did not notice that every morsel on Edith's plate re-

mained untouched, and that, while sipping her tea, her eyes wandered continually towards the window, as if anxiously watching for the cab which was to take her away. Walter noticed it with pain, and remained discreetly silent.

As soon as the cab arrived, he left the room, ostensibly to superintend the removal of Edith's luggage, but in reality to be absent at the leave-taking between his mother and his cousin.

He accompanied Edith to the station. It was merely an act of common courtesy, to which she could make no possible objection. On the way there was very little said on either side. She was silent from preoccupation, and he feared to tread on dangerous ground. But when they were near their parting, when Edith was comfortably seated in

the train, and he stood by the open carriage door, he ventured in a covert manner to refer to what had passed.

"The house will be brighter in winter-time," he said, "and we shall have more means of amusing you. You will come back at Christmas, Edith?"

She started, dropped his hand, and drew herself from him.

"No, I think not," she said; "it is always a busy time with us at Christmas. There is much to be done in the church."

This was their good-bye; for before he could say more the guard noisily closed the carriage doors, and whistled shrilly. Mechanically Walter took off his hat, and stood sadly watching the train as it moved away.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CHURCH BELLS—AND A DISCORD.

EDITH was glad that the next day was Sunday.

She rose early, dressed hurriedly, and went for a walk in the fresh morning air. She felt instinctively that she had a battle to fight, and that all her resources must be brought into play to gain her the victory. If her influence over the man was to continue, she knew there was one way by which she could regain it. With such pale cheeks and lacklustre eyes as she had brought with her from London, where, she asked,

would her chances be against Ellen Haldane's fresh country charms? She must banish all painful thoughts for the present, and try to win back the roses which he had caused to fade.

She walked for above an hour; and when she returned home, she went straight into the garden to gather a little bouquet of flowers. Then she went up to her room to dress for church. When she came down to breakfast, she wore her prettiest costume, and the bunch of flowers was fastened at her throat.

Her aunt had a headache, she said, and could not go to church. Edith was not sorry; indeed, when the time came for her to set out, she was glad she was alone.

She arrived at the church rather earlier than usual, nevertheless she

walked straight in, and no sooner had she crossed the threshold than she obeyed a sudden impulse which seized her, and determined for that day at least not to occupy her usual seat. She selected one which was some distance from the pulpit, but from which she could command an excellent view of the pew belonging to Foxglove Manor.

The congregation gathered, but the Haldane's pew was empty. Edith watched it with feverish impatience. Presently, just as the tolling bell was about to cease, she saw Mrs. Haldane enter and take her seat.

Two minutes later, Mr. Santley, clothed in his white, priestly robes, ascended the steps of the reading-desk, and bent his beautiful head in prayer. As he rose to his feet, Edith, who had been watching him in extreme fascina-

tion, saw his gaze wandering round the church, and finally fix upon the face of the mistress of Foxglove Manor. She saw, or thought she saw, the lady's eyelids quiver and finally droop beneath that glance; while the clergyman arose, like a sick man suddenly restored to health, and began to read the lessons for the day.

How that morning passed Edith scarcely knew. She remained like one in a dream, mechanically going though the religious forms, but feeling as if her heart's blood was slowly ebbing away. Of one thing only she was conscious—that of all those upturned faces before him the clergyman seemed to see but one, but that from this one face seemed to draw his inspiration, as the earth draws life and light from the shining rays of the sun.

At length the service was over, the congregation dispersed, and Edith found herself walking up and down the quiet lanes alone, panting for air, feeling sick at heart, and shivering through and through, though she stood in the warm rays of sunlight. Go home she could not. She must see Mr. Santley before she could face another human soul.

She turned, intending to go to the Vicarage, but when she was yet within some distance of the house, she saw coming towards her the very man she sought.

She paused, not knowing whether to feel glad or sorry. It was certainly better than having to go to the Vicarage, yet now that the meeting was so near, she shrank from it. She made a desperate effort to compose herself, and paused, waiting for him. The clergy-

man was evidently lost in deep thought, his head was bent, his eyes were fixed on the ground, and he was quite close to Edith before he saw her.

When their eyes met he paused, almost involuntarily, a momentary flush of mingled annoyance and surprise passed over his face, then he recovered himself, walked forward, and quietly extended his hand.

"Miss Dove!" he said, glancing nervously round. "I had no idea you were at home. How do you do?"

It had been agreed between them, long before, that so long as their secret remained a secret, no warmer greeting than this must be exchanged between them in public. When the proposition had been made, Edith had quietly assented. What was it to her that Santley should bow his head with a

politeness even more frigid than he bestowed upon any one of his flock. Had she not seen the burning light of love in his half-lowered eyes? and had she not known that a few hours later she would feel his caressing arms about her, and hear his rich, mellow voice whispering tenderly in her ear?

But now all was changed. The frigid bow which had formerly been the prologue, had rapidly developed into the play. There were no stolen meetings now; no consoling whisperings. The clergyman had latterly become alive to the risk of such indulgences, and had gradually allowed them to cease; and Edith, receiving as her portion the cold bow and cold handshake that every eye might have seen, had watched the love light gradually fade from her hero's eyes.

But she had never seen him so cold as to-day. When their eyes had met, she had noticed the look of positive annoyance which had passed across his face. It had soon fled, but when he spoke and extended his hand, his face had assumed a look of cold severity.

Edith did not speak; the painful beating of her heart almost stifled her, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She extended her hand; the cold, listless touch of his fingers throbbed through her like ice. The clergyman saw her trouble, and again that look of impatient annoyance passed across his face; then he raised his brows in calm surprise.

"What is the matter?" he asked quickly. "Has some domestic trouble caused your sudden return home?"

She withdrew her hand from his cold, lax fingers, and answered, "No."

Then she turned and walked along in silence by his side.

The good man was annoyed, seriously annoyed. First at her sudden appearance in the village, when he believed she was safely bestowed in London for several weeks to come; next at the *rôle* she thought fit to assume. He hated scenes at any time; just now he particularly wished to avoid one. So he walked on in silence, until he could command his voice to speak quietly; then he said, in the most careless manner possible—

"*When* did you return home?"

"Last night. I attended church this morning."

She looked at him quickly, to see what effect her words produced. Apparently they produced none. The clergyman's face remained as coldly impassive as

before; he raised his brows slightly as he replied.

"Indeed! I did not see you there." Then, after a pause, he added, "Your return was very sudden, was it not? I thought you intended staying away for some time."

"I changed my mind. I thought you would have been glad to have me back again."

Then, swept on by a wild impulse, which she could not possibly restrain, she added slowly, but tremulously—

"Charles, are you *sorry* I have come?"

The clergyman started, flushed, then quickly recovered himself, as he added—

"Sorry, my dear Edith? What a question! Why of course I am not sorry."

Then, why not say that you are glad?

Why not let me know it? Don't you see you are breaking my heart?"

Santley paused, and looked at her. He did not flush this time, his face grew white as marble, his eyes quite steel-like in their coldness. He had dreaded a scene, but this was so very much worse than he had expected; for by this time Edith had lost all self-control, and was sobbing violently. His face hardened terribly. He must put an end once and for ever to such unpleasant encounters.

"Edith, have you lost your senses?" he said; and the bitterness of his tone was like putting a knife into the girl's heart. "If you wish to perform in such scenes as this, you could surely find some other time and place than the public road and the broad daylight. If you have anything to say to me, you must come to me again in private. At

present I have no more time which I can place at your service. I have business with Mrs. Haldane, who is waiting for me at the Vicarage; and my duties at the church will soon begin again."

He raised his hat, and would have moved away, but Edith laid her hand upon his arm and forcibly detained him.

"Stop!" she cried. "One word! You shall not go. I must speak."

He turned upon her almost angrily; he attempted, but in vain, to shake off her detaining hand.

"Tell me," she cried; "why are you going to meet Mrs. Haldane?" Then, before he could recover from his astonishment sufficiently to speak, she added, "You need not tell me, for I *know*. It is this woman who has come between you and me. Oh, do you think

I don't know that since she came to the village you have been a changed man? What did I come home for? Because I knew it was not right that you and she should be in the village *alone*."

This time the clergyman succeeded in shaking off her hand. The face which he turned towards hers was almost livid in its pallor.

"You forget yourself," he said, with a sternness which was even harder to bear than bitter reproach. "Well, I suppose you think you have a right to insult me; but permit me to remind you that your right does not extend to religious affairs, or to a lady who is the most esteemed member of my congregation."

"I have not insulted you, Charles; I am only warning you."

"You are very kind," he interposed, with a sneer, "but I am in no greater need of your warning than is the lady. Until you can learn how to control your own words and actions, it would be better for *you* that we should not meet."

Again he moved, as if about to leave her; again she put forth her hand, and held him fast. The scene had become more violent than she had intended. It was now too late to pause.

"One more word," she sobbed. "Promise me that you will not see her, then I will promise never to mention this subject again."

"Promise you what? To discontinue all communications with Mrs. Haldane?"

"Yes, yes; that is all. It is not much to ask you."

"It is much more than you have any

right to ask. You have chosen to connect my name dishonourably with a lady whom I esteem. Enough! I cannot control your actions, but I mean to regulate my own. Good morning, Edith. Since you have nothing more important to say to me, I suppose I am at liberty to go?"

He raised his hat and walked away, pausing a minute later to raise it again, and to address some pleasant remark to a member of his congregation, who happened at that moment to be coming along the road. It was the sight of this stranger which prevented Edith from following, which made her turn and walk with rapid steps towards her home. She felt cold and sick and heart-broken, and she shrank from the sight of any human face.

When she reached her home, she

found her aunt, who had been surprised at her protracted absence, gazing uneasily up and down the road. The sight of the girl's pale, tear-stained face alarmed her, but Edith silenced her inquiries by declaring that she had not been very well.

"It was foolish of me, but I could not help crying at the service," she said. "Dear aunt, do not be anxious. I am better now, and only want rest."

"Shall I send you up some dinner, darling?"

"No; nothing. I want to be alone —quite alone."

So, with a weary, listless look upon her, the girl went up to her room, and, having locked the door, she threw herself upon the bed, and cried as if her heart were broken.

Meanwhile Mr. Santley went on his

way, almost as much disturbed as Edith herself. He was angry, terribly angry; for if scenes similar to the one through which he had passed were allowed to continue, he anticipated a storm of troubles in the future. But how to avoid them? What would be the best and safest course to adopt? The good man was terribly perplexed. To openly defy the girl might cause her, in her bitterness and pain, to expose herself and him; which would certainly be awkward, since he wished, above all things, to stand well with his congregation. And yet to adopt any other course, he must at least pretend to subscribe to her conditions. He must be content to renounce, or pretend to renounce, his intimacy with Mrs. Haldane. The man of God was justly indignant.

Such a course, he knew, must not be thought of, and he resolved with pious determination to continue Ellen Haldane's conversion, for which he was so zealous, and to leave matters between himself and Edith exactly as they were.

He knew the girl's disposition. She would soon acknowledge her folly, and make the first advances towards reconciliation. Well, then he would be inclined to meet her half-way, but she must be the first to move. If, on the other hand, she chose to take the unpleasant course of exposing him, why, he would have but one alternative: he would simply deny her statements, and who would believe her? It would be an unpleasant phase of experience to have to pass through, and it would compel him to sacrifice a fellow-creature.

Nevertheless, he acknowledged to himself, with the air of a Christian martyr, that if she pushed him to extremities it would be necessary.

After all, he hoped that Edith, shut up with her own grief, in the solitude of her own room, would soon be brought to see the error of her ways, and would make that first advance towards reconciliation which was necessary for the peace of mind of both.

But, whatever might happen in the future, Edith had succeeded for that day at least in completely destroying the good man's peace of mind. His agitation was so great that he was compelled to walk about the quiet lanes until his tranquillity was somewhat restored. Then he returned to the Vicarage, where Mrs. Haldane was comfortably seated with his sister, and

enjoyed her society until the hour of his labours returned.

When he entered the church that afternoon, all the congregation thought he was looking more seraphic than ever. Many a young heart fluttered with holiness, and many an eyelid drooped reverently, before the calm serenity of his gaze. As he stood facing his people, he cast his eyes around the church. Edith was not there.

He turned the leaves of his gold-clasped volume, and as his rich voice filled the church, and the congregation rose, he gazed once more about him. This time his cheek flushed slightly, and a soft sigh of relief and happiness escaped his parted lips. Mrs. Haldane was again in her place, calmly joining in the prayers.

That afternoon the clergyman preached

like one inspired; all were impressed, but none were cognizant of the cause. Though the clergyman's eyes wandered continually around the church, he saw only one face, was conscious only of one presence. So engrossed was he, and so wrapped up in his fervour of admiration, that he did not notice what was going on around him. Had he done so, he would have seen that there was another member of the congregation besides Mrs. Haldane who attracted a certain amount of interest. Seated in the gallery, calmly joining in the service and watching the minister, was the foreign "gentleman with the eyes."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "HE IS BUT A LANDSCAPE PAINTER."

AFTER Edith's departure from London, Walter Hetherington thought long and deeply over the mysterious change in his cousin. The more he thought, the more uneasy he grew. Of one thing he felt tolerably sure—that the girl had got into the hands of a religious fanatic, who either consciously or unconsciously was completely destroying himself, his happiness—in this world at least. She was fairly possessed by the fever of other worldliness, he said to himself, and if left alone she would, like many others before

her, probably end her days in a mad house.

Having arrived at this enlightened conclusion, which was chiefly based on what Edith had herself told him, Walter determined that she should not be left alone. What would be more rational, he said to himself, than that he should pack up his sketching paraphernalia and pay a short visit to the picturesque little village where his aunt and cousin lived? Surely Edith would be glad to see him, and while he remained to watch over her, his time would not be entirely lost.

When he told his mother of his determination to revisit the country, the old lady was unfeignedly glad. She suspected, from the unaccountable sudden departure of the girl, that the two young people had had a quarrel, and she was glad to see her son was magnanimous

enough to make the first advances towards reconciliation. So she helped him to put a few things together, and on the spur of the moment he started off.

He had written neither to his cousin nor aunt to tell them of his coming. He had intended sending a telegram from the station, but at the last moment he changed his mind, and as he sat in the train which was rapidly whirling him onward, he began to ask himself whether it would be judicious of him to go to his aunt's house at all. To be sure, he had always made it his head-quarters; but now things were changed. Edith had left his mother's house to avoid *him;* would it be fair to either of them that he should become his aunt's guest? By living in the house he would force from her a communication which might be very grudgingly given, and at the same time

his lips must be inevitably sealed. He finally decided that, during the visit at least, it would be better for every one that he should stay at the inn.

So on arriving at the station he drove to the inn, secured at a cheap price a couple of cosy rooms, and determined to delay calling upon his relations until the following day.

The next day was fine, a fit day for an artist to lounge, dream, perhaps work. Walter hung about the inn till midday; then he took his sketch-book under his arm, and strolled forth in the direction of his aunt's cottage. When he reached the door, and was about to knock, it was suddenly opened by Edith, dressed in walking costume.

On coming thus unexpectedly face to face with her cousin, she looked manifestly angry.

"Walter, you here?" she said coldly; then she added quickly, "Is anything the matter at home?"

"Nothing whatever," said Walter, quietly giving his hand, and taking no notice whatever of the irritation so plainly visible on her face. "I got tired of London, that was all, and thought a few days in the country might do me good. I am not going to bore *you*. I have brought my working tools down with me, and mean to take some sketches back."

"But where is your luggage?"

"Down at the inn."

"At the inn?"

"Yes; I had it taken direct there last night. I was fortunate enough, too, to secure rooms—a capital little parlour fit for a studio, and a bedroom leading out of it. I shall be able to do the host, and entertain you, if you'll come."

"You are going to stay at the inn?" said Edith. "You always stayed with *us* before!"

"Of course I did; but I am not going to be so inconsiderate as to plant myself upon you *now*."

He laid the slightest possible stress upon the "now," and Edith understood; nevertheless, she deemed it prudent to affect ignorance and read a different meaning in his words. She murmured something about being very much occupied, and having little time to attend to visitors; then led the way across the hall to their sitting-room, and brought him into the presence of his aunt.

Mrs. Russell welcomed him cordially, but when she heard of his domestic arrangements, her face went very blank indeed. She used every argument in her power to persuade the young man

to change his mind, and to have his luggage brought up to the cottage. Walter, eager to accept her kindness, was listening for one word from Edith. It never came, and he expressed his intention to remain at the inn.

But, although he abided by his former decision and remained *en garçon* at the inn, a very great part of his time was spent at the cottage. The old lady, anxious to atone for the inhospitable behaviour of her niece, altered all her household arrangements to suit the erratic habits of the young painter. The heavy midday meal was replaced by a light luncheon; while for the light supper at six was substituted a substantial dinner, to which Walter was always bidden. On the afternoon of that day, when the young man had first made his appearance at the cottage, a rather

unpleasant interview had taken place between the aunt and niece, almost the first which had come to ruffle the peaceful course of their evenly flowing lines. The old lady had been indignant at the coolness of Edith's reception, and had accused the girl of inhospitality and ingratitude; while Edith had coolly given it as her opinion that the young man was much better located elsewhere.

"It is a tax to have a visitor always in the house, aunt," said Edith, quietly; "and—and I haven't the strength to bear it, I think."

Mrs. Russell looked up, and was surprised to find that the girl, after bearing her reproaches so mildly, was now actually crying. She noted again, too, with a start of shocked surprise how sadly she had changed. The fresh, bright beauty which had once charmed

every eye had gone, leaving scarcely a trace behind it, and the face was pale, careworn, and sad. She got up and kissed her, and that silent caress did more than a dozen reproaches. It made Edith hurriedly leave the room, to cast herself, crying bitterly, upon the bed, while Mrs. Russell sat down and wrote a note to Walter.

"You shall have your own way about staying at the inn," she wrote, "and you shall also have every possible hour of the day that you can make use of for your work; but surely you can spare your evenings for us. I have arranged to dine every day at six, and I beg of you, for Edith's sake, to make one of the party. Dear Edith is far from well, and sadly changing. She sees so few people, and the house is dull. Dear Walter, come often, for her sake if not for mine."

Thus it happened that every night, when the little dining-room was laid out for dinner, Walter made his appearance at the cottage door, and that during those evening hours the family party was increased to three. Sometimes they left the dinner-table to lounge in the pretty little drawing-room, where Walter was permitted to smoke his cigar, while the old lady worked at wool-work, and Edith played to them in the slowly gathering darkness. Sometimes they strolled out on to the lawn, and had the tea brought out, and laughed and chatted while they watched the stars appear one by one in the heavens. Was it fancy, or since these social evenings commenced was Edith really changed for the better? Walter fancied that her eye was brighter, her cheek less pale, and that her manner towards him-

self was sometimes very tender, as if she wished in a measure to atone for her past coldness. This was particularly noticeable one night when the two sat alone in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Russell, murmuring something about household affairs, had left them together. Walter was reclining in an armchair, smoking his cigar and watching his cousin, who was busily engaged embroidering crosses upon a handsome altar-cloth, intended for the decoration of the church.

"These have been pleasant evenings," he said—"pleasant for me, that is. I shall be sorry enough when they come to an end."

Edith looked up and smiled sadly.

"If we always had pleasure it would become a pain," she said. "Though we rebel against pain and suffering, it is,

after all, a very great boon to the world."

"Humph! Perhaps so, if it were better distributed. What about the poor creatures whose portion is only pain? — who, to put it vulgarly, get all the kicks, and none of the half-pence?"

"In this world, you should have said, Walter. Let us hope their measure of happiness will be greater in the world that is to come."

Walter was silent. The conversation had taken precisely the turn which he would have avoided, and he was wondering how to bring it to the subject which was for ever uppermost in his mind. For a time he remained in a brown study. Edith stitched on. Then he rose, took a few turns about the room, and stopped near to her chair.

"Edith," he said quietly, "do you know why I came down here?"

Something in his tone rather than his words made her start and flush painfully. She did not raise her eyes or cease her work. Before she could answer, he had taken her hand.

"I came for *you*, Edith," he continued passionately. "Listen to me, my darling. Do not answer hastily, if you cannot give me a decided answer. At least let me hope."

Decidedly yet tremblingly the girl put his hands from her, and half rose from her seat. His words had frozen her to ice again.

"Why *did* you come here?" she said. "Do you call it manly or kind to persecute me? I tell you I shall never marry."

As she spoke her eye fell upon the

altar-cloth, which she held in her hand. Walter saw the look, and as he was walking back to the inn that night it recurred to his mind again. The altar-cloth! There was the symbol of the thing which had come between them—which was blighting his life and hers. Edith was changing; but she was not utterly changed. He resolved to do the only thing which now remained to be done. He determined to appeal to her spiritual adviser.

All night his mind was filled with this idea; it troubled his sleeping as well as his waking moments, and when he rose in the morning it was the one thing which possessed him. Now, he had never seen the clergyman, but he had pictured him as a middle-aged, benevolent-looking man, perhaps with spectacles; a gentle fanatic in religion,

willing, through the very bigotry of his nature, to sacrifice everything for the good of the Church, but still, perhaps, amiable. He might be open to reason, and an appeal made directly to him might be the means of putting an end to all the trouble.

Breakfast over, the young man issued from the inn, and strolled deliberately through the village in the direction of the Vicarage. It was early in the day to make a call, so he walked very slowly, meditating as he went on the nature of his errand; and the course he was about to take, after what had passed between him and his cousin, was, perhaps, a little unwarrantable, and Edith might be inclined to resent it if she knew. But then, he reflected, she need never know. Mr. Santley would surely grant him the favour of keeping the matter a secret;

and afterwards, when the shadow of the Church had ceased to darken her life, and she was happy with him in her married home, she would be glad to hear that it was he who had saved her.

These were the kind of rose-coloured visions which filled his brain as he walked on towards the Vicarage, and by the time he had reached the hall door and pulled the bell, he had even converted Mr. Santley into the good fairy of the tale, or rather a sort of Father Christmas, in a surplice, smiling benevolently upon them and pairing their hands. A trim little servant came to the door, and, in answer to his inquiries, informed him that Mr. Santley was not at home. He was expected in immediately, however, if the gentleman would like to wait. Yes; Walter would wait. So he followed the little maid

across the hall, into a somewhat chilly but sufficiently gorgeous room, which was reserved solely for the comfort and convenience of Mr. Santley's guests. As Walter sank down into an easy-chair, the arms of which seemed to enfold him in a close embrace, and looked about the room, he acknowledged that Mr. Santley at least did not give all his substance to the poor. Here at least there was no appearance of penury, or of sackcloth and ashes; all was comfortable and luxurious in the extreme. He walked about the room; examined the books upon the tables, which were all works of education, elegantly bound; noticed the engravings on the walls—one or two of Raphael's Madonnas (coloured copies), and an old engraving after Andrea del Sarto. Mr. Santley did not come. He rang the bell, gave the little

maid his card, told her he would call again, and left the Vicarage.

This time he walked in the direction of the schoolhouse. He had his sketch-book under his arm, and in it a half-finished sketch of the schoolmistress's picturesque home. He would fill up his spare time by adding a few touches to the sketch before he returned to the Vicarage.

In this matter fortune favoured him. It being Saturday afternoon, there was no school, and the schoolmistress was leaning in a listless attitude upon the low trellised gate. She welcomed the young painter with a nod and a bright smile, and readily assented to his proposition that she should stand for the figure in the picture. He took out his book and set to work.

Dora meanwhile chatted and laughed

to make the time pass pleasantly, and sometimes, in answer to an invitation from him, she would run round the easel to take a peep at the figure of herself, which was gradually growing under his hand. At last their pleasant interview was brought to an end. Walter remembered the appointment which this chattering lady had made him forget. He put up his sketching materials, and prepared to take his leave. Then Dora stopped him.

"Surely, Mr. Hetherington, you will do me one favour," she said: "you will honour me by stepping for a moment into the cottage which you have transferred so beautifully to paper. I have some cream and milk, some fresh strawberries from our garden, if that is any inducement to you."

The invitation was tempting. Never-

theless, Walter, while wishing to accept, was about to refuse, pleading an engagement at the Vicarage when another voice broke in—

"Good day, Miss Greatheart!" it said.

The schoolmistress smiled, made a prim curtsey, and answered, "Good day, sir!" Then she waited to see if her visitor had anything more to say.

The new arrival was a man, and Walter, who was looking at him, thought he was the handsomest man he had ever seen in his life. He was dressed as a clergyman, but the cut of his garments was elegant and eminently becoming. As his eye fell upon Walter he raised his hat, and discovered a head beautifully shaped and slightly thinning at the temples. Walter remained fascinated, staring at the man, who moved here and

there with easy grace, and whose face grew singularly handsome with every varying expression which flitted across it.

He had not much to say to the schoolmistress; and as he moved away his hat was again swept off to Walter, and the clergyman's eyes rested upon him for a moment with a look one might love to paint in the eyes of a saint.

Walter turned to Miss Greatheart.

"A handsome fellow," he said—"a very handsome fellow; and a clergyman, I see, by his dress. Who is he? One of Mr. Santley's curates, I suppose?"

The schoolmistress stared at him for a moment in amazement.

"One of Mr. Santley's curates!" she said. "Why, my dear sir, that is our vicar himself!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### IN THE GLOAMING.

It was now Walter's turn to look amazed.

"That Mr. Santley!" he said. "Why, he is quite a young man!"

"Of course he is—and handsome as good, and good as handsome. But won't you come in, Mr. Hetherington, and have some refreshment? It is two hours quite since you opened out your sketch-book at the gate!"

This time Walter accepted her invitation, and followed her into the quaint little parlour, where most of her days

were spent. The little maid who attended to the house had got a holiday with the children, and Dora was left to attend to herself that day. Walter was glad of it, since he was left free to sit by the window and follow the train of his thoughts, while Dora busied herself spreading the snowy cloth upon the table, and setting forth her simple fare. When it was ready, he came to the table and ate some strawberries and drank some milk, thinking all the while of Mr. Santley. Presently he spoke of him.

"You have known Mr. Santley some time, Miss Greatheart?" he said.

"I was schoolmistress here when he came."

"He is a very good man, you said?"

"Yes, indeed. But it stands to reason that a man with Mr. Santley's gifts must be very good indeed not to get spoiled.

In justice to at least half of his congregation, he ought to marry."

"Why, pray?"

"Why? If he had arrived here with a wife, many a young girl in the village would have been saved a severe heartache. He is a prize in the matrimonial lottery well worth striving for. He is idolized by every female in the village. Now, it is certain he cannot marry them all, and on the day when the happy one is chosen, fancy the hearts that will break!"

"Yours amongst the number?"

"No, sir; I am happy to say I am free. But I take no credit to myself on that account. If I had been idle like some of the young ladies here, there might have been another victim added to the list; but I have so much to do in the school, I have no time to think about

the vicar," she added. "Have you heard him preach, Mr. Hetherington?"

"No, not yet."

"Ah, you must go to the church to-morrow. He speaks magnificently, and looks a picture in his robes; besides, his sister, Miss Santley, told me he will wear for the first time to-morrow a new surplice and a magnificent embroidered band, which has been worked for him by Miss Dove!"

At the mention of his cousin's name Walter felt his face flush and his heart leap; but he made no direct reply. He went on eating his strawberries, and turned his face to the open window, as he said—

"What have you made for him, Miss Greatheart?"

"I? Oh, nothing! He has so many beautiful presents from the young ladies

in the village that he has no need of them from me, even if I had the time to make them, which I have not; all day I am teaching in the school, and all the evening I am busy preparing lessons for the following day."

"Have you always lived here?"

"Not always. My mother was a prison matron at Preston, and we lived together until she died, several years ago; then, through the influence of some friends, I got this place, and have lived here ever since!"

"Working and striving," added Walter; "finding pleasure in things which to some would mean only trouble and irritation. During the holidays do you ever come to London, Miss Greatheart?"

"No; I generally remain here."

"From choice?"

"Not at all. I should like a change; but then, to go alone to a city where you have no friends, and to parade crowded streets alone, is a holiday which I should not enjoy."

Walter rose to go.

"You will come back and finish the sketch on Monday, perhaps?" said Dora.

"I shall be glad to; I should like, above all, to finish the figure leaning on the gate."

"Then you must come in the evening. I promise to give you an hour after school hours."

Then Walter shook hands with her and left, taking the way to the inn instead of to the Vicarage. He would make no appeal to the clergyman. The sight of Mr. Santley, so different to the benevolent, elderly gentleman of his imagination, had decided him on that

point; it had also brought with it other trouble, for it threw an entirely new light on Edith's religious fervour.

Was it, then, the man or the church, infatuation or fanaticism? He asked himself the question for the first time. Was Edith among the mass of simple girls who were breaking their hearts for his sake? Probably. It remained now for him to watch her, and ascertain the truth.

He went up to the cottage that evening, and regarded Edith with quite a new light in his eyes. She also seemed changed. Her manner was restless and ill at ease; her cheek was flushed. All through the dinner she scarcely touched any food, but glanced furtively at her aunt and cousin.

When the dinner was over, they all retired to the drawing-room as usual.

Here Edith's restlessness asserted itself more strongly. Instead of sitting quietly to her work, as was her usual custom, she flitted restlessly about the room. Presently she declared that she had a terrible headache, and wished her cousin "good night."

"I have been trying to bear it," she said, "but it gets worse instead of better. You will excuse me for to-night, Walter, will you not?"

As he took her hand and held it for a moment in his, he felt that it was trembling and very hot. He scarcely believed in the headache, but he deemed silence the most prudent course; so he wished her "good night" without more ado.

Her aunt rose to go with her to her room, but permission to do so was firmly refused.

"You will stay and keep Walter

company, or else you will make me regret I did not bear the pain without a word. Indeed, dear aunt, all I want is rest and quietness. I shall be quite well to-morrow."

So she went. Mrs. Russell sat down again to her wool-work, and Walter subsided into his chair.

There was not much talking done after that, and Walter, as soon as his cigar was finished, rose to take his leave. The old lady looked at him tenderly and sadly, but she said nothing. Instinct had told her the true state of things between the cousins ; she was sorry, but helpless. It would be better, she thought to herself, if the poor boy would resign a useless courtship, since Edith had evidently no affection to give, and take to himself some pretty little wife who would make his home happy.

He did not return directly to the inn, but with head bent in deep thought he strolled on, he knew not whither. He was wondering whether or not this hopeless quest should end. If Edith had deceived him—if, indeed, it was the man, and not religion, which held the girl so entranced—why, then his task of regeneration would surely be a very difficult one. It was strange, he thought, that Edith, knowing his mistake, should have allowed it to remain. He had repeatedly spoken to her of Mr. Santley as an elderly man; and, although she knew the truth, she had never corrected him. It looked black, very black; the more he thought over it, the more complicated matters became.

He had been so engrossed in his own thoughts, that he had been almost unaware of his own actions. He was

only conscious of strolling idly on and on, he knew not in what direction. Suddenly he paused, looked helplessly about him; then took a few stealthy steps forward, and paused again. Where he was he did not know. The night had grown quite dark and chilly, for heavy, rain-charged clouds were covering both stars and moon. But his quick ear had detected what his eyes could not at first perceive—the close neighbourhood of two figures in earnest conversation —a man and a woman. The darkness shrouded their figures, but the breeze brought to him the sound of their voices. Walter hated to play the spy, yet for once in his life his feet refused to move. For he had recognized one of the voices as belonging to his cousin Edith.

Yes, the voice was Edith's.

Having wished her aunt and cousin

"good night," she had hastened to her room and locked the door; but instead of throwing herself on the bed, she had lit the candles, sat down near the dressing-table, drawn forth a letter from her pocket, and begun to read.

The letter was as follows:—

"My dear Miss Dove,

"I am very sorry to hear that you have been suffering. You will find what you require at Dr. Spruce's surgery. You are right about the time—nine o'clock will do very well.

"Yours faithfully,

"Charles Santley."

This letter had come through the post in the ordinary way. It had been handed to Edith in the morning; and the very sight of it had sent the hot

blood coursing through her veins, and kept her in a state of feverish excitement the whole day. It was the knowledge of this piece of paper in her pocket which had rendered her so uneasy during the dinner; it was the knowledge of this letter also which had caused her excitement after dinner, and which finally had made her wish her cousin a hasty "good night." And now, as she read it again, the flush remounted to her cheeks and her heart beat pleasantly. She had not seen Santley alone since that Sunday morning, nearly a week past, when the two had parted in anger—an anger which to Edith meant utter misery and prostration. And now, at the eleventh hour, he had written to her appointing a meeting, and she was ready to fly to him with open arms.

She sat for some time looking at the letter, reading it over and over until she knew every word of it by heart; then she kissed it, returned it to her pocket, opened the window, and looked out. It was a cloudy but fine night, and the welcome darkness was gathering quickly.

If it would only rain, she thought, they would be sure to have the road to themselves in that case; and for herself, why, what did it matter so long as she felt her lover's arms about her again, and knew that he was true? But now her first care was to effect her escape stealthily from the house. She had decided upon her course of action; the great difficulty which remained was to carry it through. She hastily put on her walking boots, took up a cloak of sombre colour, fastened it round her, drew the hood

over her head, and stood ready to set forth to the place of meeting—which she knew, by old experience, well.

She opened her bedroom door and listened. She could hear nothing. Perhaps her cousin was gone, perhaps he was still sitting in the drawing-room, quietly smoking his cigar. In any case, it seemed, she need not fear interruption; the way was clear. She hastily blew out her candles, locked her door, and slipped the key into her pocket; then noiselessly descending the stairs, she left the house unseen.

In the garden she hesitated, curious to know what they could all be doing; so she crept round the house and peeped in at the drawing-room window. Walter was still there, but he stood near the door, holding his aunt's hand,

and evidently taking his leave. Edith turned, and without more ado fled quickly in the darkness.

Even as Edith was leaving the cottage, Santley was already at the meeting-place, walking with impatient strides up and down the lonely lane selected for their interview, and wondering as every minute passed away why Edith did not come.

A week's reflection, and the frequent sight of Edith's pale, careworn face when they met in public, had brought him to this pass. He saw that she was suffering, and for the sake of what she had been to him he felt really sorry. Besides, he looked at the matter philosophically, and he asked himself, why *should* they quarrel? After all, she had been very patient and forbearing; and for that little fit of jealousy about

Mrs. Haldane she had been sufficiently punished.

But perhaps there was another and a stronger motive for this sudden wish for a meeting and a reconciliation. So long as this absurd quarrel continued, it was evident Edith had no intention of visiting the Vicarage; and this fact alone subjected him to a series of unpleasant questions from his sister. Santley therefore decided that it would be better for him in every possible way to send the letter, which would be certain to effect a reconciliation.

"Is it you, Edith? Quick! Is it you?"

His quick ear had caught the rustle of her dress on the grass. Even as the words left his lips came the eager answer.

"Yes, Charles; I have come!" And

the girl, forgetting all their quarrels, leapt with a glad cry into his arms.

For a time no words were spoken. After that one cry of joy, Edith had laid her head upon his shoulder and sobbed as if her heart would break. At this manifestation of hysteria, Santley was not altogether pleased; but he could say nothing, so he clasped his arms firmly about her, and tried to soothe her sorrow. When at last Edith lifted her head from his shoulder he kissed her lips, and whispered to her so gently that the girl's heart beat as gladly as it had done the first day that words like these had been spoken.

"There, there," said the good man, kissing her again, and patting her head like that of a spoilt child. "You are better now, my darling; and remember you must not quarrel with me again.

You were breaking your little heart for nothing at all."

Part of the girl's emotion had communicated itself to him; and for the time being, while he stood there holding her to him, feeling her breath upon her cheek, her clinging arms about his neck, he felt almost as passionately disposed as he had done the first day that he told her of his love. As for Edith, a serene happiness and peace seemed to enter into her soul. They stood thus for some time, exchanging whispered words and fond embraces; then the clergyman told her she had better go. A spot or two of rain had fallen, and the sky was clouding over as if for a storm.

"Will you play the organ to-morrow, Edith?" he asked, as they moved away together.

"Yes, if you wish it."

"I do wish it, Edith; for when you are playing, it seems as if you were helping me with my work."

Sweet words! She said nothing, but the hand which lay in his pressed his fondly, and he knew that she was pleased.

"And will you come to the Vicarage to-morrow afternoon, and have tea with us? I shall be so glad if you will!"

He did not add that his sister, wondering all the week at Edith's non-appearance, had threatened repeatedly to call at the cottage, when she would doubtless have elicited something of the truth.

"No, I cannot come!" she said; "my cousin, Walter Hetherington, is staying in the village, and so long as he remains here he is to spend the evenings with us. As to-morrow is Sunday, and no

work can be done, my aunt has invited him up for the day."

Santley was relieved, very much relieved indeed. He could now give his sister a tangible reason for Edith's absence from the Vicarage, while he himself would be perfectly free to spend the afternoon with Mrs. Haldane. He tried to suppress the delight which he could not help feeling, and said quietly, "Let us hope the young man will make a speedy departure, if he means to monopolize you so much. But that reminds me, Edith, a young man, a Mr. Walter Hetherington, called upon me to-day and left his card. I suppose it is the same?"

"Of course it is," returned Edith. "But what could he want with *you?*"

"I don't in the least know. Nothing of very great importance, I suppose,

since he promised to call again, and never reappeared."

The clergyman paused.

They had come now to within a short distance of Edith's home. Again, after a furtive look round, he clasped her fondly to him, pressed her lips, and murmured, "Good night, my Edith!"

"Good night," returned the girl, withdrawing herself reluctantly from his embrace. "Oh, I am so happy now! You were quite right, dear; another week like the last would have broken my heart!"

Thus they parted—Edith, happy as a child, creeping quickly to the cottage: the good man smiling celestially, and well pleased to have made everything comfortable at little personal inconvenience, walking back to his holy hearth, and thinking of his Sunday sermon.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### IN THE VICARAGE PARLOUR.

NEARLY the whole of this interview had been witnessed by Walter Hetherington.

He had heard, yet he had not heard; for, though instinct told him that the voice was Edith's, he could only catch fragments of what she said. Nevertheless, as he remained crouched in the shadow of the trees, he was conscious of sobs and tears, of stolen kisses and softly murmured words. He remained until the interview was over; then, when the two walked together back towards the

village, he still very stealthily followed them. When they stopped again, he heard the passionate words of parting. His suspicions were, in his own despite, fast becoming certainties; they were soon established certainties beyond a doubt. He followed the girl after she had left her lover, and saw her stealthily open the door and disappear across the threshold of Edith's home.

Then Walter turned, and feeling like one who has had a terrible nightmare, he walked back to his lodgings at the inn. He was sorry he had not had time to follow the man, for he remained completely in the dark as to who he might be. He got little sleep that night. The next morning he awoke sadly unrefreshed. After breakfast he strolled out among the meadows; and when he heard the bells ring, calling the villagers

to prayer, he entered the church with the rest.

When the congregation had assembled and the clergyman was in his place, Walter looked about for Edith. He felt almost a sense of relief when he saw that she was present; it repulsed him to think of her calmly joining in the service after the events of last night. He looked at the gallery where the school children bestowed themselves, and saw Dora, quiet, unobtrusive, and happy, sitting serenely amongst her flaxen-haired flock. How cosy, how comfortable she was! but the very bitterness of his heart compelled him to ask himself the question: was she as bad as the rest? At one time, yes, even so late as the preceding night, he had possessed so much blind faith in genuine human nature as to

believe that the face indicated the soul. Now, however, he felt that such a belief was puerile and false. No woman on earth could possess a more spiritual countenance than his cousin Edith—yet his eyes had assured him of the blackness and impurity of her soul. Disappointment was turning his heart to gall.

At last the service was ended: the congregation streamed forth, Walter amongst the rest. The crush was so great he could hardly get along—for Mr. Santley was a popular preacher. Once outside the edifice, Walter paused to draw his breath and look about him. He started, turned first hot, then cold, for not many yards from him was Edith herself, calmly leaving the church with the rest. Almost before he could recover himself she saw him, and ad-

vanced with a bright smile and outstretched hand.

"I saw you in church," she said, "and thought you looked dreadfully pale. Are you not well, Walter?"

He murmured something about late hours and a sleepless night; then he had to confess he had been looking about for her, for he added—

"I did not see *you* in church."

"No, you would not. I was in the organ-room. It is my Sunday for playing, you remember!"

To this he made no reply. He was wondering how it was that Edith could manage so effectually to play such a double part. He expected at least a downcast eye, and a blush of guilt upon her cheek; with this he might have been tolerably satisfied. But Edith's face looked brighter than it had done for many a day.

"I forgot to ask you," he said suddenly, "if your headache was better."

"My headache?" she replied. She had been so engrossed with happy thoughts at the reconciliation, that the question took her completely by surprise. "Ah yes," she added, suddenly recollecting herself; "it is so much better, that I had quite forgotten it. You see what a good night's rest will do!"

Walter uttered an impatient sigh, and turned on his heel; while Edith added—

"You are coming up to dine with us to-day, you know. Shall we walk together?"

"I am not coming!"

"Not coming? I thought——"

"Yes, I did accept your aunt's invitation; but I feel upset to-day, and am

not fit company for any one. Will you make my excuses at home?"

"Yes, certainly I will; and I hope that to-morrow you will be so much better. Good-bye."

She shook hands with him, and tripped away.

For a time Walter made no attempt to move, but gazed after her with eyes full of sadness and despair. Although he said to himself that henceforth Edith must be nothing to him, he felt pained at the curtness with which she could dismiss him. He had noticed that she had never once attempted to persuade him to alter his decision; indeed, she had not been able to hide from him her delight at hearing it, and he felt very bitter.

He turned from the church, walked away, and, after strolling about for some

time he knew not whither, he raised his head and found himself quite close to the schoolmistress's cottage. Dora stood in the doorway, surrounded by her flowers.

She came forward when she saw him, and, after giving him a bright smile and a warm handshake, stood by the gate and continued to talk. She was a wise little woman, and knew exactly what to say and what to leave unsaid; she had been a witness of the interview between the cousins in the churchyard that morning, and her woman's instinct had divined something of the true state of things. So she chatted pleasantly to the young man, and took no notice whatever of his pale cheek and peculiarity of manner; and when he said suddenly, "Are you not going to ask me in to-day, Miss Greatheart?" she threw open

the gate at once, and said that she was sadly neglectful and inhospitable, and that if Mr. Hetherington would like to come in, he would be more than welcome. So he followed her again into the quaint little parlour, and again took his seat by the open window, to gaze with strange, meditative eyes upon the little garden where the sun was shining. It was a ragged little garden enough, and by no means well cared for, since Dora was not rich enough to pay for labour, like her more fortunate neighbours in the village.

During her leisure hours she worked among the flower-beds until her plump hands ached again ; but, after all, her leisure hours were very few, and the grass and weeds grew so quickly. Walter saw that the grass was many inches too long, and that it was scattered

thickly with withered rose-leaves; that here and there a rose tree was sadly in want of the pruning knife. But that did not make the scent of the flowers any the less delicious; nor did it take from the quiet beauty of their place. There was plenty of light and colour everywhere, and there was beauty.

While looking at the garden, Walter began to think of the garden's mistress—quiet little Dora, living so contented among her children; and in the winter still living here alone, when the flowers had faded, when withered rose-leaves were scattered profusely on the grass, and the leafless branches of the trees bent before the biting breath of the bitter winter wind. It was a pretty picture of Dora—he loved it as we love the creatures of our imagination; it seemed to make Dora belong to him,

artistically, as it were, and bring him consolation. Then his reflections took another turn, and he began, for the first time, to think it strange that the little woman should be so much alone.

He said something of this to Dora; and she laughed and blushed, and answered frankly enough.

"Yes, I am a good deal alone. You see, I am in an equivocal position. I am too good for the servants, and not good enough for their mistresses. I am only the governess!"

"At any rate," said Walter, "you have contrived to brighten up what would otherwise have been a very cheerless visit. As a token of my gratitude, will you accept a little present from me?"

"I want no present, sir; your friendly words are quite enough."

"Nonsense! I should like to give you some of the sketches I have made of the village."

"To me! give them to me?" said Dora, with wide-open eyes. "Why, Mr. Hetherington, I thought you wanted them to—to——"

"To—what?"

"Well, to remind you of this visit!"

"Perhaps when I began them I had some notion of that kind in my head; we are all fools sometimes, you know. But I have changed my mind; I don't want to be reminded of this visit. Yes, I shall give you the sketches—that is to say, if you will accept them; and when I have taken my departure—and I shall do so soon—I shall try to forget that such a village as Omberley ever existed at all."

"And the people," said Dora; "of course you will try to forget the people?"

"That is the first thing I shall try to do!"

We are most of us selfish in our grief, and Walter was no exception to the rule. Mortified and suffering himself, it never once entered his head that he might be unpolite, and even rude, to another. But the knife entered Dora's little heart, and made her wince. She had been happy in the knowledge that she had met a fellow-creature who could treat her exactly as an equal—a man whom she could call a friend; and lo! when her interest is strongest, when she has been telling herself that the memory of the few days which he has brightened for ever will linger in her memory and never die, he came to tell her that his

first effort would be to forget the place—and *her*.

"I will take the pictures, if you like, Mr. Hetherington, but merely as a loan. You will change your mind again. I am convinced that some day you will ask me for them back again, and when you do they shall certainly be yours. But the sketch of the cottage—is it finished already?"

"The sketch of the cottage? Oh, I should like to keep *that*. It contains the picture of a lady whom I should certainly not like to forget."

Then, while the glad light danced in Dora's eyes again, he rose and took her hand, as he said—

"Good-bye, Miss Greatheart. When I said I should forget the village and the people I was wrong. Your kindness and hospitality I shall always remember."

So he crossed the threshold of the happy little schoolhouse, to stroll out again into the sunshine; and again he thought very bitterly of the woman who had effectually taken all the sunshine from his life.

He need not have thought so bitterly of her. If she had wounded him she was receiving her punishment.

Having left Walter in the churchyard, Edith flew home like one walking on air. She had accepted his decision gleefully, never attempting to alter it by word or look, for she was thinking all the time of the invitation she had received from Mr. Santley, and which had cost her such a pang to refuse. Walter's sudden determination left her free—free to spend a few hours in the company of the man who was more to her than the whole world. Light-

hearted and happy, she hurried home, gave Walter's message to her aunt, and then sat down and made a very hearty meal. After it was over, and a reasonable time had elapsed, she again put on her hat, and told her aunt she was going down to the Vicarage.

"I shan't be back till late, aunt," she added, "for, as I have to go to the Vicarage, I may as well walk to evening service with Miss Santley. If Walter changes his mind and comes, you will look after him well, won't you?"

And Mrs. Russell, promising implicit obedience, kissed her niece fondly, and watched her go down the road. On reaching the Vicarage, Edith was admitted at once. There was no necessity to take her card and keep her waiting while she ascertained if master or mistress was at home. She was known

to the servants as a visitor who was always welcome—at any rate to the mistress of the house. So, without any preamble at all, she was shown into the sitting-room, and into the presence of Miss Santley.

The room was as luxuriously furnished as any in the Vicarage, and charmingly decorated with the choicest of hothouse flowers. The lady sat in a low wicker chair, with a book in her hand, and at her elbow a little gipsy table, holding a tea-service of Dresden china. The opening of the door disturbed the lady. She let her book fall upon her knee, and looked up dreamily; but the moment her eye fell upon Edith she rose, smiling brightly, gave the girl both her hands, and kissed her fondly.

"My dear Edith, I am so glad!" she exclaimed; and there was a ring of

genuine welcome in her voice. "Why, you are a perfect stranger.—Jane, bring a cup for Miss Dove.—Now, dear, select your chair, take off your hat, and make yourself comfortable."

Edith did as she was bidden. She placed her hat on one of the many little tables with which the room abounded, stood before one of the glasses for a moment to rectify any disarrangement of hair and costume; then she drew forth a little wicker chair similar to that occupied by her hostess, and sat down. By this time the teapot was brought in, and the tea poured, so Edith sat and sipped it, talking and laughing meanwhile like a happy child.

"Well, dear," said Miss Santley, "and what have you been doing with yourself all the week? Charles tells me you have a cousin in the village, who com-

pletely monopolizes you. By the way, he told me that he had tried to persuade you to come to tea to-day, but that you had positively refused. That could not have been true."

"Yes, it was true," returned Edith. "I did refuse when he asked me, because I thought I could not come. I thought my cousin would dine with us as usual; but I met him at church this morning, and he said he was rather unwell and could not come. So I thought it would not matter if I came after all."

"Matter! My dear, I am delighted."

And so, having thus satisfactorily arranged matters, the two sat chatting to their hearts' content.

It was very pleasant, exceedingly pleasant—at any other time Edith would have enjoyed it hugely; but as the hands of the bronze clock on the

chimneypiece travelled so quickly round, she began to grow uneasy, and to wonder at the protracted absence of her lover. Miss Santley was a very pleasant person indeed, and Edith was very fond of her; but it had been a stronger inducement than Miss Santley that had brought her to the Vicarage that afternoon. Santley must know she was in the house, thought Edith; it was strange he did not come.

Suddenly Miss Santley glanced at the clock. In a moment she was on her feet.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "how the time has flown! Do you play again to-night?"

"Yes."

The lady nodded.

"We'll walk to church together, dear," she said. "Amuse yourself by looking

at the books, while I run away to get my bonnet and mantle on."

Ere the lady had reached the door of the room, Edith spoke. Prolonged disappointment had given her courage.

"Mr. Santley is busy, I suppose?" she said.

"Mr. Santley—Charles? Oh, my dear, he's not at home!"

"Not at home?"

"No. If he had been, do you suppose for a moment, my dear, he would have allowed you to be all this time in the house without coming out to say 'How do you do'? If he had known you had been coming, of course he would have stayed in; but he didn't know, so immediately after afternoon service he went to Foxglove Manor. He wanted to see Mrs. Haldane, and he said he should go straight from there to the church."

Miss Santley was near the door. The moment she had finished speaking she passed out of the room, and left Edith alone.

It was not a pleasant task to her, this mentioning of Mrs. Haldane. She knew that people had already begun to speak somewhat unkindly of the relations between that lady and her brother. But since this was so, it was well that she should show to the world that she, his sister, thought nothing of it. Therefore she had made up her mind that, whenever it was necessary for her to mention that lady's name, she would do so without reserve of any kind. It was the only way, she thought, to prevent such absurd rumours from taking root.

A very few minutes sufficed to make her toilet. At the end of that time she returned to the room where she had left

Edith, to get her Prayer-book and the handkerchief which had fallen from her hand, and lay beside her chair.

"Ready, dear?" she asked brightly; then she paused, amazed.

There sat Edith, pale as a ghost, reclining in an easy-chair, with her head thrown back, and her forehead covered by a handkerchief soaked with eau-de-cologne.

"Why, my dear!" exclaimed Miss Santley. "Whatever is the matter? Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing," said Edith, faintly. "I have got a very bad headache, that is all; and—and—I cannot go to church again to-day, Miss Santley."

"Go to church," echoed Miss Santley. "Why, my dearest girl, of course you can't go to church! I will send Jane with a message to Charles, and stay and take care of you."

But this Edith would not allow. She pulled the handkerchief from her forehead, and declared her intention of going home.

Miss Santley kissed her kindly. At this exhibition of tenderness Edith fairly broke down. She threw her arms around the lady's neck, and burst into tears.

"I—I am so sorry," she said at last, when her sobs had somewhat subsided; "but I could not help it. I—I am such a coward when I am ill!"

Miss Santley said nothing; she knew she could do nothing. There was some mystery here which she could not fathom, so she yielded to the girl's solicitations and allowed her to go home.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AT THE VICARAGE.

ONE evening about the middle of the week, as the Rev. Mr. Santley sat alone in his study a card was brought to him, on which was printed—

*Mr. Walter Hetherington.*

The clergyman raised his brows as he read, and asked the maid, who waited respectfully at the door, if the gentleman had not called upon him before.

"Once before, sir!"

"Did he state his business?"

"He did not, sir; he only said he would not detain you long."

"Well, ask the gentleman to be good enough to walk this way."

The maid retired, and a moment afterwards Walter entered the room.

The two men bowed to each other. One glance had assured Santley that any attempt at a warmer greeting would be injudicious; the other might not respond, and it would never do for the vicar of the parish to be snubbed by an itinerant painter whom nobody knew—besides, under the circumstances, a bow was ample greeting. He infused into it as much politeness as possible, welcomed his young friend to the Vicarage, and, pointing to a chair which he had drawn forward, begged him to be seated. Decidedly the clergyman was the most self-possessed of the two. For Walter took his seat in nervous silence; while Santley, wondering greatly in his own

mind what could possibly have procured him the honour of that visit, kept the scene from flagging by that wonderful gift of small talk with which he was possessed.

He was very pleased indeed to meet Mr. Hetherington. He had done him the honour to call upon him once before he thought—yes, he was sure of it; and he had also had the pleasure of meeting him once before, when he had not had the honour of his acquaintance. Was Mr. Hetherington thinking of making a long stay amongst them?

"Not very long," said Walter.

"I suppose you have made some charming sketches?" continued the clergyman. "There are pretty little spots about the village, spots well worthy of a painter's brush. I used to do a little in that way myself when I was a

youngster at college; but the vicar of a parish has onerous duties. I suppose at the present moment I should hardly know how to handle a brush. Are you thinking of leaving us soon, Mr. Hetherington?"

"I am not quite sure!"

"Ah! well, if you stay and would like to make use of my library, I should feel greatly honoured. It is the only thing I have to offer you, I fear; but I shall be very pleased indeed to put it at your service. It contains a few books on your own art, which might interest you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Santley."

"Not at all, my dear sir; I am merely neighbourly. Life would be dreary indeed if one could not be neighbourly in a place like this!"

"Mr. Santley, I have come to you for your advice."

The clergyman, nervously dreading what was to follow, looked at his visitor with a calm smile, and answered pleasantly enough.

"My advice? My dear sir, I place it freely at your service, and myself also if I can be of the slightest use to you."

"You can be of very great use to me."

The clergyman merely bowed this time and waited, so Walter continued—

"You know my cousin, Miss Edith Dove?"

As he spoke he fixed his eyes keenly upon the clergyman's face, but the latter made no sign; he neither winced nor changed colour, but answered calmly enough.

"I have the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance. She is one of the most esteemed members of my congregation."

"It is about Miss Dove I wished to speak to you."

Again the clergyman bowed; again he found it unnecessary to make a reply.

Walter, growing somewhat ill at ease, continued—

"I don't mind confessing to you, Mr. Santley, that at one period of my career I hoped most earnestly, and indeed confidently believed, that at no very remote date I should have the happiness of making her my wife. I was sincerely attached to her; I believe she was attached to me. But recently all has changed. She is wasting her life; throwing aside all chance of happiness, through some mad infatuation about the Church."

"Some mad infatuation about the Church!" returned the clergyman, me-

thodically. "Really, my dear sir, I am afraid you forget you are speaking to a clergyman of the Church. As to Miss Dove, she is a lady whose conduct is without reproach; she is one of the Church's staunchest supporters!"

"Then you approve her present mode of life; you uphold it? You will not advise her to shake her morbid fancies away? to accept an honest affection and a happy home?"

Santley seemed to reflect.

"As a clergyman of the Church, I should advise her the other way, I think. Surely the fulfilment of religious duties points to a more elevated mode of existence than mere marrying and giving in marriage. I am sorry for you, since I believe that any man possessed of that lady's esteem might deem himself fortunate; still, I could not advise her to

act against her conscience and the promptings of religion."

"And me, what do you advise me to do?"

The clergyman shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me that there is only one thing that you can do. If the lady finds your attentions disagreeable, surely the most honourable course for you to adopt would be to leave her—in peace."

Walter rose, and the clergyman breathed more freely, believing that the interview had come to a satisfactory end. Neither of them spoke for a minute or so, till the clergyman looked up, and said quietly—

"You have something more to say, Mr. Hetherington?"

"Yes," answered Walter; "I have something more to say." Then, going a few steps nearer to the clergyman,

he added, "You are a hypocrite, Mr. Santley!"

The clergyman's face grew pale. He rose hastily from his seat; but before he could speak Walter continued, vehemently—

"Do you think I don't know you? Do you think I haven't discovered that it is you, and not the Church, who has taken my cousin from me? You talk to me of religion, of religious duties, and yet you know that you are playing the hypocrite to her, as you have done to me, and that you are breaking her heart."

He paused, flushed, excited, and angry. The clergyman stood calm and very pale.

"You do well to seek this interview in my house, sir," he said. "Now you have insulted me with impunity, perhaps you will take your leave."

But Walter made no attempt to move.

"Before I go," he said, "I wish to know what are your plans regarding my cousin?"

"And I should like to ask you, sir," returned the clergyman, "what authority you have for interfering in my private affairs?"

"I have no authority; your private affairs are nothing to me. I speak in the interest of my cousin!"

"Really! I should fancy your interference would be hardly likely to do her much good."

"Mr. Santley, I shall ask you one more question. Do you, or do you not, mean to marry my cousin?"

"And if I refuse to answer?"

"I shall make it my duty, before to-morrow night, to expose you."

"Really!" returned the clergyman,

with an exasperating smile. "You will draw your cousin's good name through the mire in order to throw a little mud at me. I should think, young man, you must be a treasure to your family. Good evening. I will ring for the servant to show you out."

And he did ring—at the most opportune moment too; for Walter, staggered by that last thrust, perceived that his enemy was on the side of power. So, when in answer to her master's summons the servant appeared, Walter followed her; he was afraid to utter another word, for Edith's sake.

When he was gone, all Santley's calmness deserted him, and he walked up and down the room in a fit of uncontrollable rage. When he had grown calmer, he sat down and wrote one of his neatly worded epistles to Edith,

making an appointment for the following day.

He half believed that Walter had come to him, as Edith's authorized messenger, to attempt to force upon him those bonds which he was so very reluctant to wear. The clergyman could not in any other way account for his knowledge of the relations existing between the two. It was well for Edith that at that moment she was not near her lover—well for her, also, that no meeting could take place between them until the following day.

The next day Santley was very much more composed, and when he walked towards the trysting-place none would have known, from his outward appearance, that anything was materially wrong. He had made the appointment in daylight this time; since embraces

could be dispensed with, so also could darkness and night. There was really nothing in this meeting after all; nothing but what might have been witnessed by a dozen pair of eyes. Those who did see it would see only an event of ordinary everyday life.

Miss Edith Dove, walking leisurely towards the village, was overtaken by the clergyman, who paused to shake hands with her, and to walk with her a part of the way. Had any one looked closely at these two, he would have seen that the clergyman, though calm, was very pale; that Edith, pale too, had a weary, listless look about her face; that after she had shaken hands with her pastor, she quickly turned away her head, for her eyes grew dim with tears.

If Santley saw the tears he did not care to notice them. He had found,

directly they met, that she was suffering from one of those deplorable fits of temper which had more than once caused trouble between them; but that could not be taken any notice of now. If she chose to wear herself to a shadow, it was her own affair; he had something more important on hand. The interview could not be a long one, therefore he must reach the heart of the matter at once.

So he began abruptly—

"Edith, this new course you have adopted is a dangerous one, and had better be abandoned without loss of time."

The girl raised her eyes to his face, and asked wearily—

"What do you mean? What have I done?"

"I suppose you are responsible for

your cousin's visit to my house; you must have instigated it, if you did not actually advise him!"

Again she raised her troubled eyes to his face, and said sadly—

"I don't know what you mean."

"Then I will tell you, Edith. Your cousin, a hot-headed, ill-mannered youth, has thought fit to take upon himself the part of protector, or guardian, of your happiness. In this capacity he paid me a domiciliary visit yesterday, and treated me to some most violent abuse. He threatened to make known to the public the relations between us. I advised him to think it over, for your sake!"

"My cousin — Walter Hetherington, do you mean?"

"Most certainly."

"But how does he know? how has he learned?"

"From you, I suppose."

"No; it is not from me," returned Edith, whose listlessness was fast disappearing. "I have said nothing; I have never even mentioned your name to him. It must be known; it must be talked of in the village. Oh, Charles, spare me! Keep your promise to me, for God's sake! Any open disgrace would be more than I could bear. I should die."

The girl, overcome by her emotion, had forgotten for the moment that their present interview was a perfectly public one. The clergyman coldly reminded her of the fact. Then, after she had forced upon herself a composure which she was far from feeling, he continued—

"You had better understand, Edith, once and for ever, that whatever my conduct may be, I do not choose to have

it questioned by this exceedingly officious young man. A repetition of the scene of yesterday I will not bear. And as it is evident to me that my actions are under surveillance, I must refuse either to see or hear from you again, until that young man has removed himself from the village."

"Charles, you surely don't mean that?" exclaimed the girl.

But he certainly did mean it, and though she pleaded and argued, he remained firm. At last she resolved that she would speak to Walter, resent his interference, and, if possible, induce him to return home.

Then the two shook hands and parted.

That evening Walter dined at the cottage. During the dinner Edith scarcely looked at him; while he him-

self was silent and distrait. But after dinner, when they had all retired to the drawing-room, when the old lady had settled down to her wool-work, and Walter had lit his cigar, Edith threw a light shawl over her head, and asked him if he would come with her into the garden.

Wondering very much at the request, Walter rose at once, and offered her his arm. She took it; but the moment they were alone she withdrew her hand and turned angrily upon him. Walter listened, and he found that he had some chance of being heard. He acknowledged that she had spoken the truth; he *had* interfered; he had deemed it quite right that he should do so for her sake.

"For my sake!" returned Edith. "It seems to me there is more of selfish-

ness than benevolence in what you have done. What is it to you if I am engaged to Mr. Santley? and if we choose to keep our engagement a secret, what is that to you? I am my own mistress; I can act just as I think fit, without the fear of coercion from any one. *You*, at any rate, have no right to regulate my actions or to dictate them. I suppose you think I have no right to marry any one, simply because I refuse to be coerced into marrying you!"

It was a cruel thing to say; but Edith was simply dealing him, second-hand, some of the stabs which she herself had received from her beloved pastor in the morning. The stabs went deep into his heart, and the wounds remained for many a day. When Edith had uttered a few more truisms with the characteristic selfishness of love and

hatred, Walter coldly suggested that their pleasant stroll in the garden might be brought to a termination.

They returned together to the house.

As the old lady, beaming with delight at what she believed to be the sudden and happy reconciliation of the cousins, had prepared the tea, Walter pleased her by sitting down to take some before he said good night."

But the next day he returned to town.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### DR. DUPRÉ'S ELIXIR.

GEORGE HALDANE returned home in the best of spirits. His paper had been received with enthusiasm by the *savants* of France, and his life in Paris had been one pleasant succession of visits, learned conversaziones, and private entertainments. Thanks to his happy pre-occupation, he scarcely noticed that his wife's manner was constrained, nervous, yet deeply solicitous; that she looked pale and worn, as if with constant watching; and that, in answer to his careless questioning as to affairs at home, she made only fragmentary replies.

On entering his dressing-room to change his apparel, he found Baptisto, who was quietly undoing his portmanteau and selecting the necessary things with a calm air, as if his services had never been interrupted.

"So, my Baptisto," he said, clapping that worthy on the shoulder, "you are not dead or buried, I see? Ah, you may smile, but I am quite aware of the trick you played me. Well, you have been the loser. You would have had a pleasant time of it in Paris, the best of entertainment, and nothing whatever to do."

"I am glad you have returned, señor," replied Baptisto, with his customary solemnity.

"I hope you have given satisfaction to your mistress during my absence?"

"I hope so, señor."

"Humph! we shall see what report she has to make concerning you, and if that is favourable, I may forgive your freak of laziness."

"I have not been lazy, señor," said Baptisto, quietly preparing the toilette.

"Indeed! Pray, how have you been employing yourself?"

Baptisto did not reply, but smiled again.

"How is your inamerata and her family? I saw the little woman curtsying as I passed through the lodge-gates."

Baptisto shook his head solemnly.

"Ah, señor," he said, "you are mistaken. The woman of the lodge is a stupid person; and for the rest, I put no faith in women. *Cuerpo di Baccho,* no! They smile upon us when we are near; but no sooner do we turn our

backs, than they smile upon some other man."

"Pretty philosophy," returned Haldane, with a laugh. "Why, you are a downright misogynist, my Baptisto. But I don't believe one word you say, for all that. Men who talk like you are generally very easy conquests, and I would bet twenty to one on the little widow still."

"Ah, señor, if all women were like your signora, it would be different. She is so good, so pure, so faithful at her devotions. It is a great thing to have religion."

As Baptisto spoke his back was turned to his master, so that the extraordinary expression of his face was unnoticed, and there was no indication in his tone that he spoke satirically. Haldane shrugged his shoulders and

said nothing, not caring to discuss his wife's virtues with a servant, however familiar. Presently he went downstairs to dinner. All that evening he was very affectionate and merry, talking volubly of his adventures in Paris, of his scientific acquaintances, and of such new discoveries as they had brought under his notice. In the course of his happy chat he spoke frequently of a new acquaintance, one Dr. Dupré, whom he had met in the French capital.

"The French, however far behind the Germans in speculative affairs," he observed, "are far their superiors, and ours, in physiology. Take this Dupré, for example. He is a wonderful fellow! His dissections and vivisections have brought him to such a point of mastery that he is almost certain that he has discovered the problem poor Lewes

broke his heart over—how and by what mechanism we can't think. I don't quite believe he has succeeded in that great discovery, but some of his minor discoveries are extraordinary. Did you read the account in the papers of his elixir of death?"

Ellen shook her head. The very name seemed horrible.

"His elixir of death?" she repeated.

"Yes. A chemical preparation, the fundamental principle of which is morphine. By its agency he can so produce in a living organism the ordinary phenomena of death, that even *rigor mortis* is simulated. I saw the experiment tried on two rabbits, a Newfoundland dog, and, to crown all, on the human subject. They were all, to every appearance, dead; the rabbits for twenty-four hours, the dog for half a day,

and the woman for an hour and a half."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Ellen, with a shudder. "Do you actually mean he experimented on a living woman?"

"Yes; on a strapping wench, the daughter of his housekeeper; and a very fine thing she made of it. We subscribed together, and presented her with a purse of a thousand francs."

"I think such things are wicked," cried Ellen, with some warmth. "Mere mortals have no right to play, in that way, with the mystery of life and death."

"My dear Nell," cried Haldane, laughing, "it is in the interests of science!"

"But I am sure it is not right. Life is given and taken by God alone."

"Your argument, if accepted, would

make all mankind accept the religion of the Peculiar People, who will cure no diseases by human intervention. As to this business of suspended animation, it is merely a part of our discoveries in anodynes. Dupré's experiment, I know, is perfectly safe."

"But that is not the question."

"How so, my dear?"

"What I mean is, that death is too solemn and awful a thing to imitate as you describe. Such experiments are simply blasphemous, in my opinion."

"Come, come," cried the philosopher. "There is no blasphemy where there is no irreverence. According to your religious people, your priests of the churches, there was blasphemy in circumnavigating the globe; in discovering the circulation of the blood; in ascertaining the age of the earth; and, still later,

in using chloroform to lessen the pangs of parturition."

"But what purpose can be served by such experiments as *that?*"

"A good many," was the reply. "For example, it may help us to the discovery of the nature of life itself, which has puzzled everybody, from Parmenides down to Haeckel. If we can by a simple anodyne suspend the vital mechanism for a period, and then by a vegetable antidote restore it again to action, the resurrection of Lazarus will cease to be a miracle, and the pretensions of Christianity——"

Ellen rose impatiently, with an expression of sincere pain.

"My dear Nell, what is the matter?" cried her husband.

"I cannot bear to hear you discuss such a thing. Oh, George, if you would

leave such wicked speculations alone, and try to believe in the mystery and sovereignty of God!"

"You mean, burn my books, and go to hear your seraphic friend every Sunday?"

Had he not touched, unconsciously, on another painful chord? Why, otherwise, did his wife flush scarlet and partially avert her face? Conquering herself with an effort, she went over to him, and bending over him, looked fondly into his face.

"You are so much cleverer than I, so much wiser, and do you think I am not proud of your wisdom? But, all the same, dear, I wish you did not think as you do. When life becomes a mere experiment, a mere thing of mechanism, what will be left? If we knew everything, even what we are, and why we

exist, the world would be a tomb—with no place in it for the Living God."

Touched by her manner, Haldane drew her down by his side and kissed her; then, with more earnestness than he had yet exhibited, he answered her, holding her hand in his own and pressing it softly.

"My dear Nell, do me the justice to believe that I am not quite a materialist; simple agnosticism is the very converse of materialism. There is not living a scientific philosopher of any eminence who does not, in his calculations, postulate a mystery which can never be solved by the finest intellect. Even if we had fully completed, with the poet—

'The new creed of science, which showeth to man
How he darkly began,
How he grew from a cell to a soul, without plan;
How he breaks like a wave of the ocean, and goes
To eternal repose—
A tone that must fade, tho' the great Music grows!'

even then, we should know nothing of the First Cause. That must for ever remain inscrutable."

"But how horrible it would be to believe in annhilation? *Can* you believe in it?"

"Certainly not," replied the philosopher.

Ellen's face brightened.

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that!"

"My dear Nell, annihilation is absurd."

"Now, isn't it?" she cried triumphantly.

"It is refuted, on the face of it, by the doctrine of the conservation of force. Life is eternal, in one shape or another; no force can be destroyed, be sure of that!"

"I wish Mr. Santley could hear

you! He wouldn't call you an atheist then!"

Haldane's face darkened angrily.

"What? Does the man actually——"

"Don't misunderstand," cried Ellen, flushing scarlet. "I do not mean that he really calls you an atheist, but he is so sorry, so deeply sorry, that you do not believe. He does not know you, dear, and takes all my bear's satirical growling for solemn earnest. Now, when I tell him——"

"You will tell him nothing," exclaimed Haldane, with sudden sternness. "I will have no priest coming between my wife and me!"

"Mr. Santley would never do that," she returned, now trembling violently.

"Mr. Santley is like all his tribe, I suppose—a meddler and a mischief-maker. That is the worst of other-

worldliness; it gives these traders in the Godhead, these peddlers who would give us in exchange for belief in their superstitions a *bonus* in paradise, an excuse for making this world unbearable. Well, my atheism, if you choose to call it so, against his theism. Mine at least keeps me a man among men, while his keeps him a twaddler among women."

Haldane spoke with heat, for the word "atheist" had somehow stung him to the quick. This man, who rejected all outward forms of belief, and whose conversation was habitually ironical, was in his inmost nature deeply and sincerely religious; humbly reverent before the forces of nature; spiritually conscious of that Power beyond ourselves which makes for righteousness. True, he rejected the ordinary forms of theism; but he had, on the other hand, a deep

though dumb reverence for the character of Christ, and he had no sympathy with such out-and-out materialists as Haeckel and *hoc genus omne*. For the rest, he was liberal-minded, and had no desire to interfere with his wife's convictions; could smile a little at her simplicity, and would see no harm in her clerical predispositions, so long as the clergyman didn't encroach too far on the domain of married life and domestic privacy.

His indignation did not last. Seeing his wife greatly agitated, and fearing that he had caused her pain, he drew her forehead down and kissed it; then, patting her cheek, he said—

"Forgive me, Nell. I did not mean to scold; but one does not like hard names. When any one calls me 'atheist,' I am like the old woman whom Cobbett called a 'parallelogram;' it is

not the significance of the epithet, but its opprobrium, that rouses me. Besides, I do not like any man to abuse me—to my own wife."

"No one does that," she cried. "You know I would not listen."

"I hope not, my dear." He added after a little, looking at her thoughtfully and sadly, "Man and wife have fallen asunder before now, on this very question of religion. Well, rather than that should happen, I will let you convert me. Will that satisfy you?"

"I shall never be quite satisfied till I know that you believe as *I* do."

"What is that, pray?"

"That there is a just God, who made and cherishes us; and that, through the blood of His Son we shall live again although we die!"

"Well, it is a beautiful creed, my dear."

"And true?"

"Why not? I will go with you thus far. I believe that, if there is a God, He is just, and that we shall certainly live again, if it is for our good."

The emphasis with which he spoke the last words attracted her attention.

"For our good?" she queried.

"I am quoting the saddest words ever written, by the saddest and best man I ever knew.* He, too, believed that a God might spare us, and give us eternal life, if—mark the proviso—eternal life were indeed *for our good.* But suppose the contrary—suppose God knew better, and that it would be an evil and unhappy gift? Alas! who knows?"

He rose from his chair, still encircling

* J. S. Mill.

his wife's waist, and moved towards the door.

"Come to the drawing-room," he cried gaily. "After so much offhand theology, a little music will be delightful. Ah, Nell, one breath of Beethoven is worth all the prosings of your parsons. Play to me, and, while the music lasts, I will believe what you will."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE EXPERIMENT.

THE next morning Haldane was busy in his laboratory. When he came in to lunch, looking disreputable enough in his old coat, and smelling strongly of tobacco, he said to his wife—

"By-the-by, Nell, do you remember what I told you last night about Dupré's wonderful elixir? I forgot to tell you that I have brought some of it with me, for purposes of private experiment."

Ellen looked horrified.

"Don't be afraid," he continued, laughing; "your cats and dogs are safe

from me. I have found a better subject, and mean to operate on him this very afternoon."

"Whom do you mean?"

"As a sort of penance for his shamming illness, I shall kill Baptisto."

She uttered a cry, and raised her hands in protest.

"For heaven's sake, George, be warned! If you have any of that horrible stuff, throw it away."

"Now, my dear Nell," said the philosopher, "be reasonable; there is not the slightest cause for alarm. You will see this experiment, and it will, I hope, treble your faith in miracles."

"I will *not* see it. I beseech you, abandon the idea. As for Baptisto——"

At this moment the Spaniard entered the room, carrying certain dishes.

"I have been telling your mistress,

Baptisto, that you are ready to be a martyr to science. At four o'clock precisely, you will be a dead man."

Baptisto bowed solemnly.

"I am quite ready, señor."

But here Ellen interposed.

"It is ridiculous; your master is only joking. He would not do anything so foolish, so wicked. As for you, I forbid you to encourage him."

Baptisto bowed again, with a curious smile.

"It is for the señor to command. As he knows, he has saved my life, and he may take it whenever he pleases."

Haldane nodded, in the act of drinking a glass of wine.

"Don't be afraid, Baptisto. After death, there is the resurrection."

"That, señor, is your affair," returned the Spaniard, phlegmatically, shrugging

his shoulders. "You will do with me as you please."

And so saying, he glided from the room.

Ellen again and again entreated her husband not to proceed in his experiment; but he had long made up his mind that it was perfectly safe, and he could not be persuaded. To her gentle spirit, the whole idea seemed horrible in the extreme; but her greatest dread was that it might be attended with danger to the subject. Haldane, however, assured her that this was impossible.

All the afternoon Haldane and Baptisto were together in the laboratory. A little after four o'clock, as Ellen was walking on the terrace, Haldane came to her, smiling and holding up a small vial.

"It is all over," he said, "and the

experiment is quite successful. Come and see."

Not quite understanding him, she suffered him to lead her into the laboratory; but, on crossing the threshold, she uttered a cry of horror. Stretched on a sofa, lay Baptisto, moveless, and, to all seeming, without one breath of life. His eyes were wide open, but rayless; his jaw fixed, his face pale as grey marble; a peaceful smile, as of death itself, upon his handsome face. The light of the sun, just sinking towards the west, streamed in through the high window upon the apparently lifeless form. In the chamber itself there was a sickly smell, like that of some suffocating vapour. The whole scene would have startled and appalled even a strong man.

"Oh, George!" cried the lady, clasping her hands. "What have you done?"

"'Don't be alarmed," was the reply. "It's all right!"

"But you said the experiment——

"Was successful? Perfectly. There lies our poor friend, comfortably finished."

"But are you sure, quite sure, that he is not dead? He is not breathing."

"Of course not. The simulation is perfect. Place your hand on his wrist—you will detect no pulse. Turn his pupils to the light—you see, they do not contract. The case would deceive a whole college of physicians."

As he spoke, he suited the action to the word—placed his finger upon the pulse, gazed at the glazing pupils; raised one of the lifeless arms, which, on being released, fell heavily as lead.

"Horrible, horrible! For God's sake, recover him!"

"All in good time. He has only been dead a quarter of an hour; in half an hour precisely I shall say, 'Arise and walk.' Feel his forehead, Nell; it is as cold as marble."

But Ellen drew back, shuddering, and could not be persuaded to touch the sleeper.

"Well, go back to your promenade. I will call you when he is awakened."

Sick and terrified, Ellen obeyed her husband. Standing on the terrace, she waited for his summons; and at last it came. Haldane appeared, and beckoned; she followed him to the laboratory, and there, seated in an armchair, comfortably sipping a glass of wine, was the Spaniard—a little pale still, but otherwise not the worse for his state of coma.

"Thank God!" cried Ellen. "I

thought he would never recover. But it must have been a horrible experience."

Baptisto smiled.

"Tell the signora all about it," said his master. "Did you feel any pain?"

"None, señor."

"What were your sensations? Pleasant or otherwise?"

"Quite pleasant, señor. It was like sinking into an agreeable sleep. If death is like that, it is a bagatelle."

"Were you at all conscious?"

"Not of this world, señor, but I had bright dreams of another. I thought I was in paradise, walking in the sunshine—ah, so bright! I was sorry, señor, when I came back to this world."

"You hear!" cried Haldane, turning to his wife. "After all, death itself

may be a glorious experience; for 'in that sleep of death what dreams may come!' It is quite clear at least that all the phenomena of death, such as we shrink from and shudder at, may be accompanied by some kind of pleasant psychic consciousness. Bravo, Baptisto! After this, we shall call you Lazarus the second. You have passed beyond the shadow of the sepulchre, and returned to tell the tale."

Despite the resuscitation, Ellen still revolted from the whole proceeding.

"Now you are satisfied," she said, "promise me never to use that dreadful elixir again."

"I think you may make your mind easy. The experiment is an ugly one, I admit, and I am not anxious to repeat it—at least, not on the human organism. For the same reason, my dear Nell,

pray keep the affair to yourself, and make no confidences, even to your confessor—I should say, your clergyman. Will you promise?"

"Most certainly. I should not like any one to know you did such things. As for Mr. Santley, he would be shocked beyond measure."

So saying, she left the two men together. In the mean time, Baptisto had finished his wine and risen to his feet. While his master regarded him with an approving smile, he walked over to the door, softly closed it, and returning noiselessly across the room, said in a low voice—

"There is something, señor, I did not tell you. I had dreams."

"So you said, my Baptisto."

"Ah yes, but not all. While I was lying there, I thought that *you* were the

dead man, and that the señora, your widow, had married."

"Married?"

"The English priest."

Haldane started, and looked in amazement at the speaker.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Ah, señor, it was only my dream; a foolish dream. You were lying in your winding-sheet, and they were kneeling at the altar—smiling, señor. I did not like to speak of it to the señora; but it was very strange."

Haldane forced a laugh, while, with a mysterious look, Baptisto crept from the chamber. Was it in sheer simplicity or in deep cunning that the Spaniard had spoken, touching so delicate a chord? Left alone, Haldane paced up and down the laboratory in agitation. He was not by temperament

a jealous or a suspicious man, but he was troubled in spite of himself. The words sounded like a warning, almost an insinuation.

"What could the fellow mean?" he asked himself again and again. "Could he possibly have dreamed *that?* No; it is preposterous. There was malice in his eye, and mischief. . . . Ellen married to Santley! Bah! what am I thinking about? The fellow is not a *prophet!*"

In this manner, whether in innocence or for some set purpose of his own, Baptisto contrived to poison all the sweetness of that successful experiment. When Haldane again joined his wife that evening, he was taciturn, distraught, nervous, and irritable. All his buoyancy had departed. Ellen saw the change, and puzzled herself to account for it.

She played to him, sang to him, but failed to drive the cloud from his brow.

When she had retired for the night, he still sat pondering over Baptisto's words.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"BEWARE, MY LORD, OF JEALOUSY!"

If Baptisto's object in describing a dream so ominous was to attract his master's attention to the intimate relations between Mrs. Haldane and the clergyman, he certainly succeeded. Once assured in this direction, Haldane's perceptions were keen enough. He noticed that the mere mention of Santley's name filled Ellen with a sort of nervous constraint; that, although the clergyman's visits were frequent, they were generally made at times when Haldane himself was busy and preoccupied—that is to say, during his well-

known hours of work; and that, moreover, Santley, however much he liked the society of the lady, invariably avoided the husband, or, if they met, contrived to frame some excuse for speedy parting. Now, Haldane trusted his wife implicitly, and believed her incapable of any infidelity, even in thought. Still, he did not quite like the aspect of affairs. Much as he trusted his wife, he had a strong moral distrust for anything in the shape of a priest; and he determined, therefore, to keep his eyes upon the clergyman.

A few days after that curious physiological experiment, he had the following conversation with Baptisto. It was the first day of the week.

"Baptisto, I thought you were a good Catholic?"

"So I am, señor," returned the Spaniard, smiling.

"Yet you went to an English church yesterday, I hear?"

"Yes, señor. I go there very often."

"Why, pray?"

"Simply out of curiosity. Mr. Santley is a beautiful preacher, and has a silvery voice. While you were away, I went once, twice, three times. There is a young señora there who plays sweetly upon the great organ; I like to listen, to watch the congregation."

"Humph! By-the-bye, Baptisto, I have been thinking over that dream of yours, when—when you were lying there."

"Yes, señor?"

"Pray, what put such a foolish idea in your head?"

"I cannot tell, señor; all I know is, it came. A foolish dream, do you say? I suppose it is because the clergyman was

here so often, when you were away. And madame is so devout! I trust, señor, my dream has not given you offence; perhaps I was wrong to speak of it at all."

Haldane's face had gone black as a thunder-cloud. Placing his hand on the other's shoulder, and looking firmly into his face, he said—

"Listen to me, Baptisto."

"I am listening, señor."

"If I thought you would come back to life to tell lies about your mistress, I would have let you lie the other day and rot like a dead dog, rather than have recovered you at all. You hear? Take care! I know you do not love your mistress, but if you dare to whisper one word against her, I will drive you for ever from my door."

Baptisto bowed his head respectfully

before the storm, but retained his usual composure.

"Señor, may I speak?"

"Yes; but again, take care!"

"You should not blame me if I am jealous for your honour!"

Haldane started, and uttered an expletive.

"My honour, you dog? What do you mean?"

"This, señor. I would rather die than give you offence; and as for the señora, I love her also, for is she not your wife? But will you be angry still, when I tell you, when I warn you, to beware of that man, that priest? He is a bad man, very bad. Ah, I have watched—and seen!"

"What have you seen?" cried Haldane, clutching him by the arm. "Come, out with it!'

"Enough to show me that he is not your friend—that he is dangerous."

"Bah! is that all? Now, listen to me, and be sure I mean what I say. I will have no servant of mine spying upon my wife. I will have no servant of mine insinuating that my honour is in danger. If I hear another word of this, if you convey to me by one look the fact that you are still prying, spying, and suspecting, I shall take you by the collar and send you flying out of my house. Now, go!"

Baptisto, who knew his master's temper perfectly, bowed and withdrew. He had no wish to say one word more. He had thrown out a dark hint, a black seed of suspicion, and he knew that he might safely let it work. It did work, rapidly and terribly. Left alone, Haldane became a prey to the wildest fears

and suspicions. He remembered now that his wife had been acquainted with this man in her girlhood ; that there had even been some passage of love between them. He remembered how eagerly she had renewed the acquaintance, and with what admiring zeal the clergyman had responded. He pictured to himself the sympathetic companionship, the zealous meetings, the daily religious intercourse, of these two young people, each full of the fervour of a blind superstition. Could it be possible that they loved each other ? Questioning his memory, he recalled looks, words, tones, which, although scarcely noticed at the time, seemed now of painful significance. The mere thought was sickening. Already he realized the terrible phrase of the poet Young—"the jealous are the damned."

Haldane was not habitually a violent man. Though passionate and headstrong by temperament, he had schooled himself to gentleness after a stormy youth, and the chilly waters of philosophy, at which he drank daily, kept his head cool and his pulses calm. But the stormy spirit, though hushed, was not altogether dead within him, and under his habitual reticence and good-humoured cynicism, there lay the most passionate idolatry for his beautiful wife. He had set her up in his heart of hearts, with a faith too perfect for much expression; and it had not occurred to him, in his remotest dreams, that any other man could ever come between them.

And now, suddenly as a lightning flash illumining a dark landscape, the fear came upon him that perhaps he had been unwary and unwise. Was it

possible, he asked himself, that he had been too studious and too book-loving, too reticent also in all those little attentions which by women, who always love sweetmeats, are so tenderly prized? Moreover, he was ten years his wife's elder—was that disparity of years also a barrier between their souls? No; he was sure it was not. He was sure that she was not hypocritical, and that she loved him. Wherever the blame might be, if blame there were, it was certainly not hers. She had been in all respects a tender and a sympathetic wife; encouraging his deep study of science, even when she most distrusted its results; proud of his attainments, and eager for his success; in short, a perfect helpmate, but for her old-fashioned prejudices in the sphere of religion. Ah, *religion!* There was the one word which solved

the enigma, and aroused in our philosopher's bosom that fierce indignation which long ago led Lucretius into such passionate hate against the Phantom,

"Which with horrid head
Leered hideously from all the gates of heaven!"

It needed only this to complete his loathing for the popular theology, for all its teachers. Yes, he reflected, religion only was to blame. In its name, his wife's sympathies had been tampered with, her spirit more or less turned against himself; in its name, his house had been secretly invaded, his domestic happiness poisoned, his peace of mind destroyed. It was the old story! Wherever this shadow of superstition crawled, craft and dissimulation began. Now, as in the beginning, it came between father and child, sister and brother, man and wife.

It so happened that when George Haldane came forth from having his dark hour alone, he rather avoided meeting his wife at once, and, taking his hat, stepped out from the laboratory on to the shrubbery path. He had scarcely done so, when his eye fell upon two figures standing together in the distance, upon the terrace of the house. One was Mrs. Haldane, wearing her garden hat and a loose shawl thrown over her shoulders. The other was the clergyman of the parish.

Haldane drew back, and watched. In that moment he knew the extent of his humiliation; for never before had he been a spy upon his wife's actions.

Their backs were towards him. Santley was talking eagerly; Ellen was looking down. Presently they began to move slowly along the terrace, side by side.

Haldane watched them gloomily. The sunlight fell brightly upon them, and on the old Manor house, with its brilliant creepers and glittering panes, while the old chapel, with the watcher in its ruined porch, remained in shadow. It seemed like an omen. In the darkness of his hiding-place, Haldane felt satanic. Yes, there they walked—children of God, as they called themselves—in God's sunlight; and he, the searcher for light, the unbeliever, was forgotten.

Presently Santley paused again, and, with an impassioned gesture, pointed upward. Ellen raised her head, and looked upward too, listening eagerly to his words. Haldane laughed fiercely to himself, with all the ugliness of his jealousy upon him.

Presently they disappeared into the house. A little afterwards Santley

emerged from the front door, and came walking rapidly down the avenue. His manner was eager and happy, almost jubilant, and Haldane saw, when he approached, that his face looked positively radiant.

He was passing, when Haldane stepped out and confronted him. He started, paused, and a shadow fell instantaneously upon his handsome face. Recovering himself, he held out his hand. Haldane did not seem to see the gesture, but, nodding a careless greeting, said, with his habitual *sang froid*—

"Well met, Mr. Santley. Here I am again, you see, hard at work. Have you come from the house?"

"Yes," answered Santley.

"On some new message of Christian charity and beneficence, I suppose? Ah, my dear sir, you are indefatigable,

and the old women of the parish must indeed find you a Good Shepherd. Did you find my wife at home?"

"Yes."

"And zealous, as usual, I suppose? Ah, what a thing it is to be pious! But let me beg you not to encourage her too much. Charity begins at home; and what with soup-kitchens, offertories, subscriptions for church repairs, and societies for the gratuitous distribution of flannel waistcoats, I am in a fair way of being ruined."

Santley forced a laugh.

"Don't be afraid. My errand to-day was not a begging one, I assure you."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I was merely bringing Mrs. Haldane a book I promised to lend her. To tell the truth, she finds your library rather destitute of works of a religious nature."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Haldane, drily. "Why, I thought it unusually well provided in that respect. Let me see! There are Volney's 'Ruins of Empire,' Monboddo's 'Dissertations,' Drummond's 'Academical Questions,' excellent translations of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, not to speak of thirty-six volumes of Diderot, and fifty of Arouet."

Santley opened his eyes in horror and astonishment.

"Arouet!" he ejaculated. "Do you actually mean to call Voltaire a religious writer?"

"Highly so. There is religion even in 'La Pucelle,' but it reaches its culmination in the 'Philosophical Dictionary.'"

"And you would actually let Mrs. Haldane read such works as those?"

"Certainly; though, I am sorry to say,

she prefers 'The Old Helmet' and the 'Heir of Redclyffe.' May I ask the name of the work you have been good enough to lend her?"

"It is a book from which I myself have received great benefit — Père Hyacinthe's 'Sermons.'"

"Père Hyacinthe?" repeated Haldane. "Ah! the jolly priest who reverenced celibacy, and proclaimed himself the father of a strapping boy. Well, the man was at least honest. I think all clergymen should marry, and at as early an age as possible. What is your opinion?"

Santley flushed to the temples, while Haldane watched him with a gloomy smile.

"I think—I am sure," he stammered, "that the married state is the happiest —perhaps the holiest."

"With these sentiments, of which I cordially approve, why the deuce are you a bachelor?"

The clergyman winced at the question, and his colour deepened; then, as if musing, he glanced round towards the house—a look which was observed and fully appreciated by his tormentor.

"I am sure my wife would encourage you to change your condition. Like most women, she is by instinct a match-maker."

Santley did not seem to hear; at any rate, he made no reply, but, holding out his hand quickly, exclaimed—

"I must go now. I am rather in haste."

Haldane did not take the hand, but put his arm upon the clergyman's shoulder.

"Well, good day," he said. "Take

my advice, though, and get a sensible wife as soon as possible."

Santley tried to smile, but only succeeded in looking more pale and nervous than usual. With a few murmured words of adieu, he moved rapidly away.

Haldane watched him thoughtfully until he disappeared down the avenue.

"I wonder if that man can smile?" he said to himself. "No; I am afraid he is too horribly in earnest. I suppose the women would call him handsome—*spiritual;* but I hate such pallid, waxen-featured, handsome dolls. A pretty shepherd, that, for a Christian flock to follow; a fellow who makes his very ignorance of this world constitute his claim to act as cicerone to the next. Fancy being jealous, actually *jealous*, of such a thing as that!"

He turned back into his laboratory

and tried to dismiss Baptisto's suggestion from his mind; but it was impossible. He could not disguise from himself that Santley, with his seraphic face and sad, earnest eyes, was the kind of creature whom the weaker sex adore, and that he was rendered doubly dangerous to women by the radiant mesmerism of a fascinating and voluptuous celestial superstition.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FIRST LEAVES FROM A PHILOSOPHER'S NOTE-BOOK.

I AM about to set down, in as concise a manner as possible, and at present solely for my private edification (some day, perhaps, another eye may read the lines, but not yet), certain events which have lately influenced my domestic life. Were it not that even a professed scientist might decline to publish experiments affecting his own private happiness, the description of the events to which I allude might almost form a chapter in my slowly progressing "Physiology of Ethics," and the de-

scription would be at least as interesting as many of Ferrier's accounts of vivisection on dumb animals. But, unfortunately, I am unable, in this case, to apply the dissecting-knife to my neighbour's heart, without laying bare the ugly wound in my own.

To begin then, I, George Haldane, recluse, pessimist, moral physiologist, and would-be moral philosopher, have discovered, at forty years of age, that I am capable of the most miserable of all human passions; worse, that this said ignoble passion of jealousy has a certain rational foundation. For ten years I have been happy with a wife who seemed the perfection of human gentleness and beauty; who, although unfortunately we have been blest with no offspring, has shown the tenderest solicitude and sympathy for the children

of my brain ; and who, in her wifely faith and sanctity, seemed to be the sole link still holding me to a church whose history has always filled me with abhorrence, and a religion whose infantine theology I despise. Well, *nous avons changé tout cela*. My mind is no longer peaceful, my hearth no longer sacred ; and the woman I love seems slowly drifting from me on a stream of sensuous spiritualism—another name for a religious rehabilitation of the flesh.

If any other man were the victim, I should think the situation highly absurd. Here, on the one hand, is a fanatical Protestant priest, with the face of a seraphic monk, the experience of a schoolgirl, and the *gaucherie* of a country chorister who has never grown a beard ; a fellow whose sole claims to notice are his white hands, his clean

linen, and his function as a silly shepherd; a man fresh from college, ignorant of the world. Here, on the other hand, am I, physically and intellectually his master, knowing almost every creed beneath the sun, and the slave of none; indifferent to vulgar human passions, and disposed to disintegrate them one and all with the electric current of a negative philosophy. Between us both, trembling this way and that, is that fair thing of flesh and blood, my wife, zealous to save her own soul alive, and fearful at times, I fancy, that I have sold mine to the Prince of Darkness. It is another version of science against superstition, common sense against a lie; and Ellen Haldane is the prize. A fiery Spaniard, like Baptisto yonder, would end the affair with a stiletto-thrust; but I, of colder blood, am not

likely to do anything so courageous or so foolish, but am content to watch and watch, and to feel the sick contamination of my suspicion creeping over me like an unwholesome mildew. A stiletto thrust? Why, the mere tongue, a less fatal weapon, would do it all. If I could only summon up the courage to say to my wife, "I know your secret; choose between this man and me, between his creed and mine, between your duty as a wife and your zeal as a Christian," I fancy there would be an end to it all. But I am too timorous; I suppose, too ashamed of my suspicions, too proud to acknowledge so contemptible a rival. As a Spaniard covers his face with his mantle, I veil my soul with my pride; and, under the mantle of unsuspicion, rest irresolute, while the thing grows.

Once or twice, I have thought of another way—of taking my wife by the hand and saying, "To-morrow, my dear, we shall leave this place, and return to Spain or Italy—some quiet place abroad." I could easily find an excuse for the migration, which, once effected, would make an end of the affair. But that, in my opinion, would be too cowardly. It would, indeed, be an admission that the danger was real and imminent; that, in other words, the fight for honour could only be saved by an ignominious retreat. No; Ellen Haldane must take her chance. If she is not strong enough to hold out against evil, then let her go—*au bon Dieu* or *au bon diable*, as either leads.

Yet what am I saying? It is precisely because I have the utmost faith in her purity of heart that I watch the struggle

with a certain patience. I believe there will be a victim, but not my Ellen. Surely, if there is a good woman in the world, she is that woman. As for the other, every day, every hour, brings the cackling creature further and further into my decoy. Even if he tried to turn back now, I do not think I should let him. No; let him swim in and on, and in and on, till he reaches the place where I, like the decoy man, can catch him fluttering, and—wring his neck? Perhaps.

It is quite clear that the man takes me for an idiot. At first he used precautions, invented subterfuges; latterly, certain of my stupidity or indifference, he comes and goes without disguise. When I meet him driving side by side of my wife in the phaeton, on some pretended errand of mercy, he gives me

a careless bow, a nod. As he goes by my den, on his way to invite her out to visit his sister or his church, he makes no excuse, but passes jauntily, with a conversational pat for the stupid watch-dog: that is all. It would be amusing, I say, if it were not almost insufferable.

This afternoon, as Ellen was going out, I blankly suggested that she should stay at home.

"But you are busy," she said—"always busy with your books and experiments."

"Not too busy, my dear Nell, for a *tête-à-tête* with you. Where are you going? To the Vicarage?"

"Yes."

"To see the parson, or his sister?"

"Both. We have a great deal to discuss, about the designs for the new stained-glass windows, which have just come from London."

"Very interesting; but they will keep for a day. I fancy I could show you something quite as interesting, in my laboratory."

"I hate the laboratory," she cried, "and those horrible experiments."

"My dear, you should not hate what your husband loves."

"I don't mean that I hate them, quite; but I think them so useless!"

"More useless than stained-glass windows?"

"It is certainly not useless to beautify the House of God. Oh, I do so wish you could feel as I do about these things! What is the world without them?"

"Without stained-glass windows?" I suggested sarcastically.

She flushed impatiently.

"George, why have you such a dislike

for religion? Why do you hate everything I love?"

"Pardon me, my dear Nell, it was *you*, not I, that spoke of hating. Philosophers never hate."

"But you do worse; you despise it. Thank God we have no children. It would be horrible to tell them that their father forbade them to go to church, or pray!"

It was like a stab into my heart of hearts, that cry of thanks to God. Despite myself, I lost my composure. She saw it instantly, and in the manner of her sex, encroached.

"Oh, George, do try to think sometimes of these things, for my sake! You would be so much happier, you surely would have so much more blessing, if you sometimes prayed."

"How do you know that I do not pray?"

"Because you do not believe."

"I do not believe precisely as your priest believes, that is all."

She looked at me eagerly; then, after a moment's hesitation, cried—

"George, if I asked a favour, would you grant it?"

"Try."

"Let Mr. Santley come sometimes, and speak with you about God!"

This was too much, almost, for even me to bear with equanimity. I am afraid I did not look particularly amiable as I answered, sharp and short, turning from her—

"After all, I think you had better go and look at those designs."

"There, you are angry again!" she cried; and I knew by the sound of her

voice that her throat was choked with tears. "You are always angry when I touch upon religion."

"You were not talking of religion,' I retorted; "you were talking of that man."

"Why do you dislike him so? Because he is a preacher of the Word?"

"Because he is a canting hypocrite, like all his tribe," I cried.

She saw that I had lost my temper, as was inevitable, and, sighing deeply, moved to the door. I followed her with my eyes. I would have given the world to call her back; to clasp her in my arms; to tell her my aching fears; to promise her I would worship any God she choose, in any place, in any way, so long as she would only be true, and answer my eager impulse with a little love. But I was too proud for that.

"Then you are going?" I said.

She turned, looking at me very sadly.

"Yes, if you do not mind."

I shrugged my shoulders, and after another sad, reproachful look, she left the room. A minute afterwards, she drove her ponies past the window, without looking up.

*Thursday, September* 15.—A golden autumn day, so warm and still that it reminded me of the Indian summer. Not a leaf stirred, but the insects in the air were like floating blossoms, and seemed to sleep upon their wings. Even all round my den the shadows were sultry, and intertangled with slumberous shafts of light.

This fine weather rather disappointed me, for I had arranged for a day's recreation. In my youth, before I was caught myself in the tedious snares of

speculation, I used to be an ardent fisherman, and I still retain sufficient knowledge of the gentle craft to cast a fly tolerably. So, tired of work, and a little weary of my own thoughts, I determined, for the first time, to take advantage of the permission my neighbour, Lord ——, has given me, and spend a day upon the river banks.

Despite the sunshine, and the absence of even a breath of wind, I shouldered my basket, lifted my rod, and set off. Ellen was already out and about; so I did not see her before I started. Taking a short cut through the shrubberies, I soon came to the banks of the Emmet—as pretty a little stream as ever rippled over golden sands, or reached out an azure arm to turn some merry water-mill. Arrived there, I soon saw that it would be useless to try a cast till there

was a little wind; so, without putting my rod together, I strolled on along the river-side, till I was several miles away from the Manor house.

The stream was rather low, but here and there were good deep pools, but so calm, so sunny, that every overhanging tree, every finger of fern, every blade of grass, was reflected in them as in a mirror. Still, as the time was, the waters were full of life. Over the pools hung clusters of flies like glittering spiders' webs, scarcely moving in the sunshine; and when, from time to time, a trout rose, he leaped a full foot into the golden air above him, and sank back to coolness beneath an ever-widening ring of light. Sometimes from the grassy edge of the bank a water-rat would slip, swimming rapidly across, with his nose just lifted above the water, and his tail

leaving a thin, bright trail. Water-ouzels rose at every curve, following swiftly the winding of the stream; and twice past my feet flashed a kingfisher, like an azure ray.

The way lay sometimes through deep grassy meadows, sometimes by the sides of corn-fields where the sheaves were already slanted, oftentimes through thick shrubberies and woods already yellow with the withering leaf. From time to time I passed a farm, with orchards sloping down to the very water's edge, or pastures slanting down to shallows where the cattle waded, breaking the water to silver streaks and whisking their tails against the clustering swarms of gnats. It was very pleasant and very still, but, from a fishing point of view, exceedingly absurd.

By-and-by, however, a faint breeze

began to touch the pools, and putting my rod together, and selecting my finest casting-line and two tiny flies, I tried a cast. Fortunately the wind was blowing sunward, and as I faced the light, the shadow fell behind me; but, nevertheless, the shadow of my rod flitted about at every cast, and threatened to spoil my sport. My first catch was an innocent baby-fish as big as my thumb, who came at the fly with a rush, and fought desperately when hooked. When I had disengaged him, and put him back into the water, he simply gave a flip of his little tail, and sailed contemptuously and quite leisurely out of sight, making me call to mind, with unusual humiliation, the well-known definition which Dr. Johnson gave of angling—"a fish at one end of the line, and a fool at the other."

I had tried a good many casts before

I took my first respectable fish—a trout of about half a pound. I caught him in a nice broken bit of water, just below a quaint old water-mill; and just as I put him into the basket, the portly miller came out to the granary door, and looked at me with a dusty smile. He evidently thought me a lunatic, to be out with a fishing-rod on such a day.

Half a mile further on I landed another glittering picture of at least a quarter of a pound; after that, another of half a pound; then my luck ceased, the wind fell, and it was full sunshine. By this time I had wandered a good many miles from home, and reached the spot where the river plunges into the Great Omberley woods. Here the stream was so rapid and the boughs so thick, that it was useless to think of casting; so I put up my rod, and, leaping

over a fence, rambled away into the woods.

How strange and dark and still it was, passing out of the sunshine into those shadows, deep and cool as the bottom of the sea! The oak trees stretched their gnarled boughs into the air, and all around them were the lesser trees of the wood-willow, elder, blackthorn, ash, and hazel. The ground beneath was carpeted with moss and grass as thick and soft as velvet, with thick clusters of fern and bluebells round the tree roots, and creepers dangling from every bough. And the wood, like the river, was all alive! Conies tumbled across the patches of light, and flitted in the shadow, like very elves of the woodland; squirrels ran up the gnarled tree trunks; harmless silver snakes glided along the moss; but here

and there, swift and ominous, ran a weazel, darting its head this way and that, and fiercely scenting the air, in one eternal glutter and hurry of bloodthirsty emotion. Thrush, blackbird, finch, birds without number, sang overhead; save when the shadow of the wind-hover or the sparrow-hawk passed across the topmost branches, when there was a sudden and respectful silence, to be followed by a precipitate hurry of exultation, as the enemy passed away.

If I had been a moralist, I might have seen in this wood a microcosm of the world, with its abundant happiness, its beauty, and its dark spots of moral ugliness and cruelty. In you, Signor Weazel (who came so near that I touched you with my rod, which you snapped at ferociously, before bolting swiftly into the deep grass), I might have

seen the likeness of a certain sleek creature of my own sex and species, who dwells not very far away. Nevertheless, I let you go in peace; which was no mercy to the conies, I suppose.

So I entered the Forest Primæval—or such it seemed to me, as the blaze of sunshine faded, the boughs thickened, the air became full of dark shadows and ominous silence. My steps were now deep in grass and fern, and the scent of flowers and weeds was thick in my nostrils, but I chose a path where the boughs were thinnest, and quietly pushed through. While thus I rambled, I suppose that I fell, philosopher like, into a dream; at any rate, I seemed to lose all count of time.

> "The world, the life of men, dissolved away
> Into a sense of dimness,"

as some poet sings. I felt primæval—

archetypal so to speak, till a sudden shifting of the vegetable kaleidoscope recalled from thoughts of Plato and the Archetype to a cruel consciousness of self.

I was moving slowly on, when I heard the sound of voices quite close to me. I paused, listening, and only just in time, for in another moment I should have been visible to the speakers. Well shrouded in deep foliage, I looked out to discover what sylvan creatures were disporting themselves in that lonely place; and I saw—what shall I say? A nymph and a satyr? a dryad and a goat-footed Faun?

Just beyond me, there was a broad green road through the woodland, deeply carpeted with soft grass, but marked here and there with the broad track of a wood-waggon; and on the side of this

solitary road, on a rude seat fashioned of two oaken stumps and a rough plank, the nymph was sitting. She wore a light dress of some soft material, a straw hat, a country cloak, and gloves of Paris kid—a civilized nymph, as you perceive! To complete her modern appearance, she carried a closed parasol, and a roll which looked like music.

How pretty she looked, with the warm light playing upon her delicate features, and suffusing her form in its delicate drapery; with the semi-transparent branches behind her, and flowers of the woodland at her feet!

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE NOTE-BOOK CONTINUED—NYMPH AND SATYR.

And the satyr? Ah! I knew him at a glance, despite the elegant modern boots used to disguise the cloven foot.

He wore black broadcloth and snowy linen, too, and a broad-brimmed clerical hat. His face was seraphically pale, but I saw (or fancied I saw) the twinkle of the hairy ears of the ignoble, sensual, nymph-compelling, naiad-pursuing breed.

He was talking earnestly, with gestures of eager entreaty; for the nymph

was crying, and he was offering her some kind of consolation.

Presently he sat down by her side, and threw his arms around her. She disengaged herself from his embrace, and rose trembling to her feet.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "That is all over now. I cannot bear it!"

He rose also, and stood regarding her, not with the rapturous eyes of a lover, but with a dark and gloomy gaze. Then he said, in a low voice, something which I could not catch. But I heard her passionate reply.

"No, it is all over," she cried; "and I shall never be at peace again. Even if you kept your word, it would be the same. You do not love me; you never loved me—never!"

I crept a little closer, for I was anxious to hear his answer.

"I do love you, Edith; and after what has passed between us——"

She shrank away with a faint, despairing cry, and put her hand to her face.

"After what has passed between us, do you think that my love can change? But you are unjust to me, to yourself; too violent and too hard to please. I do not like to be suspected, to be watched; and it is painful to me, very painful, to be constantly called to an account by you. It is not reasonable. Even as your husband, I would not bear it; it would poison the peace between us, and convert our married life into a simple hell!"

He paused; but her only answer was a sob of pain. So he sermonized on:

"Between man and woman, Edith, there should be solemn confidence and

trust. When that ceases, love is sure to cease. Why, look at me! My trust in you is so absolute that no action of yours could shake it; no matter how peculiar were the circumstances, I should be certain of your faith, your goodness. That is true love — absolute, implicit faith in the beloved object. I wish I could persuade you to imitate it."

"You know that you can trust me," sobbed the poor child, "because I have *proved* my love."

"Have I not proved mine?" he cried, with irritation. "Have I not made sacrifice upon sacrifice for your sake? Have I not remained here, in this wretched country place, when I could have been promoted to other and greater spheres of action? Have I not made you my companion, my confidante, my nearest and dearest friend? Edith,

why do you persist in such accusations? What must I do to signify our attachment? Shall I marry you at once? Speak the word, and although, as you know, it would involve the ruin of all my worldly projects, I will do as you desire."

I had heard enough to convince me that the affair under discussion was no affair of mine, and that I had no right to continue playing the spy; so I was drawing back as gently as possible, and about to return the way I came, when I was suddenly arrested by the next words spoken.

"Give up Mrs. Haldane!"

The nymph was the speaker. She stood with her wild eyes fixed upon the other's face, which did not improve in beauty of expression. For myself, I started, stung to the quick; then I

returned, trembling, to my place of espionage.

"Give up Mrs. Haldane!" repeated the girl. "I ask nothing more than that. I will not force you to marry me, Charles, till it is for your good; indeed, if I did, I know that we should be unhappy, and that you would never forgive me. But you can at least cease to be so familiar with Mrs. Haldane."

He had discovered by this time, I suppose, that the pleading mood availed him little; at all events, he suddenly changed his tone, and with a cry of angry indignation, he exclaimed—

"Edith, take care! I have told you that I will not suffer it! How dare you suspect that lady! How dare you!"

And he stood towering over her (the satyr!) in the fulness of his snowy shirt-

front and the whiteness of his moral indignation.

"It is no use being angry," she returned, with a certain stubbornness, though I could see that she was cowed, in the manner of gentle women, by his violent physical passion. "After what you have told me, after what I have seen——"

"Edith, again, take care!"

"You are always with her," she continued, "night-time and day-time. I am amazed that Mr. Haldane does not notice it. It is the talk of the place."

With another exclamation, he turned his back and walked rapidly away.

"Come back!" she cried hysterically. "If you leave like that, I will drown myself in the river."

He returned and faced her.

"You will drive me mad!" he said. "I am sick of it. I am more like a slave than a free man. You will not suffer me even to have a friend."

"She is more than a friend. You have told me yourself, that you loved her."

"And so I did," he answered, "though of course she is nothing to me *now*."

"Why are you always with her?"

"I am interested in her, deeply interested. She is unhappy with her husband, and as a minister of the gospel——"

With her tearful, truthful eyes, fixed so earnestly upon him, no wonder he paused and blushed.

"Charles, do not be a hypocrite! At least be honest. She is more to you than a friend."

He raised his hands heavenward, in pulpit fashion, and protested.

"Edith, I swear to you before God, that there is nothing whatever between us. She is a stainless lady, her husband does not understand her, I am her spiritual friend and guide."

"Yes, Charles; I understand," she said, still earnestly watching him. "*Just as you were mine!*"

I think it worth while to put that little sentence in italics. It was a home stroke, and took away the satyr's breath.

"Edith, for shame!" he cried. "You know you do not mean what you say. If I thought you meant it, I should break with you for ever. I tell you again, Mrs. Haldane is above reproach, and it is simply disgraceful to couple her name, in such a manner, with mine. And you would infer, now, that I have influenced your own life for evil; you would mock at my spiritual pretensions,

and brand me as a base, unworthy creature. Well, Edith, perhaps you are right. Perhaps I have given you cause. I have shown you that I love you, beyond position, beyond the world, beyond even my own self-respect, and this is my return."

I could have sprung out and strangled the fellow, he was so cruel and yet so plausible, so superbly selfish and yet so completely self-deceiving; and I saw that with every word he uttered he gained a fresh hold over the heart of the pretty fool who was listening. While he spoke, she sobbed as if her little heart was ready to break; and when he ceased, she eagerly held out her arms.

"Oh, Charles, don't say that! Don't say that my love has been a curse to you!"

"You drive me to say it," he answered moodily; "you make me miserable with your jealousy, your suspicion."

"Don't say that I make you miserable—don't!" she sobbed.

"You used to be so different," he continued, still preserving his tone of moral injury; "you used to be so interested in my work, my daily duties. Now, you do nothing but reproach me; and why? Because I have found an old friend, who happens to be of your own sex, but who is far above the folly of a meaningless flirtation, and who little deserves the cruel slur you cast upon her. Am I, then, to have no friends, no acquaintances? Is every step I take to be measured by the unreasoning suspicion of a jealous woman?"

By this time she had put her arms

about his neck, and was sobbing on his breast.

"Oh, Charles, don't be so hard with me! It is all because I love you—ah, so much!"

"But you should conquer these wicked feelings——"

"I try! I try!"

"You should have more confidence, more faith. You know how much I care for you."

"Yes; but sometimes I feel afraid. Mrs. Haldane is so much cleverer, so much more beautiful, than I am, and she was your first love. They say men never love twice."

"That is nonsense, Edith."

"But you do love me, dear? you do?"

Ugh, the satyr! He answered her with kisses, straining her to his heart;

and she, sobbing and clinging round him, was quite conquered. I felt sick to see her at his mercy. Then their voices sank, and he whispered, and I saw the bright blood mount to her cheek and brow. But, alas! she did not shrink away any more.

Thus whispering and kissing, with eyes of passion fixed upon one another, they moved away, taking a lonely path into the woods beyond me. My first impulse was to follow them, and to tear them asunder. But after all, I reflected it was no affair of mine, and I knew now, moreover, that nothing in the world would save her from him—or from herself.

END OF VOL. II.

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