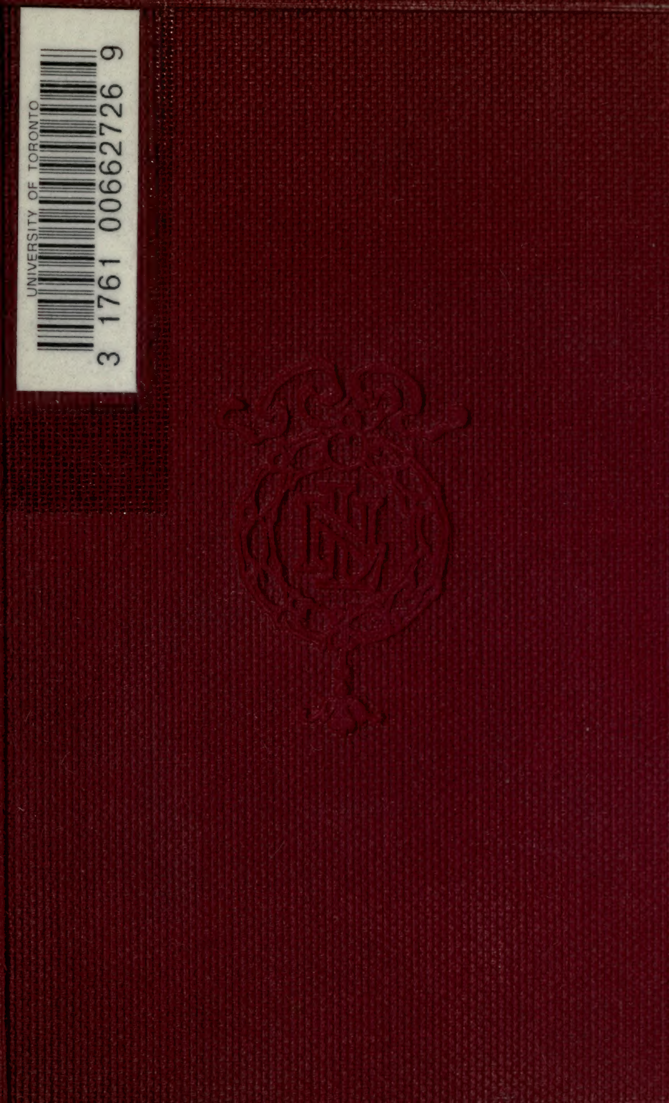
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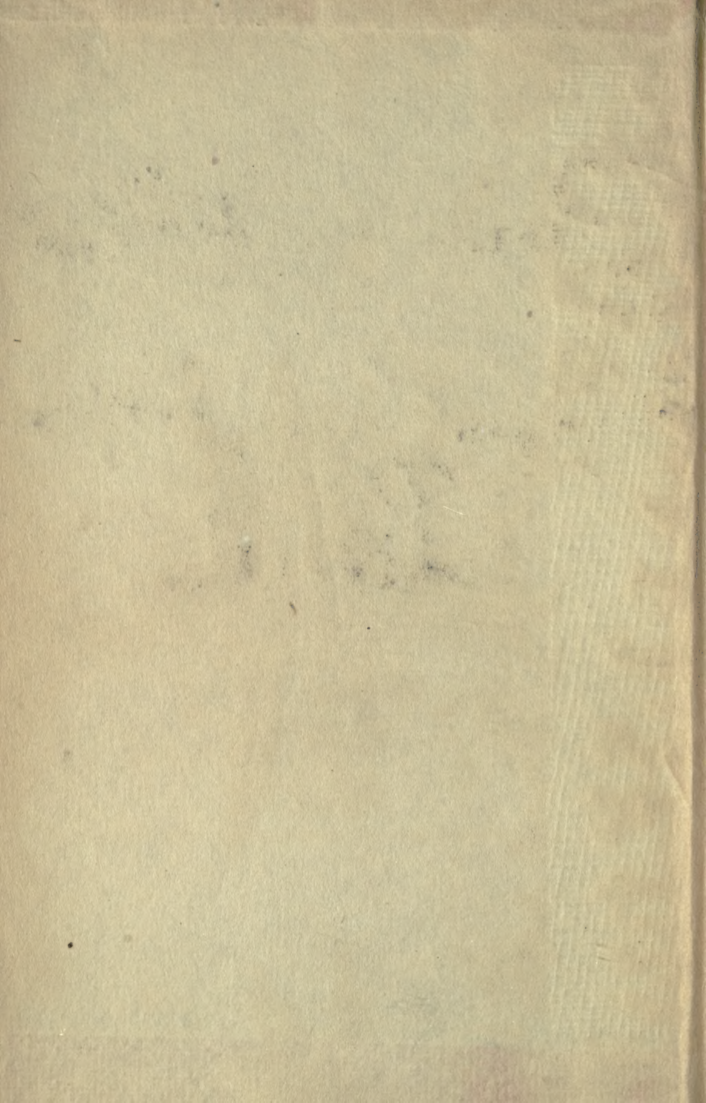

Evelyn Blackwood

January 11 - 1911

Much love from

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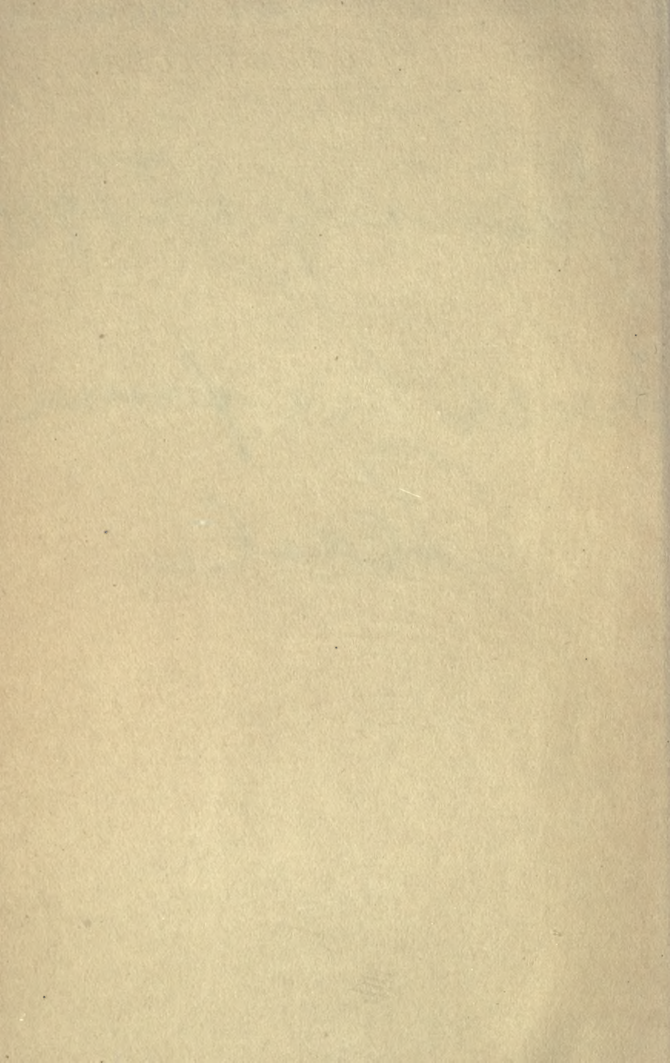

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She allowed herself to be lifted into his strong arms.

THE GIFT

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" So the All-Great were the All-Loving too.
So through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, ' O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself!
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me who have died for thee!' "

THE GIFT

PART I

CHAPTER I

WHEN Eleanor McNeill was quite a little girl she drove down to Hurlingham one Sunday afternoon with her father and mother and dined with them there. The McNeills always dined out somewhere on Sundays, and Eleanor had heard all her life that this arrangement was made from some godly motive in connection with Evening Service and the servants' supposed attendance thereat. Eleanor herself loved Evening Service when her father and mother went to parties and she went to St. Peter's with her French nurse and stayed up till nine o'clock. But she liked dining at restaurants better. She used to eat a good deal on these occasions, and feel rather sick on Monday mornings.

She sat up in the carriage now, feeling very important; a perky, pretty, over-dressed little

girl—with bobbing curls and big blue eyes, and a huge white hat with ostrich feathers in it. She made quaint, pert little remarks to her parents from time to time, and was disappointed if what she said did not provoke laughter and comment. And this afternoon Eleanor's father and mother did not seem quite as appreciative as usual; her mother smiled indulgently at her, but her father hardly spoke. Eleanor would have liked a better audience. She began to fidget, and wanted to remove her gloves.

"When I'm in Parliament," she said, "I'm going to abolish gloves." This was said for effect, and her mother laughed. But her father seemed preoccupied, and Eleanor's joke fell a little flat.

"Get out, dear," said he, as the carriage stopped.

They strolled about under the trees, and listened to a Viennese band that was playing a distracting valse full of gaiety and sadness, with, as we say, a laugh and a sob in it. The sun began to decline towards the west, making a golden glory behind the trees, and causing pretty Mrs. McNeill to blink her eyes and unfurl a huge white lace parasol.

"How lovely everything is looking this evening," said Captain McNeill. "It seems to me we go through life, and sometimes it is not till the very end that we realize how beautiful the world is, and how many simple pleasures we have missed."

There was a note in his voice like the note in the wild Hungarian valse that was being played

under the trees—a sound of pain and tears under the ordinary speech.

"Yes," said Mrs. McNeill, "it's very pretty down here. I always like town trees and lawns and flowers; they look so nice and artificial."

"Shall we go in to dinner now?" said her husband presently; and they went in and dined at a small table, the three together, and Eleanor drank some champagne, and ate ices, and enjoyed herself immensely. Several people turned round to look at the pretty, aristocratic-looking child, and of this she was fully conscious. She began to show off, and to bob her curls about, and to say pert things.

"Let us take another stroll under the trees before I order the carriage," said Captain McNeill. "I can't go home yet."

"That will be delightful," replied his wife in her pretty, charming way. She was always pretty and charming, always well-dressed and well-bred and sweet. "Pay the bill, Hector dear, and let us go out into the cool."

The waiter brought the bill, and Captain McNeill merely glanced at it, and laid two sovereigns on the salver with the characteristic indifference of an English gentleman when he settles such accounts.

Then he suddenly burst out laughing.

"I suppose if one were at one's last fiver," he exclaimed, "one would order a decent dinner and some champagne, and tip the waiter! We can't

economize. It's the way one is brought up nowadays. Why, even at Eton I had begun all sorts of expensive habits which have lasted through my life. And you and I, Dulcie, we have had an excellent time. It has been pleasant, darling; but I don't believe we have ever stopped to consider the difference between five pounds and fifty."

"I don't think there is much difference," said Mrs. McNeill with gentle conviction.

Captain McNeill finished his coffee and pushed back his chair. He was smiling a little oddly.

"No," he said, "and we can't make even the fifty pounds do very much. It pays for a dinner, or it fills the drawing-room with lilies-of-the-valley in January, but it's not a bit of use for anything else. Fancy trying to pay bills with fifty pounds!"

"No," allowed Mrs. McNeill, "but I always think fifty pounds is rather a nice sum, just to spend. You don't feel extravagant, and yet you can buy some really nice little things with it. I love spending."

"We can't stop spending," said Captain M'Neill in a hopeless sort of way. "It's one of the laws of society that one must either swim with the stream or go under altogether."

"Hector!" cried Mrs. McNeill, her blue eyes full of tears, and a little sob coming into her voice, "you don't mind my having a few lilies-of-the-valley, surely?"

"I'm a savage," said Captain McNeill huskily. "Come out into the garden, Dulcie, come and walk with me in the dark. I can't breathe here." He drew her arm within his own, and pressed it close to him.

His wife's lovely face brightened directly. "We are like people coming home from Evening Service," she cried gleefully.

She thought Evening Service rather a vulgar form of entertainment, to which footmen and maids and shop assistants went arm-in-arm.

"I could wish to be like one of those simple bourgeois lot," said Captain McNeill. "I should like to earn a weekly wage and bring it home to my wife, and not try to keep up appearances and—— "

"How terrible!" murmured Mrs. McNeill.

"You wouldn't like to be poor?" asked her husband; and he looked at her and smiled a little. There was a grey look of pain on his face, and he blessed the darkness that hid this from her.

"I couldn't be poor," said Mrs. McNeill, simply. "You have to be born to it, you know."

She trailed behind her on the dusty gravel path her long dress of palest blue, and Eleanor followed behind in a leisurely fashion.

"I think I should like to go home now," said Mrs. McNeill.

She had spent such a tiresome evening, and had not met a soul she knew. And Hector had really

been a little depressing. Generally he was so nice. Mrs. McNeill thought she had the most charming husband in London. She hoped that he was not going to become morose or religious, or anything of that sort.

She wrapped herself in a light cloak, and slept peacefully the whole way home. Hector McNeill bent forward quietly and drew Eleanor on to his knee; and they drove home thus through the dusky, lamp-lit streets.

"I've been asleep," exclaimed Mrs. McNeill, as the carriage stopped; and she sat up and rubbed her drowsy blue eyes and laughed. "Dear! how sleepy I am! I shall go to bed at once, Hector."

"I am not sleepy," said Hector McNeill. "I am going to lie down on the library sofa; it's the only cool place in the house."

"You absurd person! Well, Eleanor, darling, you be off directly."

Hector McNeill came upstairs to his wife's room in the silent hot night. He was frightened of the odd pain that came so often to him now—and it was worse to-night. His doctor had asked if he had any worry to account for it, and he had answered, No. Yet some day he would know all about it: and Dulcie would have to know too. He hung about her bed, and prayed that she might wake and speak to him. All the house was still now; but some lamps burned softly on the staircase.

"Dulcie!"

"Is it you, darling?"

"Dulcie, wake up and speak to me. Wake up and say good-night, Dulcie."

"Good-night, Hector," said the drowsy voice.

He went downstairs through the quiet house.

And the next day there was the awful confusion of death in the house. They had found poor McNeill where he had lain all night—dead and alone in the big library. The servants did not summon their mistress, but sent for the doctor; and Hector was lying in decent fashion on a couch before his wife even knew that he was dead. She must be spared all possible pain. The servants and every one else felt that. She was one of those women who are made to be sheltered and protected—a woman like a summer breeze; a little languid, very soft and delicious. Dulcie was never in a hurry, never untidy, never hot, nor cross, nor dirty. Never too busy to speak to you; ever ready to approve, without any motive except that it was pleasanter to approve than to disapprove, and the pleasant thing must be best. Surrounded by luxury and love, she often wondered why people talked so foolishly about this world being a hard or a difficult one. She supposed such people must have been born a little discontented, and she classed them with those rather trying, dear souls who acted from

principles, and discussed whether quite ordinary things were right or wrong, and who were altogether a little exhausting. Men worshipped her, women loved her, servants slaved for her. And she thanked them with a smile and a look from her very blue eyes. She accepted graciously all sacrifices made for her. Why not? She never asked for a sacrifice. They seemed to like to make them. There was scarcely a woman in London more beloved than Mrs. McNeill, and one could hardly call her selfish for accepting all that was offered her—the sacrifices and the worship and the praise that were like a daily incense burned before her.

It seemed to Hector that she was worth a man's suffering, and he had died without speaking rather than tell her he was ruined and ask her to face poverty with him. Perhaps during those long still hours in the library, the thought may have come, even to his loyal heart, that somehow his beautiful wife had failed him. And a longing may have crept over him—for we are all cowards in the early dawn, and perhaps a lack of vital energy was poor McNeill's gravest fault—for the clasp of a brave, firm hand laid in his, and the sight of loyal eyes facing the future and all that it may bring, with sweet courage and a woman's patient endurance. While unconsciously

he may have learnt that the essential part of a woman's love is its protective quality.

No one will now know what thoughts beset him as the dawn crept through the windows, and the lamps died and went out on the staircase, and the odd sharp pain in his heart brought a merciful faintness. The great silence had fallen for him before the sun was risen.

The doctor broke the news to Mrs. McNeill with what gentleness he could, but the widow's grief was of a frenzied sort. "Where is he? Where is he?" was her first cry. Then, when they had led her to the locked door of the room where Hector lay, she turned on the threshold, with her poor white face full of fear, and whispered, "I can't look; take me away," and her servants wept for sympathy with her. She sent for Eleanor, and clasped her in her arms, and wailed out the awful news, saying, "She couldn't look—she couldn't look; death was so awful," till the child was in a panic of fear, and clung terror-stricken to her mother.

Then, "They must send for some one—send for every one; she could not be alone. No, not her women friends; only men were kind and strong." She had clung to some one all her life, and already the need of support made itself felt.

Sir John Majendie—the dead man's colonel—was the first person to come to the darkened house,

and it was with him that Dulcie visited the room where Hector lay.

"I can go if you will come with me," she had whispered.

Even in her grief she was charming, helpless, winning. And this unconsciously. To be charming was a habit with Dulcie McNeill.

It was Sir John who was her support and stay through all the awful time that followed. It was he who made the necessary arrangements with lawyers and coroner; but, with all the will in the world, not even he could keep from Dulcie McNeill the fact that she was penniless. He did not tell her that but for her husband's untimely (or timely) death he would have been a bankrupt; but in helping her to arrange for the future the fact of her poverty could not be concealed.

"I do not understand being poor," said Dulcie. "What does one do?"

"Have you no relative you could live with?" asked Sir John.

"No, no one. At least, only an old uncle—a cross old retired general who lives at Clapham or Peckham, or somewhere dreadful of that sort. . . . But I would rather live in a single room in a slum than go to him!" cried Dulcie.

"Then what is to be done?"

"I shall work," cried Dulcie McNeill. "I shall face the world, and work for myself and my child."

Sir John blew his nose. It was hideous to think of this beautiful, fragile creature condemned to toil for her daily bread.

"You will help me to find something to do?" said Dulcie, laying her hand on his arm.

"I will do all I can," said Sir John, while he turned over in his mind all the kind-hearted people he knew, and wondered which of them would give an asylum to this fair woman and her child in exchange for a slender amount of work.

"Would you have any objection to being a companion?" he asked, thinking of a stingy old aunt of his own who might be persuaded to employ a lady in this capacity—if her salary were found by some one.

"Oh! I couldn't be a companion," cried Dulcie, her tears bursting forth afresh. "Anything but that! I would rather live in a single room in a slum than that!"

Sir John went away and began racking his brains and bothering his friends to find employment for a beautiful woman who had never in all her costly life brushed her own hair nor buttoned her boots for herself.

His friends, if they listened to him at all, had a disagreeable way of inquiring what were Mrs. McNeill's capabilities, and with much compunction Sir John called at a pretty house in Stratton Street to question Dulcie on the subject.

"You see," he said apologetically (for it seemed so unnecessary that Mrs. McNeill should have any talents or capabilities, or indeed anything but her beauty and her exquisite charm of manner), "people ask so many questions. Now, my cousin, Mrs. Trefusis, thought you might suit her as a governess, but she wanted to know——"

"Oh, but I can't teach," said Mrs. McNeill, smiling. "I give Eleanor little lessons on Sundays, but I always have to have the book."

"And my sister said something about your giving painting lessons. She thinks she could get you some pupils, and you could live at home, you know."

"I have never painted anything in my life," said Dulcie, and she laughed a little at the absurdity of the notion.

"I think," said Sir John gently, "that I could do more for you if I knew what you could—I mean what you would like to do."

"It isn't what I would *like*," said Mrs. McNeill bravely, "I would do *anything*."

And at last the kind-hearted soldier seemed to have found the very thing that was wanted. An American girl he had heard of—well off, but not an heiress—wanted to spend five years in England. She could afford a house in a good part of the town, and would pay a chaperon a hundred a year to live with her and take her into society. She had no objection to the child living in the house.

"Dear, *dear*, Sir John," said Mrs. McNeill, "I am *so* grateful! But can I do it? I don't like American girls—they are so unlike ourselves; and besides—besides—oh, how could I go into society as a chaperon? Hector would not have liked it. And just think what it would be to be at the beck and call of some slangy girl! When I go out I like to meet my own friends, and I couldn't—I really couldn't—have a strange girl tacked on to me always. If it were anything but that! But to be a chaperon! I think I would almost rather——"

The usual reference was made to that single room in the slums which had been heard before; and this time Mrs. McNeill added the unhappy rider, "It's what I shall come to, I know," while Sir John Majendie tugged at his moustache, and wondered if it would be brutal to suggest that even a single room in the slums cost something.

"What I think I should like," said Mrs. McNeill, and Sir John listened with interest, "would be parish work. I know that heaps of charitable people do it for nothing, but I should have to ask for a small salary. I went to the East End once, so I know how to get there, which is a great matter. I should feel I was doing good as well as earning my living."

"You would be a district visitor, do you mean?"

"Yes, or go to thieves' kitchens. I know a man who does that."

The next day she was still more hopeful.

"I am not going to do parish work after all," she said, "because I should be afraid of infection for Eleanor, but I have found a whole lot of advertisements showing how ladies can make money at home. I have answered five, and have sent two-and-sixpence to each advertiser—that is the fee they require before answering you. I haven't got any replies yet."

Some people believe that an advertisement will discover some talent in them which they have never discovered for themselves.

Meanwhile time had passed, and the house and furniture at No. o Stratton Street had to be sold.

Mrs. McNeill could not believe it was really going to happen till Sir John Majendie came for her and Eleanor and her maid, and took her away from her home to the Alexandra Hotel.

"Have I got anything to pay the bill with?" she asked tearfully, helplessly, at the end of a few days.

"Never mind that for the present," said Sir John. "You can settle up with me, you know, when you begin to make some money."

"I can arrange flowers," interpolated Mrs. McNeill hopefully. "I forgot to tell you that I could do that."

But before a week had passed Dulcie's uncle, the grim old General, came to see her, and asked with calm matter-of-factness who was paying for her ?

" Uncle ! How insulting ! " sobbed Dulcie. But it ended in the General paying the hotel bill, going over every item with the manager with much grumbling and warlike disputations, and then he told his niece that if she wanted to keep her character she had better come to the only relation who had offered her a home. So Eleanor and her mother and an indispensable maid went to live at the Bungalow, Clapham Park, S.W. And here ends the first chapter in the life of Eleanor McNeill.

CHAPTER II

"How long will it be before it kills me?" Dulcie McNeill used to say, alluding to her grief; but it is probable that, like some hot-house plant thrown out in chilly autumn weather into the cold and misty garden, the fair widow was drooping from the cold misery and dulness of her altered life rather than from any more active or grievous sensation.

Could there be anywhere, she used to wonder, a more unbearable existence than hers? No; thinking over all the hard fates she had ever heard of, hers was the hardest. She did not fight against it—Dulcie never fought. But she drooped silently, and her cheeks grew pale, and her blue eyes big and starlike.

The Bungalow was a large grim grey house in the King's Road—a house as unlike a bungalow as any structure devised of man could possibly be; a hideous house, with tall dripping trees about it, and some carefully tended paths on which no one ever walked. On either side of it stood other large grim grey houses, and opposite the tale was still the same. Big houses and

small gardens, carefully swept paths and black dripping trees. The autumn after Mrs. McNeill's arrival at Clapham was unusually wet. A small, tidy gravel path encircling a conventional flower-bed led to each stuccoed doorway. Each garden boasted a hawthorn tree.

The names of the houses alone showed any variety or originality of ideas, and gave food for speculation to account for their bestowal. "Arundel" or "The Grange" doubtless form a fine heading for Silurian notepaper, and may deceive a distant tradesman. But when "Fir Hill" and "Ivy Glen" stand side by side, with no perceptible variation in the level of the soil, the reason is more difficult to find.

Eleanor was delighted with the Bungalow. She danced out into the garden as soon as ever she arrived, and came in to tea an hour later, sooty and radiant.

"Mamma!" she cried, "it's such a lovely place! There's a big silver ball in the garden, and a dear little seat, and a dog. And the gardener says I may keep a rabbit. Isn't it jolly, mamma?"

"Jolly!" cried Mrs. McNeill. "Oh, Eleanor, have you forgotten him already?"

She burst into tears, with which the child's sobs mingled, and after this Eleanor only walked soberly round the trim-kept garden paths, and she told the gardener she had changed her mind and did not want a rabbit.

The days passed in most dreary monotony. There was nothing to do. No one came to call. The weather continued raw and damp and misty.

And Dulcie McNeill was so bored, so hideously dull and bored! Even her grief had lost its poignancy, and was now only dull and dead and heavy. She wept daily, and sometimes all day long, but not with the tragic abandonment of a fresh grief—her nature had become too weary for violent feeling.

It was in these days that her voice took to itself a plaintive note which never afterwards left it. Even in after happy days there was always something pathetic in Dulcie's voice. She considered its minor note a mark of respect to poor Hector. Women sometimes erect a perpetual memorial of this kind to their dead—a memorial which often remains long after the dead are forgotten.

"It must soon kill me," said Dulcie to herself, coming downstairs at eleven o'clock one morning—she breakfasted in her room to make the days appear shorter. She went in to say good morning to her uncle, who sat in the dining-room all day long with closed windows and a huge fire. Her black gown showed too plainly her wasted figure, and she wore a pathetic looking little shawl, and a snow-white widow's cap.

"Good morning, uncle."

The old gentleman by the fire did not respond; his head was bent over the *Times*, which publica-

tion he read faithfully every day, from its title and price to the last word of its advertisement column. He suffered much from cold, and his kindliest expression of feeling was conveyed in the invitation to "come to the fire and get warm." He dressed in Jaeger flannel, and he habitually wore a large knitted shawl round his shoulders, while a black skull-cap, suggestive of bygone acquaintance with pomades, protected his bald head.

"Good morning, dear," repeated Dulcie, and still receiving no response, she bent down and dutifully kissed the only available place that presented itself to her—a small portion of neck, just visible between the woollen shawl and the skull-cap.

The old gentleman burst into tears.

"You have given me untold agony," he cried, and Dulcie wept too—her tears were never far away in those days.

"What have I done?" she cried. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You touched my spinal cord," said the General. "Oh, oh!"

Dulcie ran for Eleanor. She had become very dependent on the little girl since her widowhood—indeed the positions of mother and child were completely reversed, and pretty, forward little Eleanor, with her curls and her blue eyes, had become a sedate, careworn person, with poor mamma's health always on her mind.

"I had better go and play bèzique with him," she said, when her mother had sobbed out her distress. "Is the fire *very* large, mamma ?"

"Enormous !" replied Mrs. McNeill tragically.

Eleanor gave a sigh, and went and fetched the little card-table with its faded plush cover, and placed it in front of the blazing fire. The person who played bèzique with the General sat opposite him on the hearthrug, with the back legs of his or her chair in the fender.

"You have the devil's own luck," said the old gentleman to the small girl, now feeling very hot and a little sick, when she ventured to declare a sequence.

"Old Nick is in it—he really is. You think you can play. But it's luck—luck. Oh me ! Oh me !" (He was beginning to weep again.) "Oh me ! if I could only get the cards. Give me the tools and I'll work, I say ; but I can't get a single thing. What's to be done here—what's to be done ? It's cruel, cruel. Come here, Dulcie."

Dulcie went and leaned over the back of the old man's chair. She knew that two persons were always required for these games of bèzique ; one as opponent, and the other to advise and sympathize.

"Cruel, eh ? Isn't it cruel ? I'll have to sacrifice my queens, eh ? Oh, it's persecution, this——"

This perturbed and distracted player had all the

time a double bèzique in his hand, which, after debating for some minutes, he flung upon the table.

"I'll show you how to play!" he cried with grim triumph; "just give me the tools, and I'll show you how bèzique ought to be played. That's five hundred to me." He twisted the handle of his marker and added seven hundred to his score.

"*Five* hundred, uncle," said Eleanor, with a child's rectitude in such matters, while her mother whispered, "Let it pass, darling."

"Five hundred! So it is; my eyes grow dim," murmured the old man, his lip trembling. He reduced his score to six hundred, and begged Eleanor to proceed.

After luncheon, there being no carriage, Eleanor and her mother generally went for a short walk up the King's Road and along the Queen's Road a little way, and home again. Occasionally, for the distance was almost beyond Mrs. McNeill's strength, they went as far as the shops in the principal street. Eleanor thought these shops were wonderfully attractive, but her mother shuddered at the ready-made dresses and cheap millinery, and passed by on the other side.

"Everything seems made to insult me!" she cried, with a personal sense of injury at suburban streets and clothes. "Oh, Hector, why did you leave me? If only Mrs. Egerton were at home, I

could go to her, and forget all this for a little while, and perhaps see a few people."

The few friends who had, with exaggerated difficulty, managed to penetrate into the unknown regions beyond Vauxhall Bridge, did not come twice to Clapham. It occupied the whole afternoon getting there and back, and their coachmen never knew the way, and trains always took them to Clapham Junction instead of to the other Clapham—whatever it might be—and poor dear Mrs. McNeill began to have faults, whereas before she had been simply charming and faultless. Now, she was absurdly hopeless and too full of grief, or not grieving enough. But in reality poor Dulcie's most unpardonable fault was that she was penniless and alone.

As the winter deepened she was too weak and languid to go out, but sat with folded hands and big childish sad eyes gazing out on the lawn and the silver ball, and the tidy paths of a Clapham garden.

"Pack of nonsense," said the General; "I wish she only knew what it was to have bad health like mine."

Then he drew the slim white hands between his own strong fat ones, and drawing her down to the hearthrug, said—"Keep warm, Dulcie, keep nice and warm, my dear."

Kindness appealed strongly to Dulcie, and she

kissed the General's hand in her pretty way, but she was quite hopeless about herself. And one afternoon, when the Bungalow—the big dreary house—was stiller and quieter than even it was wont to be, she drew her child towards her, and whispered, "What will you do when mother is gone, my darling?"

"Gone where?" asked Eleanor, her eyes big with terror.

Then Mrs. McNeill burst into tears, and talked to the nervous child about the "Better Land," where she would soon go "to meet my Hector"—"For I cannot live without him," said Dulcie.

Eleanor's grief was painful in its intensity. "Don't leave me, mamma, don't leave me!" she cried in a frenzy of fear and sorrow; and Mrs. McNeill said, "Don't cry, darling," and went on to give some touching instructions to the little girl, and begged her never, never to forget poor mamma.

The pathetic scene and tender little appeal were not intentionally cruel, but their effect upon Eleanor was that for days after she could neither eat nor sleep, and would hardly leave the house even to take a short walk. Mamma might be dead when she returned. She never re-entered the little carriage-drive without glancing up at the windows to see if the blinds were drawn, and often in the night-time she would steal into her mother's

room and bend over the bed to hear if she were still breathing.

When once with her maid she had walked a little further than usual, and was returning to the house, she saw a phaeton and pair of horses standing at the door of the Bungalow, and she ran forward in a frenzy of apprehension, crying, "It must be the doctor; it is all over!"

She rang again and again, without a moment's pause, and tore past the servant who opened the door. "Where is mamma?" she cried, and fled onwards to the drawing-room.

She heard a soft little laugh, and saw her mother sitting on a low chair by the fire gently waving a big black fan to and fro. There was a pretty colour on the widow's pale cheeks, and she smiled at Eleanor as she entered the room, and said, "See, darling, Sir John has found us in our banishment! Isn't it nice to see our old friend again!"

"Yes, mamma," said Eleanor in a low voice. The sudden revulsion of feeling made her faint and sick, and she sat down beside her mother and held her hand till Mrs. McNeill said, "Run away now, dearest, and play."

The phaeton with its heavy wheels and rattling chains and its pair of handsome brown horses, drew up at the door of the Bungalow often after this. Sir John Majendie had given up his command of Her Majesty's Own Guards soon after

Captain McNeill's death, and had been abroad ever since. Now he had returned to London, and Dulcie McNeill's eyes grew brighter, and her thin cheeks less pale, after some drives in the phaeton in the warm spring air.

"Spring has come," she said to Eleanor as they looked out of the dining-room window at the yellow crocuses starring the lawn.

"I wish my warm slippers would come," said the General. "While I think of it, if you are going out with that stupid fellow you make such a fuss about, I wish you would call and enquire for them. It will be better than driving about in the aimless way you generally do."

"I will do anything with pleasure," said Dulcie, smiling.

"Will you, my dear? Then just put on a morsel more coal. The fire will take another piece in that corner."

Eleanor sat on the back seat of the phaeton with the groom when she and her mother drove with their old friend through the budding suburban lanes. Dulcie had found out that Streatham Common under a pale April sky was beautiful, and she had turned to Sir John once as they drove to Sydenham, and exclaimed—"Look at those silver mists! Are they not lovely? What a pity it is that it has never been the fashion to drive out here and admire the view."

Eleanor used to hear these little scraps of conversation and watch the golden plaits and the grizzled hair of the two heads in front of her. And sometimes Sir John would look back over the folds of the leather hood which divided them from her, and say in his kindly way, "All right behind, eh?" to which Eleanor would reply with a little forced smile, "Yes, thank you," and think how dull it was.

But to-day they drove up to Bond Street to enquire for the General's shoes, and that was more amusing. She saw a carriage with a little girl in it whom she used to know, and she had tea and ices at Gunter's.

Mrs. McNeill smiled and nodded to at least a dozen acquaintances. "I live again," she said to Sir John, with a happy smile.

He gave her flowers—early fragile roses and sweet white hyacinths; and she sat with them on her knee the whole way home. still smiling happily.

It seemed, indeed, as though she lived again! These little pleasures and a few caressing words had brought pretty, pleasure-loving Mrs. McNeill back from the brink of the grave. There are some natures constituted thus. Without amusements and soft words and luxurious surroundings they droop as surely as a flower will droop without water. Some soft delights are a necessity of their existence. Mrs. McNeill had been amused and admired and beloved all her life. Clapham and poverty had

been killing her. And poor Hector was not far wrong after all, that night when he looked down into the bare, poor future and turned aside from it to that other road from which there is no turning back.

Meanwhile, Mrs. McNeill was driving home with the roses in her lap, and her sweet eyes smiling. They returned by Clapham Common, and so on to King's Road. And there Dulcie discovered that the hawthorn trees in all the little gardens were budding, and that made her smile too, " For," said she, " the long winter is quite over now."

They turned in at the gate of the Bungalow, and went and sat in the back garden on the little lawn beside the metal ball on its tripod. Eleanor had gone indoors, and the General, with his feet on the fender, was finishing the last page of the *Times*.

" The air is like summer," said Dulcie, turning her wild-rose face up to the sky, and hearing the rooks cawing among the tall black trees.

" My summer has come if you will be my wife," said Sir John.

CHAPTER III

When her engagement was announced, Mrs. McNeill was overwhelmed with pretty notes and kind congratulations and presents from her friends in town. Mrs. Egerton, who had returned to London, asked her up to stay with her for a month for the purpose of buying the trousseau, and the marriage was to take place from her house.

"Am I to come too?" asked Eleanor wistfully.

"For the wedding, of course, my darling—you are to be my bridesmaid, you know."

"But I shan't see you for the last month," said Eleanor.

"The last month! You foolish child, why you will be always with me, Eleanor, when I am married, just the same as before."

How could a child express the thought that it would never be the same again? How explain the blank feeling that is experienced when responsibility is removed—the resentment that a nurse may feel when a patient is strong enough to do without her? So Mrs. McNeill drove away in the new brougham which Sir John had bought for her, and she went to her own place—the London that she loved, with its

Bond Street and Piccadilly and Mayfair; and Eleanor stayed behind at the Bungalow in charge of the housemaid, and played bèzique with her uncle, and cried every night regularly after she went to bed.

The housemaid was a plain woman, with a large and awful cap, squeaky shoes, and strict religious principles. Eleanor liked her, and enjoyed hearing about her relations, but it was not many hours that Hannah could spare from her work to talk or play, and the little girl had a lonely, miserable time of it. Night was the worst time, when the memory of her father's death, and the vision of that long, still, mysterious figure under the white sheet in the library seemed even now before her eyes. But daytime was lonely, and ghostly too. She hated the big dining-room with its closed windows and huge fire and dull brown wall-paper, but the drawing-room, since Mrs. McNeill's departure, had been swathed in brown holland and carefully locked up, and there was nowhere else to go. The General sat all day long with his feet on the fender, silently absorbing the *Times*.

When mealtime came it was difficult to eat with appetite in the stuffy atmosphere; and the General conversed solely with his butler. Pope was a faithful servant, with an eye to a legacy in due time. He and his master discussed food, its ingredients, and its several effects upon the human system as the different courses were placed upon the table.

"Try a morsel, sir; quite harmless, sir; just a few heggs beat up, sir, and a little cream, as you might say, sir."

"Couldn't touch it, Pope; the very sight of it gives me jaundice."

"The cutlets is nice, sir, made with a little soce-pikant and just a dash, as you might say, of sherry, sir."

"Turns to acidity directly."

"I saw a nice little curry downstairs, sir, if you don't fancy anything on the table, sir."

"That might tempt me. Yes, Pope, fetch the curry."

After luncheon the programme was the usual one of bèzique and tears mingled with upbraidings.

"You want to rob me!" (The games were never played for money.) "I'm desperate, desperate! Pope! Ring the bell for Pope, please. Look here, Pope, what am I to do? I'm in a hat—the deuce of a little cocked hat, and something will have to be sacrificed. Was there ever such an encumbered hand?"

"Seems very 'ard, sir," said Pope, with a reproachful look at Eleanor.

"Hard, Pope! I have the cruellest hard luck! Give me the tools and I'll use 'em, but who can play with such tools as I get?"

He was nearly five minutes deciding which card to sacrifice, and before he had, with tears, parted

with his queen, Eleanor had rolled off her chair on to the hearthrug in a dead faint.

Pope ran for Hannah, and they carried the child to bed, and left her with a night-light and a Bible for company. That night, for the first time for many years, the General mounted upstairs. He came to Eleanor's room and looked grimly at her in bed. "Women are kittle-cattle," he said, and he went out and fetched a large blanket and laid it upon her already overburdened head. "Good-night, silly," he said; "you keep nice and warm and go to sleep."

Hannah remarked, "It's my belief the child is moped. And not a line from her mother for a week. If Mrs. Egerton knew, she'd send for her, I know." She said to Eleanor, "I'll tell you what I'll do, Miss, I'll take you for a treat to hear Spurgeon at the Tabernacle. It's beautiful. Such crowds, Miss Helnor! it's every bit as good as a theatre."

Eleanor was in an impressionable mood, and the gaslights and dense crowds of earnest or animated faces wrought her to a strange pitch of excitement. She listened spell-bound to Charles Spurgeon's deep, fine voice, and sang the catchy melodious hymns with a lump in her throat and a tendency to hysterical tears.

"Oh, Hannah!" she cried, when they had emerged into the street, "I do believe I'm saved!"

It was her first religious impression.

But her exaltation was not for long. Her Prayer

Book was full of religious difficulties, and she read it for hours every day. She studied the Athanasian Creed, sitting as still and quiet as her uncle in the hot dining-room; and at night she no longer cried for her mother but lay awake, repeating in an agony of childish doubt and fear, "I can't thus think of the Trinity. I can't. I don't know how three people can be one person, it's so difficult; and as I don't see how it is managed I must perish everlastingly."

Being an imaginative child, her ideas of hell were vivid and distinct. The place lost nothing of its terrors from Eleanor McNeill's conception of it. Sometimes, when she bowled her hoop ahead of Hannah along the King's Road, the thought of the burning pit smote her with sudden terror, and she would run back and cling to the housemaid's hand, speechless but trembling. Oftener, however, it was at night time that these terrors laid hold of her, and even her dreams became an agony.

No religious fanatic, however despairing he may be, is so much to be pitied as a morbid religious child. A child cannot bring sense, reason, nor experience to bear upon the profound questions which beset it—unknown, it may be, to any one about it—its parents, its little companions, its nurse. Children are unconscious solitaries. Who, indeed, knows anything of their minds? They have troubles which nearly break their hearts; and they know terrors which some strong-souled ones will scarcely

know even in death. They question things which you and I do not dare approach, and the little stories which they learn from their mothers on Sunday afternoons are frequently received with a scepticism as profound as it is unrealized. But speech is foreign to their use ; they remain dumb, or at best incoherent. For when expression has been learned the vision has fled.

Eleanor having failed to find any comfort or consolation in the Athanasian Creed, entreated to be taken again to the Tabernacle ; and she and Hannah set out on a lengthening spring evening, and took a tramway to Newington. The hymns delighted her, but the sermon was not particularly consoling. It dwelt chiefly on the duty of alms-giving, and Eleanor had no money. She saw Hannah put a penny into the alms-box and envied her. "If I had any money," she thought, "I would give every bit of it to the poor. That would be an easy thing to do—much easier than thus thinking of the Trinity."

The collecting-box was coming nearer. Quite suddenly Eleanor put up her hand to her throat and felt her pearl brooch. She unpinned it with trembling fingers and dropped it into the collecting-box.

"Oh, Miss Helnor," cried Hannah, "Oh you naughty girl! That's your beautiful jewel brooch worth paownds and paownds. Oh, whatever shall I do? Your Ma will never forgive me, and perhaps

I'll have it stopped out of my wages. To think of you doing such a naughty trick as that! Oh, dear!"

By a sudden inspiration she thought of appealing to one of the church officials, to whom she said that "Miss" had let her brooch fall into the plate by accident.

The trinket was restored, and Eleanor rode home thoughtfully in the tramway car. "I expect I am rather like Cain," she said to herself; "my sacrifice was not accepted. Now, Hannah is more like Abel, her penny was approved. You never seem to know what things God will like and what He won't."

And she went home and continued her study of the Prayer Book—a truly miserable and morbid little girl.

Hannah would not take her to the Tabernacle any more since the incident of the brooch, but cook was kind enough to allow her one Sunday morning to go with her to her own church. "It's genteeler than the Tabernacle," she said to Eleanor, "and just as raousing."

"Repent, repent!" cried the rousing preacher; "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Howl ye; weep for your sins. Yea," said the eloquent man, "let thine eyes flow with penitential tears lest I consume thee in a moment......We must repent, every one of us. There is not a man or woman, there is not a child in this church but must repent and turn with wailing to the avenging God."

The eloquent man had not learned—shall we indeed ever learn ?—that there is a child's religion as well as a grown-up religion. That the call to the thief and the reprobate is not the call to the stainless soul of a child. Poor children, not long come from the God Who is their home ; with their feelings all sensitive and quivering, and the wistfulness of the uncomprehended in their faces. How soon we teach them to forget whence they came ! How soon we make sensible little men and women of them ! And yet it may be that now and again when a child lifts its grave clear eyes to our faces, we may look down into the wistful depth of them and realize that the burden of what it knows is too great in a world of ignorance and uncomprehension.

Eleanor never told her trouble to any one, but as she walked round and round the prim garden or sat in the stuffy dining-room, one heavy thought was in her heart, driving out even the old difficulty of the Trinity—" I am not penitent : I can't count myself the chief of sinners. I can't. I have never murdered any one nor stolen things. O God, please make me repent ; please make me repent with tears."

She began to pity herself and long for her mother, and some hot tears fell. Eleanor felt that her prayer had been answered, and she cried as hard as she could for ten minutes, and returned to the house in an elated frame of mind.

"I'll convert uncle," she said to herself.

Cook and Hannah seemed safe enough, but it was awful to think of the General's unconverted state. He had no Bible, and he read the *Times* and played bèzique all day. Doubtless his portion would be the burning pit unless he howled for his sins.

She went upstairs and fetched her Prayer Book, and brought it down to the dining-room. But there her courage failed her. Her uncle was busy reading; "in season and out of season," whispered conscience, and Eleanor, with a white face and shaky voice, said, "Uncle, may I read to you?"

"Read what?" asked the General, shoving his gold spectacles up on his forehead, and putting a fat forefinger on the newspaper to mark his place.

"A—a psalm," faltered Eleanor.

"Thank you, I prefer the money article."

This was awful. The General turned to the *Times* again, and Eleanor had grown a little whiter than before.

"Uncle, I hope you won't go to hell when you die."

"At least I should be warm there," said the old gentleman testily. "Ring for Pope and tell him to put on some more coal; this room is like an ice-house."

Eleanor went away, and prayed a long pharasaical prayer, poor child, for that chief of sinners—no, not quite the chief—but next to herself the chief of sinners—her uncle.

"We can't all be chief, and yet we have all got to think we are," sighed Eleanor.

She gave up playing bèzique, and learned instead a number of hymns which she recited to Hannah in the pantry. She crept into the holland-covered drawing-room and played hymn-tunes on the grand piano; and she stitched a little red flannel petticoat for the poor, and felt very self-righteous and utterly miserable and lonely.

And then one day Sir John Majendie drove down to Clapham to see his future step-daughter. Eleanor thought he looked very "worldly" in his handsome phaeton, with the flower in his button-hole, and the smart groom standing at the horses' heads.

She went to meet him primly, and sat talking to him in the drawing-room. Sir John looked struck by the little sallow face, and said, "You've been playing too much bèzique over the fire, Eleanor."

"No," said Eleanor simply, "I have given up playing bèzique; I think it is wrong."

Then the tall worldly soldier took her on his knee and said, "My poor little lass, you've been moped to death here with 'dirt, dissent and dulness.' And you are looking as sick as you can be, dear."

Any reference to its health is enough to break down a child's fortitude, and in another minute Eleanor had laid her head on the kind man's shoulder, and was sobbing out, "I'm so mi—mi—miserable, and mamma has forgotten me, and no one loves

me, and the Bible is so di—difficult to understand."

Perhaps he saw into the child's heart, as big men with big hearts often do see into childish troubles, even where a woman fails to do so. He did not say much—being unfluent of speech—but he found out about Eleanor's church-going, and said fiercely, "I'll crack those two old women's heads together. The idea of filling a child's head with such things! I'll send her to Kininvie!" he said to himself, "Alec will be nice to her, and she will get out of doors. I won't have her moping here while we are away on our honeymoon."

CHAPTER IV

The marriage of Dulcie Hermione Clare McNeill, widow of the late Hector McNeill, captain in Her Majesty's Own Guards, with Sir John Majendie, of Frant Place, baronet—was, according to the society papers, a brilliant affair.

The bride was attired in grey satin trimmed with silver embroideries, and carried a bouquet of white roses and stephanotis, the gift of the bridegroom. She was attended by her only daughter (Miss Eleanor McNeill), a lovely little girl, who performed her duties of bridesmaid with exquisite grace, and who made a charming picture in her Watteau dress of flowered brocade over a quilted pink satin petticoat. She carried, instead of a bouquet, a tall cane tied with a bunch of pink roses and ribbons, and she wore a pearl locket—both the gifts of the bridegroom. The centre aisle of the church was lined with a detachment of Her Majesty's Own Guards . . . The decorations . . . The reception . . . The presents . . . The bride's travelling gown . . . The distinguished guests . . . There were columns of print about Dulcie McNeill's wedding, and each account con-

tained some flattering notice of the lovely little bridesmaid.

Eleanor had come up to town a week before the wedding—the very day, indeed, after Sir John had seen her at Clapham. She slept with her mother's maid in an upper chamber in Mrs. Egerton's big house in Belgrave Square, and Robson was a cheerful person, who talked a great deal about dress and the peerage. She used to bring Eleanor good things from the servants' supper-table, and the child ate them in bed and found them very delicious. Robson laughed at the General's housemaid, and called her a "dissenting old maid," and this view of the converted Hannah gave Eleanor a bewildered feeling, as though her world with all that was in it had suddenly been turned upside-down. She had no time for what she called, without any sense of self-importance—without any sense of anything, indeed, but headache and weary effort—her "self-examination": and her puzzled questionings were all forgotten. If she was restless at night, and the miserable fears of her sleepless hours at the Bungalow returned to her, Robson's "Don't fidget, Miss Eleanor," had a consoling effect; or if she was very wakeful, a glass of cold water (which tasted of tooth-powder), administered by the same sensible person, soon sent her off to sleep again.

She got three new frocks, including the sweetest, smartest little tweed to wear when she should go

to Kininvie ; and she went to four tea-parties and a matinée all in one week. Always sensitive to the influence of environment, and directly swayed by it, she began to be forward and amusing again, and to make people laugh. Her mother said, " My own love, what shall I do without you till I come back ? No one else is so amusing." And her step-father, who had a deeper insight into Eleanor's character than most other people, said : " Poor child, there is much more in her than people think who only laugh at her funny remarks. She will feel keenly all her life, and that too often means that she will suffer keenly. And yet who knows ! She may marry some good fellow before she is twenty, and live happily ever after."

Quite suddenly he thought of his nephew, Alec Campbell, and laughed. " How absurd to think of anything of the sort yet ! Alec is a good fellow, but I don't suppose he'd ever understand her. I wonder who will ? "

" I do hope," said gentle Mrs. McNeill, " that Eleanor will never be a woman who requires to be understood. It's so irksome."

Mrs. McNeill, or Lady Majendie as she was when she returned from St. George's, Hanover Square, looked every bit as lovely as she had done on a certain sunny June day years before, when Hector McNeill, trembling like a girl, had sworn to love and cherish her. Her blue eyes were just as smiling now as

then, her cheek as fair and fresh, and her pretty voice quite as charming. Sir John thanked God for her—his prayers were all for his wife! Let him only make her happy, make him good enough for her! Never was bridegroom more utterly satisfied with his bride, and never, let it be said at once, was there a happier marriage. Dulcie kindly furnished in herself an object for worship; and surely this is something! The leisurely, sweet, smiling, well-dressed woman will never lack adoration while the world lasts. Jane, the excellent housekeeper, who can be met with any day in an omnibus, sensibly dressed, and with the weekly books under her arm, may gain our respect, but not our adoration. Sophia, who is learned and teaches the boys Latin; Matilda, who attends meetings, and who has been known to say that she does not waste one minute in the twenty-four hours—these, doubtless, are the elect of the earth. But Dulcie McNeill—gentle clinging, easily loved, and easily loving, who never entered an omnibus in her life, and who liked to be taken care of—is the type of woman who will probably be worshipped of men while others are often neglected.

Eleanor enjoyed the wedding immensely. Everybody made a fuss about her, and as she looked much younger than her years, her little grown-up remarks and small sallies of wit sounded much more precocious than they really were. She carried

about a huge basket of favours which she distributed amongst the wedding guests, and she had to hold up her charming little face a dozen times to be kissed. She was here, there, and everywhere, her Watteau frock rustling about her, and her eyes bright with excitement. A strong-minded looking girl in a dark cloth gown put up her eye-glass and asked who that conceited child was, but every one else was charmed with her. An old gentleman took her into a corner and made her promise to come the very next night, in that very same frock, to a juvenile fancy-dress dance that his granddaughter was giving. To which Eleanor replied affectedly, "Oh, I can't be seen again in this frock; every one will be sick of it!" And just then the old gentleman stepped out on the balcony and said, "Come and look! They are just off!"

"Not mamma!" cried Eleanor. She dropped her basket of flowers, and her poor little face grew very white. "She forgot to say good-bye to me," she said. . . . .

The following day she went with a new maid and all her pretty frocks to stay with Sir John Majendie's brother-in-law, Colonel Campbell, of Kininvie. From there she wrote to her mother—

"My darling Mamma,—

"I write to say I like being here very much. The Campbells are very funny. They say very

little, and I do all the talking; they always say just what they mean; it is very odd. Colonel Campbell is called the Laird; he makes me call him Uncle, and I call the son Alec. He is eighteen, and very, very tall, and the people here call him a bonnie laddie—that is Scotch. But I think he is hideous. He has sandy hair and grey eyes, and is never indoors. He wears a kilt. The village here is called a Clachan, and the park they call the policies. I always dine late. I have no more news, so goodbye my angel mamma.

"Your loving daughter,

"ELEANOR.

"P.S.—There are heaps of dogs."

It was at Kininvie that Eleanor first got her notions of conquest. The village people adored her, and Alec was her humble slave. She grew conceited, snubbed Alec, and wrote to her mamma for some more new frocks. Alec smiled awkwardly when she made sharp speeches to him; she was more than his match already, although Alec was a handsome young giant and a good sportsman besides. She delighted the Colonel, and her fairy-like dresses and pretty English speech were a constant wonder to the Highland peasantry.

Eleanor was becoming very much spoilt. The unhappy days at Clapham were all forgotten. She sat up late, played backgammon with the Colonel,

and fished the brown burns with Alec for a companion. Also she began to give herself airs. She talked in a grown-up manner, emphasizing all her words in an affected way, and she patronized Alec when she did not snub him.

"My *dear* boy," she said to him one day when they had been fishing all the morning, and now rested on the grey hillside for lunch, "you are *the* most silent person I ever met."

"One can't always be talking," the big man in the kilt replied awkwardly.

Eleanor laughed. "You wouldn't be a bit of good in society," she said.

"I think society is awful rot," Alec replied.

"That's because you don't know anything about it, my young friend," said Eleanor pertly.

But she was more civil to him when Alec landed the big trout which she could never catch; and when she saw him one stormy day with his bonnet pressed down over his eyes, steer his boat through a gale of wind to the rescue of a fishing craft in distress. She was crying softly to herself when he came back, with the salt water hanging on his hair, and his hands bleeding from the strain of the ropes. She wanted to put her arms round his neck and call him brave and noble! But the Colonel's "You got to them all right, I suppose?" was a restraint to her ardour; and so was Alec's reply, "Yes, that boat of Brodie's leaks a good bit.

Have you any whisky ?" What could be more commonplace ?

She had a glimpse of him through other people's eyes when they sailed across to the Highland Gathering at Orme, and the crofters and fishermen were all trying to get a word with him, and the young ladies who drove to the ground in dog-carts and waggonettes had encouraging little nods and smiles for him.

"Of course he's taller than any one here, but I really don't see why they all make such a fuss about Alec," said Eleanor to herself.

It was almost dark when they set sail for Kininvie again, and the night was mirk and stormy. The boat heeled over till her gunwale was under water ; the ropes creaked and strained in a way that seemed very ominous to the town-bred child. She could see Alec only dimly, with his hand on the tiller steering through the gloom.

"I'm rather frightened," she whispered to the Colonel, slipping her hand into his in the dark ; and he laughed and said, "Frightened, little one ? Why, Alec is steering."

After this visit Eleanor did not come to Kininvie again till she was nineteen years old. This time she came with her mother. Poor Lady Majendie was not very strong. "Have you heard the dreadful news ?" she would say. "Another baby ! An adorable thing—so pretty ; with just my eyes.

But it is a little hard on me after all that has happened." A terrible calamity, second only in tragedy to the awful death of her poor Hector, had befallen Lady Majendie one year after her second marriage—twin daughters were born. This misfortune intensified the plaintive note in her voice. Dulcie was now, more than ever, a creature to be pitied and taken care of and caressed. "It's the only vulgar thing I ever did," she used to say in a deprecating, sad way when people would ask the difference in age of her two beautiful little girls. And now, when governesses had taken the place of nurses and "the wee curious clothes" had all long been put away, Lady Majendie was the mother of a fragile little creature a few months old. It was the autumn after Violet was born that she and Eleanor came to stay at Kininvie.

"Everything is exactly the same!" said Eleanor laughingly to her cousin, the day after they arrived. Eleanor was no longer pert, but Alec's slow speech and unreadiness in retort always prompted her to tease him. "The house is the same, and the village is the same, and all the people are the same, and you are the same, and the fish are the same, and the——"

"It's ridiculous to say that the fish are the same," said Alec in his slow way; "and the house is not quite the same either."

"Indeed! What has altered?" laughed Eleanor. "Not the furniture, for I notice that every chair in

the house occupies its old position. Not the house itself, nor the hours of meals. What is the great change, Alec ?"

Alec was silent. Shyness always made him appear dour, and he dreaded now that Eleanor would discover the alteration which had seemed to him so important, and would laugh at him. He had repapered her bedroom—had repapered it himself, and cut the strips with a pair of nail scissors, his only tools. The paper had come from Edinburgh, and had taken many days to hang. The servants used to visit the room by candle-light after he had left it at nights to see how the beautiful new walls looked. The affair was held of great importance in the isolated Highland house.

"Well, it is a dear old house," said Eleanor approvingly. "I like its stone hall and thick walls; it's unlike other houses, and it is very, *very* like the Campbells—so solid, so settled, so—so desperately truthful! You know a house can be truthful, Alec, especially an old, well-tried house like this. Now a stuccoed house with a pretence of a portico or sham panelling is a horrid, fibbing sort of house. But, oh dear! it doesn't look as though it would last for ever and be respectable and good—and that really is a comfort."

"The view is fine from here," said Alec, who felt that his cousin was aiming a jest at him, and who habitually disliked talking about himself.

"I hate views," said Eleanor, "they take such a lot out of one."

"Now that is a silly remark to make," said Alec, roused to defend his beloved hills and loch. "How can it take a lot out of you just to sit and look at a view?"

Eleanor burst out laughing. "We are just as quarrelsome as we used to be," she cried. "I wonder how you ever put up with me for three months when I stayed here before. But, Alec, I was never, never as odious as Jessie!"

Mrs. William Campbell and her little daughter were staying at Kininvie, and Eleanor's sudden onslaught upon Jessie was provoked by seeing that young person approaching them.

"You shouldn't be sitting there," said Jessie. She had never been known to speak without pointing out a duty or tendering sound advice. She was thirteen years old, with flaxen hair, thick legs, a Scotch accent, and an air of excessive virtue.

"Why should we not sit here?" enquired Eleanor.

"It's damp," quoth Jessie, "and you are just idling your time."

Jessie herself was engaged in knitting a grey stocking which accompanied her wherever she went and was to her as a strong tower of virtue, impregnable and justificatory.

"My good Jessie," said Eleanor, "I don't quite see what business that is of yours."

" Well, I know your mamma has been calling for you this half-hour," replied Jessie, " and you ought to be with her."

" Why didn't you say at once that mamma wanted me ? " said Eleanor crossly, and she went indoors.

Jessie watched the retreating figure while her hands still moved steadily amongst the grey wool and gleaming wires of her knitting.

" That's an awful silly gurrul," she remarked, in her sing-song voice. " I hope you are not thinking of marrying her, Alexander."

" Oh, shut up, Jessie," said Alec hotly, and he went off to the stables.

Jessie wandered on knitting and humming. She had put a few things to rights, and was quite satisfied with herself.

CHAPTER V

In spite of the view, the picturesqueness of the grand old house, and the Campbells' profuse hospitality, it must be confessed that the house-party at Kininvie was not very amusing. Mrs. William Campbell, relict (the word exactly describes her) of the colonel's only brother, was an elderly Scotchwoman, who, having lost her husband after one year of married life, still mourned him rather aggressively in black merino and a blue-white widow's cap. As Miss Webster she had been governess to William's little boy Roderick, and report has it that William was led to the altar the second time much against his own wishes. It is said that during his last illness he one day heard his wife refer to his approaching death as " a happy release," and that upon this poor William smiled slightly. Be this as it may, it is certain that neither Mrs. Campbell with her " weepers " and black merino, nor Jessie with her knitting and her counsels, were particularly lively guests; and Lady Majendie began to suffer from neuralgia.

" I always get it when I am bored," she said to Eleanor.

The loneliness of the place was oppressive. Hills and loch and vast expanse of moor. Stormy sunset skies, and cool fair mornings fragrant with a thousand scents. But no one to speak to—not a single soul outside the house to meet or chat with. No one calling for letters in the village; not a single solitary dog-cart even, on the long white Glen road. And the irritating part of it, from Lady Majendie's point of view, was that Colonel Campbell and his son could never be made to feel that this most melancholy and desolating isolation was any disadvantage. Kininvie and Loch Maven were a passion with them both. They loved them with a jealous protecting love, and would have hardly understood a word in their dispraise. They did not talk about their feelings, nor call attention to the grandeur of scenery which surrounded them. But in all simplicity they believed in Kininvie. Every villager, every beast on the hillside, if it were a Kininvie beast, was, if not superior to other cattle, at least more interesting than an ordinary specimen. And Alec knew every bird that flew about the place, and where the badger burrowed, and where the heron nested.

Now all this, Lady Majendie admitted, was very poetical and charming, but it was an enthusiasm that could not all at once be entertained by strangers.

"It's a dear, dear old place," said Eleanor, trying to be sentimental in remembrance of her three months' happy childhood spent there.

She and her mother, after a long wet day indoors, were taking a turn before dinner on the sandy, winding shore-road.

"But, my dear, the cold of that stone hall!" said Lady Majendie with a shudder. "And those small deep windows in all the rooms make the house very gloomy. I am quite frightened sometimes when it is beginning to get dark."

"The grounds are lovely," said Eleanor, still bent upon being loyal.

"*Please* don't!" exclaimed Lady Majendie entreatingly. "I am so tired of hearing Kininvie praised! And the Campbells *will* think it so adorable, and it gets on my nerves."

"They don't say much about it, however," said Eleanor soothingly.

"Say much! Do the Campbells ever say much? Does any one say much in this dullest of houses? Dear, it's all so horribly Highland, and I never could appreciate kilts and bogs and wet feet and pipers and things. And Mrs. Campbell's gown! It isn't right, Eleanor, really it isn't. That black material ought never to have been manufactured, far less ought it to have been cut and made like that."

Having begun to speak Lady Majendie became more plaintive than ever. She laid her hand on Eleanor's arm, and said—"I think we had really better go home, dear; my neuralgia is very bad,

and even our Redfern gowns are too smart, and the evenings are so hopelessly long."

The following day a yacht steamed up the loch and dropped anchor below the house. Its owner proved to be a Mr. Brand, a gentleman of whom it might be said that the number of people he knew was not in exact ratio to the number of people who knew him. Mr. Brand, dear man, knew everybody, and could be seen any day and in any place to which the purchase of a ticket could admit him, flourishing his shiny silk hat in the most unresponsive faces. He did not know what a cut meant—being, indeed, far too kind-hearted to bestow such a slight himself had he been in a position to do so—consequently he was hardly able to appreciate this particular form of repudiation.

Nature intended Mr. Brand for a quiet, good man; circumstances had made him a rich bachelor with one absorbing ambition—to be fast. He dressed in a rakish fashion, and alluded to scandals at least a month old as though imparting fresh news. He affected the society of fast women, but his natural goodness of heart, the propriety of a lifetime, and his somewhat parsimonious ideas, were sad stumbling-blocks in the way of becoming a fast man. During the winter he usually frequented the Riviera, where he entertained lavishly on board his handsome yacht; and he was wont to say, in his ingenious way, that there were no places like

hotels for making pleasant acquaintances. It was at a hotel at Cannes that the Majendies had met and striven to avoid him. But a chance service that he had been able to render Lady Majendie—such a service as Mr. Brand's kindness of heart combined with his progressive spirit sought frequent occasion to render—had given him the right, as he believed, to lift his hat to her on all subsequent occasions, and prompted him now to call at the castle and invite the whole party to lunch on board the *Capuchin*.

"One always thought him such an impossible person in London," said Lady Majendie apologetically, when she had admitted accepting the invitation; "but in the Highlands almost any one is bearable, and he really seems quite nice and kind, and his yacht is lovely."

They went for a cruise in her the next day, and Dulcie said that even such a little break in the prevailing dulness had cheered her up, and nothing more was said about going home.

Mr. Brand was hospitable according to his lights. He offered champagne (which he called "the boy") with a sporting air, and as though it were a sort of treat not usually enjoyed by his guests. He tried to squeeze Lady Majendie's hand, which frightened her very much, and he made broad jokes in a hopelessly laboured fashion.

Jessie had her eye upon him from the first. She

had detected him in his efforts to squeeze Lady Majendie's hand, and Jessie was not the child to allow such an indiscretion to pass unnoticed. She removed the plaid which covered the two offending hands, merely remarking, "This is my plaid," but she kept a stern eye upon Mr. Brand for the rest of the day.

They sailed down to Orme, where the loch is wider and the hills are lower, and they went ashore at Ardmerrick and called on the Mures at Mr. Brand's suggestion ("I am sure I have met them somewhere," said that progressive person), and bought Alloa wool at the shop. They lunched in the charming saloon of the yacht, with its sad attempts in decoration and upholstery to appear up to date, and Mr. Brand showed off his photographs and fastened the wrong scandals on all his friends.

"Still, it has been civilized," said Dulcie, as she walked up the avenue on her way home; "and the luncheon was delicious."

"No one should drink champagne in the middle of the day," said Jessie, "it leads to intemperance."

Lady Majendie was always completely silenced by Jessie—the fighting instinct was non-existent in this gentle person—and she began to feel penitent for having drunk champagne.

Eleanor turned back to wait for Alec, who was following with some wraps on his arm.

" I am leaving mamma to be lectured by Jessie," she said. " Jessie does not approve of Mr. Brand nor his luncheon. Were you as unfavourably impressed ? "

" Brand is a vulgar beast," said Alec briefly.

" Poor Mr. Brand," said Eleanor, laughing. Then she said suddenly, in a pretty, provoking way she had, " I liked him, do you know ? "

" Liked him ! " exclaimed Alec, and his quiet voice could almost be said to be raised. " Liked that bounder with his brass buttons and his tight shoes ! Did you notice he used *scent !* "

" Wood-violet, yes ; rather nice."

" Well, I thought it beastly," said Alec with one of his unbrilliant rejoinders.

" He was so amusing," Eleanor went on, her eyes full of fun, and thoroughly enjoying rousing her cousin.

" Vulgar brute ! " ejaculated Alec.

" I adore vulgarity," said Eleanor, " there's something so fresh about it."

" I believe you are laughing."

" Laughing at Mr. Brand ? "

" No, laughing at me ! "

" Impossible ! " she said gaily. Then she raised her eyes suddenly to his, and gave him a flash of kindness—a quick, unexpected brilliant look which was a little bewildering.

Alec fell back upon Mr. Brand. " You can't like

the way he talked of women. I wanted to punch his head."

"Jessie told him that she never knew an old gentleman more given to backbiting."

This made Alec laugh, and they walked on up the avenue and talked of other things. As they approached the house he stopped a moment and stood in the drive, the wraps and plaids in a pile on his broad shoulders, and his face very grave.

"Nellie," he said, "I wish you would not know this man Brand."

"Mamma chooses my friends," said Eleanor demurely.

"You are such a child yet," he went on unheedingly, "and you have no one to look after you."

"No one—to look after me?"

"No," he said. "It is you who are always looking after others. You do everything at home. They work you far too hard. And now they let you know a man like Brand, who does not care a hang what he says before women. I suppose it is because you are so clever that no one seems to remember that you are only nineteen—and such a little thing too."

"It is very sweet of you to say all this to me," said Eleanor gently, "and of course I was only in fun about Mr. Brand. He is a silly old thing, and I need not know him if you would rather I did not."

Perhaps she was only flirting, perhaps sincerely

touched. She did not know. Alec was very handsome, and conquest was very easy, and Eleanor was nineteen, and so pretty!

Also it must be remembered that dear, beautiful Kininvie, with its loch and hills and soft skies, was really very dull. Eleanor repeated this statement to herself with emphasis several times the next day. Dulness and propinquity have always been the primary excuses for flirtation—and Alec looked extraordinarily handsome in his kilt.

They went for a walk up the Glen, where Kininvie Water rushes among the rocks, and the hills keep solemn watch over the long white road. They left the path and wandered up the burnside under the slender firs, whose tops were close against the sky. And the fir-needles were slippery under their feet, so that as they descended, Eleanor said, "You go first, Alec, and then if I fall you will stop me from rolling to the bottom."

"Put your hand on my shoulder," said Alec.

The hillside was so steep, that when he walked in front of her his tall shoulder was on a level with hers. She laid her pretty ungloved hand on the rough homespun of his jacket, and it felt good that it should rest there. It was such a strong, steady resting-place! Alec's brogues took the ground firmly, his step was sure, his figure upright and fine. Once when her foot slipped and she leaned her whole weight upon him, the shoulder she clung to was as

steady as a rock. She was under a strong man's care, and woman-like, her heart glowed.

"Will you sit down here for a little?" said Alec.

They had come to a clear brown pool, where some rocks made a pleasant resting-place.

"Sit down; oh, why?" said Eleanor. "I am not tired." It would be much better not to sit down, she thought.

"I want to see you," said Alec.

(It was not going to become *serious*, surely?)

"Do you like Kininvie?" said Alec awkwardly. He sat down on a rock, and Eleanor had perforce to do the same.

"I love it!" cried Eleanor, with her mother's own charming untruthfulness.

"I am glad you like it," he said gently. "For I want you to like what is mine."

"It is so beautifully situated," said Eleanor in a conventional manner, but her heart was beating quickly, and her voice was not quite steady.

"Yes, it is very beautiful, I think," said Alec simply. "I don't think you would ever be dull here, and——"

"Alec!" cried Eleanor, "my feet are in a bog! Don't you think it is very damp here? Don't you think we ought to be going home? It is quite tea-time, I am sure."

She spoke in a headlong, rapid way, and rose to her

feet. "I am going to cross the burn and go home on the other side, where it is drier."

"You must let me carry you across; those stones are slippery," said Alec in his patient way.

"Oh, nonsense, I mean to get to that big rock and then jump."

"Nellie, please listen——"

"Look, I am here already! Now for a jump!"

She made a charming picture as she stood on the rock in mid-stream in her sporting little tweed dress, with her trim waist and the flash of a white bird's wing in her cap.

"One! Two! Three!"

But alas! the sporting little tweed dress was narrow in the skirt and "caught" at the critical moment. Miss McNeill missed the opposite bank by half a foot, and fell into the water. It was a nasty place. The burn ran deep and fast between the rocks, and a few yards further on fell some twenty feet into a famous trout-pool.

"Oh, Alec, did you pull me out? Do I look an awful fright?" gasped Eleanor, sitting on the bank with her throat and eyes full of water, and her dress clinging about her. Then she began to laugh rather hysterically, for Alec's face was blanched, and he still held her by the arm with a grasp that was almost fierce in its protectiveness.

"Oh, I am so wet," she went on, still in a nervous voice. "And we are miles from home, aren't we?"

"About two miles." He was wringing the water from her skirts, and his hand shook. "You are quite sure you are not hurt?"

"Quite sure; but oh, Alec, I am a 'dem damp moist unpleasant body.'"

"I am going to take you to the keeper's cottage to get dry things. It is just up there."

Eleanor was shaking after her cold plunge, and the chilly air through her damp clothing made her teeth chatter.

"But we shall have to cross the burn again on those wet stones," she said dubiously.

"I am going to carry you."

She allowed herself to be lifted into his strong arms, and Alec waded across the burn with her, and when they reached the opposite side he did not set her down, but carried her up the steep path to the keeper's cottage.

Conventionality demanded a protest.

"Alec, I wish you would put me down."

"Why?"

"Because I can walk quite well."

"I can carry you quite well." And he smiled at her because she pretended to think that such a dear burden was too heavy for him.

The keeper's wife dressed her in some homespun garments deliciously dry and warm, and Eleanor came down to the kitchen in a pink "shor'gon" and a rough blue petticoat. There was a wide fire-

place in the room, with a lavender cotton frill hung below its tall chimneypiece, and a bright fire of resinous pine branches burned in the grate. The flames threw wonderful red lights on the homely furnishings of the room, on its bright tin kitchen things, its tall cupboards, and the two box-beds with their cotton counterpanes and the bead watch-pockets above the pillows; there was a big bowl containing a mess for chickens on the dresser. A little boy came and peeped in at the door and ran away again, and a collie sniffed favourably at Eleanor's rough blue petticoat.

Mrs. McVittie, the gamekeeper's wife, fussed kindly over the girl, and prepared tea for her, with scones and Abernethy biscuits, and then went out to feed her chickens. Eleanor drank the tea, and leaning back in her chair broke her biscuit in an absent manner. She looked prettier than ever in the firelight, with her cotton bodice falling away from her soft white neck and wrists. Alec rose and pushed a pine log further on the fire with his brogue. Neither had spoken since they found themselves alone.

"Thank you so much for pulling me out of the burn," said Eleanor suddenly, breaking the silence with her soft voice.

Alec smiled. "It was not a very wonderful feat," he said, "and you could hardly expect me to stand on the bank and look at you."

She sat up in her chair and began to try to be chatty, but it was a failure. Conversation did not flow readily between the two this evening. Eleanor fell back on talking of old times.

"How well I remember my first visit here," she said. "Do you remember, Alec, how much afraid I used to be of ghosts?

"I remember everything about you," said Alec.

"Then you must remember a very horrid little girl! I was odious when I came here, but I think I improved a little before I left! Kininvie makes one feel good. Alec, why is it that I am always different in different places? When I was at Clapham I was a morbidly religious child. And when I go into society I am frivolous—you don't know how frivolous and vain I am. I love it, too!—when I am in it; but it looks rather foolish from here. And if I were with learned people I should put on airs of learning—not only would I put on airs, but I would *be* learned. And if I were in what is called a fast set I should be fast. Environment—don't you call it environment, Alec?—affects me so powerfully. I can't withstand its influence. I don't understand why it is so; I don't understand myself. Is one only as good or as bad as one's surroundings? Should I be good if I lived at Kininvie?" She broke off suddenly. "Alec, let us go home! Please take me home, Alec."

He wrapped her up tenderly.

"There's one thing about you that never alters," he said, "and that is yourself. It is the only thing that matters. I don't care a bit what you do or what you think as long as you are you."

They walked home silently through the Glen where the twilight falls soon, and with the twilight an eerie silence. Once a pheasant rose with a whirr, and sailed away over the tall fir trees, and an owl hooted with its solitary note somewhere in the distant wood.

"Tired, dear?" asked Alec, and his voice had unconsciously taken to itself the hush of the Glen.

"No," whispered back Eleanor, "I am not tired."

They emerged into the open, and the moon came up over the hills and flooded the long white road with a silver light. The Highland cattle, with wide horns and gentle eyes, stared stupidly at them, standing knee-deep in the dewy grass.

The hills told each other strange secrets in the wonderful mystic silence and the silver light. Down below, the loch glimmered softly, its white breast streaked with long lines of black storm-water. There was a majesty of loneliness in the scene.

"Alec! I don't like it!" said Eleanor with a little cry.

He thought she was frightened, and took her gently by the hand.

"It is too grand," she said, and there was a catch in her voice. "I am not in tune with it. The hills and the moon and the loch—they are saying things I don't understand. It is awfully beautiful. But it is beyond me, Alec; I don't want to look at it, and it hurts. I don't know why it hurts, but it does."

"The people here say in Gaelic, 'God is near us in the Glen,'" said the young fellow, shyly intent on comforting her.

"Too near!" cried Eleanor, trembling a little while Alec held her hand more closely. "I am like those people in the Bible who said, 'Speak not with us face to face lest we die!' Oh, the solitude of it, and the ache it gives one!"

Alec did not understand, but she was in trouble—that was enough for him.

"I thought you liked the place," he said miserably. "I thought you said it made you feel good."

"But it doesn't! It's too far above me. And you are above me too, Alec, and the Laird and Kininvie. There is something a little sacred about it all, but I only want gas-lights and pretty dresses and silly amusements that won't let me think. I don't want to think. I don't want ever to have time for it. I hate solitude, and I hate this feeling of always being in some Great Presence with no happy little place in which to hide from It and forget It."

"We shall be home soon now, dear," he said comfortingly. He thought her nerves had had a shock from her fall into the pool, and that she was tired and hungry.

"Do you ever feel afraid of yourself, Alec? No, I know you don't, but I do. Once I was alone when I was a child, and I began to try and realize Eternity and to understand the Trinity, and I was wretched. And if ever I were alone again—really alone in solitudes like this—or living a lonely life, I should think again. Because there is Something always there, Alec, and the best thing we can do is to enjoy ourselves and see a great many people and pretend it isn't there."

"I don't think there is anything to be afraid of," said Alec slowly.

"No," said Eleanor, speaking more quietly. "I can't imagine you being afraid of anything, Alec."

CHAPTER VI

THE lights from the castle windows shone pleasantly, ruddily, in the cold white glare of the moon. They cast cheerful patches of brilliancy on the broad gravel sweep and the lawns; and a stream of light came from the hall door where Jessie and her knitting awaited them.

"Where have you been at this time of night?" she asked sternly.

"Never mind, Jessie," said Eleanor, shortly "Is dinner ready?"

"No," said Jessie, "but it ought to be. They are getting very behind-hand with meals in this house."

Jessie liked her food at regular hours.

Eleanor ran up to her room to dress. She lit all her candles, and bade her maid put away her black dinner gown and lay out for her instead a wonderful confection of rose-colour. She put jewels in her bodice, and pinned a fashionable-looking black aigrette in her hair.

She ran downstairs as the gong sounded, and flashed into the sombre drawing-room, with her bright dress and feathers and jewels.

"What a vision!" cried the Laird. "Why, Eleanor, we thought you must be drowned, and you burst upon us like a comet!"

"I was very nearly drowned," laughed Eleanor. To a sensitive ear her gay manner might seem a little overdone, and she talked more quickly than usual, and she bewailed the spoiling of her dress in an affected way. "Oh, uncle, I've ruined my dearest, sweetest dress! Just think of my grief! And I came home from the keeper's cottage in a homespun petticoat and a pink cotton jacket. The jacket was rather becoming, wasn't it, Alec? And, oh, my dear uncle, I was so frightened in the Glen that I began to quote Scripture!"

She caught sight of Alec's puzzled face and grave eyes, and she rattled on more gaily.

"We were beginning to discuss the Universe, and the whys and wherefores of things—all the Glen's fault, you know—until we met Jessie, and Jessie brought us to earth again! She said we ought not to be out so late. Are we so very late, uncle?"

"Dinner is late to-night," said the colonel. "The Mures drove over from Ardmerrick, and are staying to dine and sleep."

"Hence Jessie's best frock!" said Eleanor.

Jessie's best frock—a Campbell tartan silk with a deep collar of starched Madeira trimming—always had a peculiarly irritating effect upon her

relations. For Jessie wore it with an air of solemnity and virtue.

"Your dress is just like a play-actress's," said the little girl.

"I think if I were plain," said Lady Majendie reflectively, intending no sarcasm nor unkindness, but merely stating a fact, "I should not wear tartan silk."

Some one laughed, and Mrs. William Campbell looked annoyed. But Jessie was unmoved. "I am as my Creator made me," she said. And a solemn silence fell upon the party.

Then Lord and Lady Mure appeared with their son, and they went in to dinner. Eleanor was in high spirits. She gave an amusing, exaggerated account of her misadventure in the afternoon. She looked brilliant, and spoke flippantly of everything. She flirted with the Master of Mure, who fell in love with her on the spot, and she entirely won the heart of that genial old reprobate, his father. She appealed to Alec to corroborate her wildest statements.

"Didn't you think I was dead, Alec? Oh, yes, you did! You got so white; and didn't I look hideous when you pulled me out?"

Alec was silent. He was feeling horribly hurt, and could scarcely have said why. He was very miserable, and very much puzzled. Why, it was only an hour ago that she had held his hand in the

eerie Glen, and trembled and talked of God. And now, in her flashing satin and her nodding feather, her jewels and laces, she was mocking herself and him and everything in the world.

After dinner she sang little sparkling French songs, and made the Master turn over the leaves of music for her. Then Lord Mure said she must dance the Gillie-Callum for them, and the Laird sent for his piper, and every one adjourned to the hall. She held up her flashing rose-coloured train, and danced with wonderful light steps over the claymores crossed on the floor. Her lithe, pretty figure, with its trim waist, was upright as a wand, and she danced like a flower in a breeze. The pipes shrilled loud and clear in the vaulted hall as the piper beat his brogues to a faster measure, and Eleanor's little feet twinkled across the bright claymores. Her cheeks and her eyes grew brighter. "Faster!" she cried, and the arched foot tapped hither and thither between the flashing steel blades. The Gillie-Callum ended with a final shrill of the pipes, and Eleanor made her courtesy, sinking low on the floor with her skirts held out between her fingers, and her white arms bowed in graceful fashion. The reprobate Lord Mure was enchanted, and suggested an encore. Mrs. William Campbell said, "I think it is time we were all in bed," and Alec strode across the hall to light the candles.

Eleanor followed him with her eyes as she stood

waving her fan and talking to Lord Mure. He looked a very goodly figure, with his swinging kilt and bare brown knees, his old velvet doublet setting well to his fine shoulders, and his shapely feet in their buckled shoon put firmly down. He walked gracefully, with the free unfettered step of the Highlander, and with something, too, of the unconscious pride of the man who has walked on his own soil all his life. He lighted the candles ranged on a great oak table by the door; their flame threw a soft light on to his fine, grave face. The claymores and armour on the wall behind him formed a fitting background for his barbaric, beautiful dress. And Eleanor was saying to herself, "He is splendid."

She came to take her candle from him, and he looked at her, still with the puzzled expression in his kind eyes. They were practically alone at the far end of the hall.

"Alec," exclaimed Eleanor, flippantly, "do you know that you have long eyelashes! I never noticed them before!"

She ran upstairs and nodded to him over the railings of the gallery. "Good-night," she cried. "Do not dream of drowning ladies!"

Two days later she and her mother left for the South. Lady Majendie said she had never enjoyed anything so much as their last day at Kininvie, when she had a huge fire lighted in her bedroom,

and watched her maid pack for London. The rain poured down mercilessly outside, and the great hall and stone passages of the castle never looked more gloomy.

"To think I shall be in Cadogan Square in two more days!" she cried, clasping her hands, and speaking as though she had been in some distant land for years. "Just think of it, Eleanor! No draughts, and no mountains, and no Mrs. William Campbell—and a brougham instead of dogcarts and waggonettes."

Eleanor sympathized, and went to her own room to finish packing, then strolled downstairs to the hall. Here she found Alec hanging about the stone porch. "Will you come for a walk with me?" he said.

"In this rain!" exclaimed Eleanor, "I should be soaked, and all my dresses are packed."

Alec said nothing.

"I will go if it clears," said Eleanor impulsively—then added, "Jessie and I will go. You won't mind if Jessie comes too, will you?"

"Jessie will not fash," said that young person from the corner where she had established herself behind her grey stocking.

Alec gave her a grateful look. But the rain never cleared, and the walk never took place.

When Eleanor and her mother were safely in the express for London, Lady Majendie said in her

plaintive, pretty way, "I believe you enjoyed yourself, Eleanor. It was very cruel of you, when I was so miserable."

"Did I enjoy myself?" said Eleanor, absently. "I don't know."

"The tall cousin was very devoted to you," said Lady Majendie. She was not, as a rule, a person who noticed these things, but when she did she always remarked openly upon them. "I dislike mysteries," she used to say, "they are so silly, and they tire me so much."

"Oh, I don't think it was very serious," replied Eleanor, blundering and blushing a little.

"Did he propose?" asked Lady Majendie simply.

"No, no, no," replied Eleanor eagerly. "No, he certainly did not."

"I think it is always kinder to let them speak," said Lady Majendie, speaking of men as a class. "It is good for them, and it is more satisfactory for the girl."

The day wore on, and Eleanor sat looking out at the flying landscape. The train rushed on over the border, and away through the depressing Black Country. How different from beautiful Kininvie! Her mother went to sleep, and the afternoon began to darken and grow chilly.

"It is just an incident in my life," said Eleanor to herself, "and it is over."

Quite suddenly she felt the hot tears gather in her eyes, and she saw the flying landscape mistily as through a rain-smeared window-pane. A sob came to her throat, and she choked it down and furtively wiped her eyes.

"I am very glad it is over," she said.

Indeed she said it several times.

PART II

CHAPTER I

Eleanor McNeill stood before the looking-glass in her bedroom, and gazed long and gravely at her image reflected there.

"I am a failure," she said.

For we speak the truth to ourselves when we stand alone before our bedroom looking-glass. We do not even speak softly before the bedroom looking-glass, though at the drawing-room mirror we may whisper polite fibs to ourselves.

"I am a failure," said Eleanor; and then she began to laugh a little. "I!" she said. "It is very funny." She was thirty years old, still pretty, still unmarried, with a character for being clever, maintained, but hardly demonstrated. A certain bright manner and fluency of speech, and a mind that was always delightfully wide awake, a pretty sympathy and a genius for getting at the core of a subject without wasting time over its surrounding matter—these had helped to build up for Miss McNeill a reputation for cleverness.

She had done most things which she attempted just a little bit better than any one else, and had flown from one subject to another with surprising activity, skimming over the surface of things with bright wings, seeing much and sounding very little, feeling all the time, perhaps, the danger that a dive means for those who are inclined to dive too deep. Eleanor McNeill was a persistently, even a deliberately, frivolous person. For her there had never been stormy, blood-red sunsets, nor dark nights, nor brilliant dawns flushed with a large and comprehensive promise of a joyful day. She had lived by candle-light, and had closed the curtains of her life against extremes of light and darkness. And now the candles had begun to burn down a little, just a very little, but perceptibly nevertheless. And their light was beginning to appear just a little tawdry.

It was one of those afternoons in early November which furnish us with an excuse for blaming the weather for almost any disagreeable sensation of the mind. A yellow haze hung over London—not a fog exactly, but gloom anticipatory of darker days to come; the air felt still and heavy, and friend meeting friend on a day like this was liable to give an extensive description of the effect of the atmosphere upon him or herself.

Eleanor blamed the weather for her mood, with a half comical feeling of gratitude that she

had the weather to blame. These reminiscent afternoons, when the past spreads itself rather obstrusively before our eyes and calls most impertinently upon us to pronounce our own judgment upon it, should be left for the contemplative hours of old age. And really there was nothing except the weather of course, to account for Miss McNeill's dissatisfaction with herself. Her address to her image in the glass was made only half seriously.

The dutiful and sensible marriage which she, as an elder sister who of course must marry, had contemplated making, would have been wearisome to tediousness, and oh! what a relief to think that it was not to be. What a relief not to have to school one's self by platitudes and conventional common sense into accepting the conventional common sense ordering of fate. What an escape to avoid doing precisely what society and a number of friends intended that one should do! And yet what a break, what a jar it made in the conventional candle-lit life to find that the small, the superficial, the prosaic were not to act as altogether binding laws. It almost made one pause and think—this little hitch in the conventional arrangement of things.

To go back a little way, and to state the matter as frankly as her friends stated it, Miss McNeill had been a little disappointing. This non-productive cleverness of hers was really irritating.

Surely she might have done something with her talents! And then her rather over-fastidiousness in the choice of a husband was surely a trifle pretentious. Eleanor's women friends asked each other with some exasperation "What more she wanted?" She had refused a dozen good offers of marriage for no reason except that she had not cared sufficiently for the men who had proposed to her. (Rather a feeble reason, her friends thought.) She had gone everywhere, had done everything, had made heaps of friends, was very popular, knew everybody in London—and was still pretty Miss McNeill, with an unsupported reputation for cleverness, a boundless fund of amusing conversation, and really a lamentably and inexcusably long period of girlhood behind her.

With two pretty sisters coming out, it was hardly fair to linger in the pleasant ways of maidenhood so long. So when the two pretty sisters actually put on long dresses and began to go to dances, Miss McNeill, feeling perhaps half unconsciously, the general sensation of disappointment in the air concerning her, had decided that she had better act according to the law of public opinion, and make the dutiful, sensible marriage that was expected of her. She was not in love with Cecil Brooke, but she contemplated marrying him because she was thirty, and because the pretty sisters had grown up, and because Cecil was suitable.

He was a pale-faced man, gentleman-like, well off, and above all, he was the man of the hour, the man who wanted to marry Eleanor at the moment that Eleanor had made up her mind that she had better marry. She had refused him ("from habit" an impertinent schoolboy cousin told her), but with inward reservations. She was giving herself time to think. "The benefit of a negative," she reflected, "is that it admits of a future affirmative, whereas an affirmative is binding and implies obligations."

At last, without much romantic feeling—with indeed, just a prosaic thought of settling and from the notion that it was not quite fair to "dear Mamma" to expect her to take about three unmarried daughters—Eleanor decided that she would change her mind and do the right and dutiful thing by marrying Cecil.

"Marriage is just like turning up one's hair," she said whimsically. "Girls may put off doing it for a long time, but it has got to be done some day." So after a decent lapse of time she wrote a diplomatic note to Mr. Brooke, not intimating her change of feeling towards him, but with just that gentle touch of encouragement which is known as "bringing it on again." Cecil had replied in four gushing pages announcing his engagement to Eleanor's cousin—our old friend Jessie Campbell.

Now Eleanor had not cared for Cecil Brooke

at all, but it was not very flattering to learn that he had consoled himself so quickly—and with Jessie Campbell of all people!

"I know it is the first proposal she has had," thought Eleanor with a certain degree of comfort, "and Jessie must have snatched, positively snatched at it! Now that is so bad for the whole race of mankind! To wait until one is twenty-four, and then to consent with such unseemly alacrity to the suit of the first wooer. It's undignified." From which speech it will be seen that Miss McNeill was laughing. But one may also gather from it that, like many of us who make up our minds to the right course of action, be it sacrificial or the reverse, when the matter is taken entirely out of our hands we may feel relief that fate has decided the thing for us without our intervention, though all the same we may be reminded that there is a certain species of repulse which is called in homely language "a slap in the face."

"I suppose I ought to mind much more than I do," went on Eleanor, still speaking the honest truth to her image in the glass. "I must be utterly heartless to be so indifferent."

The fire burned brightly in her charming bedroom, with its pictures and books, its couch and writing-table—a room more like a boudoir than a bedroom. Some candles burned steadily in the gloom of the thick afternoon. Eleanor blew

out the candles, and sat down in front of her looking-glass in the unattractive yellow haze of fog, and placed her elbows on the toilet table. "I am going to look my most hideous," she said to that really very charming image in the glass, and speaking with a sort of self-indulgent pleasure in exaggerating the tragedy of the situation.

"I am a failure," she repeated, with quite a sensuous enjoyment in the tragedy of her case. "I have retired from social life, the life of balls and parties as an elder sister should, and I am beginning to wonder (which is the result of the weather, of course) whether I have not wasted my life. The expression is a horrible one without doubt, and savours of the Salvation Army platform; but one must candidly admit that the unproductiveness of my existence is just a little damping to my self-conceit. Dear me!" smiling humorously at the pretty face in the glass, "is this the sort of self-abasing afternoon that one spends when one has renounced the world! It is most unprofitable, and a little dull."

She got up and sauntered round the room, looking at some pictures on the walls. "They are not badly painted," she said to herself. "I wonder if I could ever have become an artist, as my old teacher said I might. Well, I cannot begin now; I should be drawing straight strokes by the time I was thirty-five, and at advanced studies when I was forty. . . .

The poor old violin, too!" She stooped and drew from below the sofa a fiddle case, and took from it a dusty fiddle with broken strings. "Violin playing was a phase too, like painting, but one never takes these things up seriously, at least not half so seriously as one takes up society, or enjoyment, or dress, or the thousand other things which make study an impossibility. One wastes a lot of time, I suppose, and religious people, Salvation Army folk, and their like, would doubtless tell one that it is very wicked (oh! this fog!) . . . ."

She turned from the window and stirred the fire to a brighter blaze, and drawing up a chair to the hearth she placed her feet on the fender.

"But after all, this life of ours is very pleasant, and we are pleasant . . . and people who study and paint and practise are not always pleasant . . . and not always successful either! They have smudgy fingers and pale faces, and they play the piano at impossible hours and disturb their neighbours . . . and they take themselves seriously, and generally dress badly. Now, we lilies of the field—I do not know why I should express myself in such a Scriptural fashion this afternoon—we do add a little to the gaiety of things, and we generally look nice. The life of society and of the world is really as good as any other, but it should be perfectly equipoised—it requires to be lived as harmoniously and reasonably as any other life. And perhaps the only thing

about the society woman that shocks us is to discover that she has any real depth of character. One dislikes irregularities, and it is an infringement of our social code to think deeply, to live seriously, or indeed to be anything but superficially clever Talent is so horribly non-conformist — and conformity is so charming, so good-mannered too! Religion is a idiosyncrasy, and any depth of thought is a little anomalous. One cannot serve two masters (why has no one over discovered that a foggy afternoon is distinctly Scriptural in its tendencies?) It's not wrong, it's impossible. And so it is absurd if you are a society woman to pretend to be anything but a society woman. Surely one's acts should always show a perfect equation? . . .

"I wonder whom I shall marry now? There is always Alec, but Alec does not count. I look upon Alec as a brotherly lover, and one does not marry a brotherly lover. Besides, dear old Alec— Oh, I could not! It has gone on too long. Yet it is evidently expected of one that one should marry. It is a woman's career, as we are informed quite a wearisome number of times, to marry and bring up children; but if that's the end of it all, I don't quite see what we are to tell our children about the final issues of life. It is not reasonable to say that the continuation of the human race is the beginning and the end of things . . . Love! Yes, perhaps love explains the situation a little. But

suppose one never did love. It does not happen to every one."

Eleanor sat silent, musing by the fire, while the clock ticked on the mantelpiece and the fog deepened outside. Then she rose, and took from her writing table drawer a little locked volume.

"This is my one idiosyncrasy," she said, fitting the key in the lock and choosing a pen for herself; "every rule has its exception!"

"What is man's life?" she wrote at the top of the page. Such questions as these half-filled the little volume, and a capital W marked the beginning of most of the sentences. "Why? Whither? Whence? What next?" were the burden of the questions. The inarticulate man or woman who finds no outlet in speech or in the affections will often keep a little locked volume of this sort. For expression is probably the most insistent of human needs; and men and women alike often believe that self-realization is a sort of religion.

"What is man's life?" Eleanor wrote. "It is a blade of grass, they tell us, growing up in the morning and withering in the evening; a little day of life and vigour, and then the sickle and the oven."

"What is woman's life?" was the next question. "It is less than a blade of grass, less than a shadow. It is a waiting. We sit by the long dusty highroad,

waiting—always waiting—looking up and down the road, looking for that which will come to us."

"It is quite true," said Eleanor, biting the top of her pen and looking at the words she had written; "we women never seem to be, except in the most secondary way, the controllers of our fate."

The foggy afternoon was entirely her own to use as she liked. Mamma and the pretty sisters would probably not return until tea time or a little later—this fog might certainly detain them. Violet was in the schoolroom, and Sir John had an old friend to sit with him. Eleanor determined to enjoy the luxury of a good scribble. The portraiture of her thoughts upon the white page in front of her would help to make some of her thoughts clear to her without embarking upon perilous speech. She dipped her pen in the ink, and her words began to flow more quickly underneath her hand: "Most of us are waiting for some one whom we feel when he comes we shall know, and who shall take us by the hand. We shall rise up with a smile on our lips to go with him, and the rest of the journey, for weal or for woe, we shall make together. Some of us work very busily while we wait, and some of us sit and sing and weave flowers in our hair. Those who work bend their heads over their tasks, and they say, 'We are not waiting, our work is our life, and we are satisfied.' But they too raise their heads sometimes, and look up and

down the dusty high road before they set to work again. Those who pass on the king's highway will look at those bowed heads and say, 'Lo, this one's hands are hard with toil, and her face is seamed with care; she is too busy to stop and laugh with us, she is too tired to smile; we will none of her. See this lovely face, flower-crowned and radiant, the fresh bloom on her cheeks, and the light in her eyes as she raises them and looks at us and smiles. Her hands are soft and her arms are round and white. Come with us, dear love, dear life, come with us, and we shall love you and care for you, and nothing shall hurt you all along the dusty road. Come, and we shall carry you when you are tired, lest those little feet weary, and we shall root out the briars from your path, lest your tender feet should be torn. Yet they only smile, those flower-crowned queens, smile and look up with blue eyes." (I am becoming florid, but I can't help it—this quill pen is too soft.)

"To some of us as we sit and wait, many stop and hold out their hands; but we shake our heads impatiently, or sorrowfully, as the case may be, and we see them pass down the road. 'Nay, but forgive us if we cannot go with you; yours is not the step for which we are waiting.' And then perhaps that step comes, and all the years we have waited for it seem of no account. It is coming nearer! We bend our heads lest our joy and our welcome should

be written too plainly on our faces. It has stopped! We must look up, as flowers turn to the sun. And some one looks down at us calmly and indifferently. Ah! we cannot let him pass us like this. May we not call him? No. You are a woman, you have only to wait. But since there is no one left now to wait for? Poor child! That is the question you have to solve for yourself. ("I did not know I was sentimental," murmured Eleanor.)

"Sometimes we say the journey must be smooth for us, the one whom we shall follow must come for us with full hands. By and by we shall see afar off some one with a gay silk coat and a fine horse. He stops and bids us come with him; shows us the gold for which perhaps we have been waiting, and the gay carriage in which we shall drive, and the soft clothes we shall wear. He tells us that the journey shall be smooth and pleasant for us, and that all our desires shall be fulfilled. We thank you, but we will not go with you. Why? We do not know.

"Then some one comes along with a plain tweed coat and shoes that are a little worn on his feet; his hands are rough with work, and there are only a few silver pieces in his hand. We do not like poverty and worn shoes, and we never meant to walk! Why, then, do we rise up at his call, and slip a hand into his and go with him all the way? Ah, why? Again we do not know.

"Some there are who wait for a long time, and

whose eyes grow wistful with watching. The long dusty highroad stretches out far beyond them, and the sun is low in the west. These, perhaps, are the lonely ones for whom the world has an ever-ready sneer. They wait all day. But sometimes when the red sun is very low, a voice, not clearly heard at first, becomes clearer and stronger, until they are obliged to listen. 'My child,' it says, 'rise up and take such comfort with thee as thou mayest, and if possible buy a staff to carry with thee, because thou must make the journey, even to the very end, alone."

Eleanor stopped. "I should like to make a really nice little parable of this," she murmured, "for I am so sorry for old maids." She relighted the candles and piled some more coals upon the fire, then replaced the little red morocco volume with its unlocked clasp upon her knee and continued: "Nay, my child, let no sadness overtake thee, for I have set thee a task which shall lighten all thy road. Thou shalt help others. This will keep thy feet from growing weary; therefore rise up and start, even though the day is waning and thou art timid, because thou hast never walked alone and dost not know the road. Fear not the sneers of those that say, 'She is alone.' Fear not, for I am with thee! Take thy purse, though it be so ill plenished, and share its contents with the poor and the suffering. Ah! dost thou feel that at night there will be no shelter for thee, in the storm, no arm to defend thee, no

children to lisp thy name and cover thy poor lips with kisses? Patience. Just a few more miles to travel, and then I will come and take thee to thy home, and there thou wilt find thy children waiting for thee. Yea, they will go even to the gates of the City of Gold to meet thee. And if thou askest, 'Who are these with palms in their hands?' they shall answer, 'We are thy children, the children of thy pity, of thy care, whose feet were set in the right paths, whose wounds were healed, and who of thy love and of thy prayers were born into the great family of God.'"

Eleanor drew a firm line with her quill pen, blotted the words she had written, and locked the red morocco volume.

"It is quite true," she murmured to herself, "but I don't know how much comfort the thought would bring! For in spite of all that I have written, it is incontestably a fact that primitive fashions still hold their sway, and that which is unguarded, unprotected, will for ever appear to the ordinary mind as most significantly valueless.

"So that is why I am quite sure," mused Eleanor, "that it is a good thing to marry, even suppose one's heart is not greatly touched, even suppose one misses what people call the best. After all, how few of us there are who are permitted to know the best. And this I think, not through any fault in the quality of our power of loving, but because love is not strong

enough for us. (How many romantic married couples does one know?) One feels within one such enormous, such rather startling powers of loving, and no doubt, had they full expression, there might be danger in it. If once the reservoir broke, the city might altogether be submerged. And yet the heart-longing of almost every woman in the world is for the strong, the conquering, the triumphant lover, who will break down the walls and laugh at sluice-gates and bid the riotous overwhelming waters flow. One would accept, I believe, all the dangers of such a disturbance. Nay, who talks of accepting? The world is far too cold and cautious, the long restrained force, the imprisoned flood will burst forth so gladly, so overwhelmingly!"

The easy chair, the comfortable room, the four walls were too narrow for the girl's tempestuous mood. The little knicknacks, the luxury, the trivial surroundings were stifling. The thought of all those women who, like herself, claim the best, or at least, have within them the power of recognizing it and grandly fulfilling its claims, and yet after all have to be content with second best—(no, there could be no second best; that which is not the best can only be the worst)—that these should live their lives with powers unused and souls unmade, came upon her with a new force, a sharp suddenness as she realized her fellowship with them. "For I could love," said Eleanor, pushing aside the easy chair and standing

upright with clasped hands, "I could love!—not Cecil Brooke, not even Alec, but some one!"

A sob came to her voice, a sob of almost anger, as of one who has been wronged, defrauded of her rights. "I could love, not as other women seem to love, but in some greater, fuller measure. I could be content to give everything and get very little in return. I could serve in all faithfulness, and expect no profit for my service. God give me love! Give me love," said Eleanor.

In most women there is an inherent passion for self-sacrifice which seeks for an object on which to expend itself. The truth of this lies on the very surface of most women's lives. Observe their courage and daily sacrifices, their acceptation of responsibility, of grief and care.

If of our charity and kindness we go into any of the cottage homes of England and listen to a few of the troubles of which the women tell us, we cannot, I think, fail to be touched, very deeply touched, by a good deal of their cheerful heroism. They will be quite homely tales—tales badly told, not even particularly refined; but it will not hurt us nor bore us very much to listen to them for once, and we shall learn thereby much of the tragedy of life, much of its faithfulness, much of its pain. And be we as kindly as we may, be we as pitiful, we shall never find a cure for this error in the scheme of things. But let us take courage! Woman has, with her usual in-

genuity, discovered the only way out of the difficulty —she says she likes it. Self-sacrifice has become her highest pleasure.

A knock came to the door, and Eleanor somewhat hastily resumed her attitude of ease in the armchair by the fire, and the expression that belongs to less unguarded moments than these.

"Miss Campbell, did you say, Martin? Come in.... Yes, I was just going to change my dress— my new brown one, did you say, and brown silk stockings, and bronze shoes?.... No, I think my hair is quite straight, thank you. I must go downstairs." She ran to the drawing-room, and crossed the room with both hands outstretched—a pretty, conventional, well-dressed woman, with a charming voice and a graceful manner of moving.

"This is very sweet of you, dear Jessie," she said gushingly, "to come and tell me all about it."

"How did you know that there was anything to tell?" said Jessie, a little disappointed at not being first with the news.

"Mr. Brooke told me," said Eleanor. She added, "You know we are old friends."

"You have too many friends," said the Scotch girl in her judicial manner; "you will never get a husband that way."

It was a little necessary sometimes to remember that Jessie's mother had been a Webster. It was a plea for indulgence when Jessie's speeches were

apt to remind one a little of the conversational level attained to by those sections of society which express themselves after a primitive manner. Jessie spoke with an irritating sense of security which her recent engagement seemed to have engendered, and Eleanor was thinking, "Now I suppose if I were a Webster, or a person of that sort, I should inadvertently disclose the fact that Cecil recently proposed to me. The restraining influence of good breeding cannot be transgressed, but no doubt people of a Webster turn of mind would find some satisfaction in the present case in giving instant relief to their feelings."

To Jessie she said in her conventional, well-bred way, "I hope you will be very happy; do let me wish you all sorts of good wishes!"

Jessie thanked her, and added calmly, "You should get married too, Eleanor; you cannot think what it is like to be loved."

"I think I can imagine it," said Eleanor, smiling.

Jessie looked unconvinced. She was ever sceptical of her cousin's attractions. "She can't have had proposals, or she would be married now," was that young person's logical conclusion.

"Where did you first meet Mr. Brooke?" asked Eleanor, with polite interest.

"Here!" exclaimed Jessie. "Don't you remember that night one of your guests disappointed you at dinner, and your mamma was superstitious

about sitting down thirteen to table, so you sent round and asked me to make up the number ? "

" I remember," said Eleanor. She was wondering whether thirteen had proved a lucky or an unlucky number to her, and what would have happened if her mamma had not been superstitious, and Jessie had not met Mr. Brooke. " It is far best as it is," she thought, " for I could never have appreciated Cecil in the way that Jessie seems to do."

It was very odd, she thought, that Jessie should be occupying the position she had contemplated filling herself, and the more she reflected upon it the more satisfied did she feel with the ordering of Fate. " For surely," she said to herself with a whimsical turn of thought, " nothing depreciates a man so much as his becoming the affianced of another. The engaged young man ! Can he ever remotely realize what an uninteresting object he is ! Even if a woman has loved him she cannot but feel that her idol is but a poor human being after all, with more than ordinary limitations of intellect, and less than ordinary discrimination and good taste ! "

Cecil Brooke, as the *fiancé* of Jessie Campbell, seemed to our heroine a person whom she could never for a moment or even remotely have contemplated marrying.

" I'll show you my ring," quoth Jessie, drawing off her glove and displaying a plump little red hand and rather a mean hoop of pearls.

"Charming, charming!" gushed Eleanor. "He was always stingy," she commented inwardly; and she remembered, too, with ever-growing satisfaction, that he had a trick of standing on his toes, which always annoyed her, and that he had a protruding lump in his throat which moved when he swallowed.

"There is not another man in England I could have brought myself to accept," Jessie was saying with the egotism of an engaged young lady, who, be she even as truthful as Je sie Campbell, can never resist hinting that her choice has been made from among a number of applicants.

"I am so glad you are happy," said Eleanor, and honestly she meant it. She considered herself something of a cynic, and never guessed that she was boundlessly good natured.

Jessie removed her hat and jacket, and paid a call of two hours duration. She placed her clumsy little muddy boots on the fender, and discoursed of marriage, its opportunities, its responsibilities.

"It's a woman's duty to marry," she said, surveying complacently her feeble little hoop of pearls.

But Eleanor was thinking of the time, not so very long ago, when "not to leave mother" had seemed a daughter's highest duty, and she recalled the rather elaborate way in which Jessie had been wont to lead the widow about, entering church with her on her arm, and settling with a dutiful touch the

footstool or cushion of that independent, capable woman.

The person who can consecrate his or her own wishes and transform them into a duty is an enviable person. There is an engaging simplicity about such a life. The mental vision is not bothered by seeing two sides of a question; duty and pleasure are not opposed, but united, and while admirable they are also complacent. Of such surely is wisdom justified.

Presently Mr. Brooke called, in loverlike fashion, to take his *fiancée* home. Cecil was a mild person with kind manners and a long neck; he beamed at Jessie out of pale eyes, and did not seem embarrassed at meeting his former love. He drank a great deal of tea, and he and Jessie called each other by their Christian names an inordinate number of times. Their self-consciousness was a little wearisome, and their manner of parading affection for each other imparted a flavour of provincialism to the little courtship.

"It cheapens all one's ideas of love," said Eleanor to herself when they had gone. "Why, only a month ago Cecil *cried* when I refused him, and Jessie was enlarging upon the subject of a daughter's duty to her widowed mother. What is it all worth, and what is that love worth which they now say they feel for each other? Yet it will be a happy marriage—one of those sensible, prosaic, conventional marriages which are so poor a thing."

Then Lady Majendie and the two pretty sisters came in, and Eleanor gave them an amusing account of her visitors. Cecil had announced his intention of staying another half-hour, whereupon Jessie rose to her feet saying, "You must just come straight home, Cecil," and Mr. Brooke obeyed directly. Eleanor was reminded of the little girl who used to keep such order at Kininvie, and she gave a comical description of the scene.

"I am so thankful I was not at home," said Lady Majendie piously. "Jessie always makes me so nervous, and she wears woollen gloves." She and her younger daughters went to dress for a small and early dance, and the two girls fluttered downstairs presently in charming white frocks, their pretty hair curled on their foreheads, and their eyes bright with pleasure. They were dear pink-and-white girls, with happy faces and soft eyes—rather stupid, perfectly sweet and amiable, and with delightfully caressing manners and clear sweet voices. A charming pair of girls! Always pleased with everything, and with a refreshing air of gladness about them.

"You dears!" exclaimed Eleanor, smiling at the happy picture in the doorway—the floating soft white dresses, the satin shoes, the fans and laces and ribbons of her pretty sisters.

"If only you were going with us!" exclaimed the girls, twining their white arms caressingly about

Eleanor in her black dinner gown. The half-sisters were devoted to her, and indeed every one in the house loved Eleanor.

"I had much rather go to bed," she laughed; and when the sisters had fluttered off to their dance, she did go early to her room. She dawdled over the fire and wrote some letters. Then, because the amusing side of things always struck her, she began to smile.

"Not for me, a prosaic, happy marriage," she cried. "But," with a comical shake of her head, "is this the alternative?"

CHAPTER II

THE two pretty sisters, Angela and Clare, had made up their minds to study Shakespeare. That such a resolve should be a phase in nearly every one's existence is a touching tribute to the universal obligations of duty. The manner in which the resolve is put into practice varies. A man who feels that he is not sufficiently acquainted with the works of the immortal playwright will take down the volume of plays from the bookshelf and read the great works at his leisure. Or if he has not the volume in his house, he will buy a copy according to his means or his desires—a pocket edition, or a calf-bound crown 8vo—and he will then proceed to peruse its contents.

A young lady adopts less simple methods. She first of all confesses blushingly that, except for two plays that she has seen at the Lyceum, she does not know Shakespeare at all. She then remarks, with quite a serious amount of penitence, that she often feels how much her education has been neglected in this direction. She will probably proceed to mourn her ignorance, but she looks doubtfully at the big volume; the task is a heavy one to attempt alone,

and she has so little time for reading. She makes a resolve; other people must also make resolves—as many people as possible must resolve to read Shakespeare. They will read him together; thus will the task be lightened. A burden shared is a burden spared. They will meet and have tea; they will each buy a new volume of Shakespeare; they will also each subscribe half a crown. It shall be a Shakespearian Reading Society. They might even have a badge or ribbon! What a charming occupation for the winter months—so cultured, so interesting! How much better than wasting time on frivolous amusements . . . and the fine for non-attendance only threepence!

Lady Majendie was charmed with the idea of the Reading Society when her younger daughters suggested it to her. She willingly undertook the part of Christopher Sly, and she ordered a Greek gown with classic folds, which she said helped her to feel the character. Angela of the gentle voice and sweet pink cheeks was Katherine the Shrew, and lisped her scoldings in a soft whisper; and Violet was the Page. Jessie had been asked to join the Society, and had replied in characteristic fashion, that she did not approve of acting, and that no one knew how full a girl's time was when she was engaged to be married.

"Miss Blair has made the play very short," said Lady Majendie plaintively.

"Who is Miss Blair?" asked Eleanor.

"She goes to work-parties," said Lady Majendie comprehensively, "and we meet her at guilds and in church. She has read over the play, and marked all those passages which we may not read."

"Yes," said Miss Blair on the occasion of the first meeting of the Society. "All plays should go through a process of filtration." And she proceeded to accentuate all the coarser sentiments of the piece by pencilling the margin with a broad black line.

Miss Blair had, it appeared, but one idea of the uses of Shakespeare's plays—they had produced Bowdler; the reason of Shakespeare's existence was to create the Immortal Expurgator. Miss Blair had been known to say that morally speaking Bowdler was the greater man of the two. She frequently made reference to his methods, and often interrupted a reader to say, "Excuse me, but I am quite sure Bowdler would have expurgated that."

Eleanor watched her with some interest and not a little amusement this afternoon. Miss Blair was an elderly woman, dressed in seedy black, with a shy manner, combined with a sort of nervous courage which constrained her to contradict everybody from the feeling of being true to her principles. By the time the afternoon's reading was over, the poor lady was flushed and

nervous with excitement; and from her air of disapproving aloofness she almost appeared to be making a stand against some conspiracy of sinners. By tea time it is to be feared that most of the party had formed an adverse opinion of William Shakespeare. Deep in their hearts it is to be suspected that one or two members of the Reading Society felt convinced that Shakespeare's genius had ever been somewhat overrated. The rules of the Society were, at the end of the meeting, somewhat eagerly revised, and the suggestion that tea should be served on future occasions at half-past four instead of at five was proposed and seconded without a dissenting voice being heard.

It could not fail to be observed that half the party were of the opinion that the other half had spoken with unnecessary expression—a little out of place in a drawing-room; while those whose dramatic instinct had inclined them to the forcible rendering of a speech commented upon the milder exposition of the play as being a little flat.

Eleanor, who came into the room simultaneously with the tea-trays, was rather eagerly welcomed. She was always bright and entertaining, and social gatherings whether great or small had a way of circling round her and depending upon her for their entertainment. She was in the habit of spending her afternoons with her step-father, whose

failing health condemned him to the sofa for a great part of the day, and of returning to the drawing-room at tea time.

The tired and disappointed readers of William Shakespeare clustered eagerly round her table, and something very graceful and winning about the girl—a universal courtesy, a certain subjugating of self-interest—made her presence a very welcome addition anywhere.

Perhaps it is a cheap gift, a trick even of the society woman, to know exactly what is the right thing to say and to be ready with sympathy and with proper inquiries about the interests of others; but undoubtedly it is a charm which cannot well be dispensed with; and even if it is only a trick, one must admit that it is a very commendable one.

Pretty Clare and Angela could never be accused of being very witty or amusing, and their sweet eyes could only look their admiration for their sister, while Miss Blair, with the ready admiration of the unattractive woman for those whose social gifts exceed her own, listened throughout the afternoon from her quiet corner to all Eleanor said. Then she crossed the room rather suddenly, and said with her usual shy manner, "May I talk to you?"

"Please do," said Eleanor, graciously making room for her on the sofa where she sat.

"Your face interests me so much," said Miss Blair in a hard voice.

Eleanor laughed. "I am not a bit interesting," she said.

"I feel sure you are," contradicted Miss Blair. Her manner was so unattractive, her voice so flat in tone, that even her kindest remarks lost interest, and were devoid of sweetness; while her excessive shyness was a little unpardonable in a woman of her age.

She fidgeted with her gloves for some moments, and then asked with some of that sudden inappropriateness which distinguishes a questioner making inquiries for one's soul in a railway carriage, "Do you do any parish work?"

"No," said Eleanor, smiling; "I have not come to that yet!"

Miss Blair was not gifted with a sense of humour.

"What do you do?" she said jerkily.

"Nothing," replied Eleanor, smiling. "I am a lily of the field: I sow not, neither do I spin. But I am inclined to think that my clothing is rather nice."

"What church do you attend?" Miss Blair's too evident shyness prevented her questions from sounding impertinent.

"I generally stay at home with my step-father on Sunday mornings; it is dull for him being alone. Yes, I sometimes go in the evenings; but I have no pet church—no pet priest."

"Have you ever heard Mr. Vawdry?"

"No," said Eleanor; then, laughing, "Do you mind my saying that I do not want to?"

Some one came to the tea-table for some more tea, and some one else got up to say good-bye.

"Why do you not want to?" repeated Miss Blair, as soon as Eleanor had re-seated herself.

"I don't quite know," laughed Eleanor. "I think I am like the man who refused to vote for Aristides because he got so tired of hearing him called the Just. I am a little tired of hearing Mr. Vawdry called the Good."

"Oh, if you could only hear him once!" cried Miss Blair, with all a woman's enthusiasm for her favourite priest. Women's superiority in virtue is not often questioned—least of all by themselves—yet still they love to look to men as their confessors and their guides in the paths of virtue.

"Oh, I must get over my prejudice and go and hear him some day," said Eleanor, polite but vague, and quickly repentant of the least suggestion of having hurt this strange, unattractive woman's feelings.

"I should be glad if you would go with me some Sunday evening."

"Thank you so much."

"Will next Sunday suit you?"

Really this dear insistent woman was some-

thing of a bore. "I am afraid I am engaged next Sunday," said Eleanor mendaciously.

"The Sunday after, then?"

"May I write?" asked Eleanor, falling back upon the one polite means of escape open to the hard pressed.

All the guests had left except Miss Blair; even Lady Majendie had made an excuse for going down to the library to sit with her husband.

Angela and Clare, hand in hand, in the pretty shy fashion in which they were wont to cling to each other upon all occasions, sat on the sofa on the other side of the fireplace. Eleanor smothered a yawn.

"You do not district visit at all?"

"Not in London. I do a great deal of it down at Farant, but I am afraid that that is from the most sordid motives of self-assertiveness."

Angela and Clare laughed admiringly, and Miss Blair looked puzzled.

"Our neighbourhood at Farant is populated entirely by young ladies; they are all a little bored, I am afraid, and not a little dull, and the explanation of their universal malady has come to be that they are misunderstood or in love. Now, you know, visiting the poor is an invaluable remedy for such disorders; but the worst of it is that there are only about two thousand inhabitants in the three villages, and as the supply of district visitors very considerably exceeds the

demand, we wage a jealous war with each other as to who shall visit the poor people. Our vicar has done his best, and has divided the poorer quarters of the parish into twenty districts, and this gives us each a handsome allowance of about four families apiece. Still, many of us were unemployed altogether, until a certain Miss Lane came to her tiny house just outside the village. She is our Outlet, a most convenient person, a cripple —no one's particular property. Her house is not, like our several districts, labelled 'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' and in her we find our sphere of usefulness. Whenever we make good resolutions, or turn over a new leaf, we go and read regularly to her for nearly a week. After a stirring sermon the poor lady has more grapes than she knows what to do with. And when our curate married!—there were so many empty lives and broken hearts that Miss Lane became surfeited with fruit and flowers, and was worn out by drives in pony carriages."

It has been remarked an almost wearisome number of times that ninety-nine women out of a hundred have no sense of humour. Miss Blair, as has also been before intimated, was one of the ninety-nine.

Church work, it must be remembered, was her profession as well as her duty. She honestly believed that there was no other outcome of Chris-

tianity—there was no other proof of the inward spiritual life than this.

"Could your friends find no other parochial work?" she asked literally; "there are so many other ways besides visiting in which one may help the Church."

Her air was so solemn that it excused a slight tendency to tease in Eleanor's rejoinder:

"Church decorations and mending surplices have not the full flavour of parish work," she said gravely. "One vicar tried to put me off with that, but I insisted upon being saved in my own way, and stuck to my district. I claimed my four families; they were all poor, and they all drank too much beer."

"Oh, Eleanor," exclaimed Clare, "you forget the Pipers. Mrs. Piper didn't drink, and you sat up with her for two whole nights when she was ill."

"Merely to gain experience," said Eleanor lightly.

This overdone solemnity of Miss Blair's awoke in her a quick repudiation of such seriousness. The girl's nature, with all its faults, was too large to magnify the trifling into the admirable, or to claim a martyr's crown for a small service to her fellow beings.

"Two nights in the Pipers' cottage," she went on, still in the light tones of narrative, "were full of dramatic effect. Piper was not sober the

whole time, and his wife's one fear was that he would be 'turrible angry with her if she went and died.' Mrs. Piper was the bread-winner."

Miss Blair rose to go, and Eleanor, quickly sensitive to soothe as well as to suffer, hastened to atone for her flippancy by a more than kindly farewell.

"Good-bye," she said cordially. "Won't you have your fur? Please let me put it on for you." The poor lady was pathetically shabby, and the fur ruff was innocent of hairs at its worn edges. She fastened the clasp when Miss Blair's fingers, in their woollen gloves, had failed in their effort to do so, and said in a friendly, charming way, "And be sure you don't forget to take me to hear Mr. Vawdry some evening."

She went to the staircase with her guest, and made the usual polite, if somewhat inane speeches that it is deemed necessary to drop, as it were, on to the top of a visitor's bonnet as she descends the stairs.

The hall clock pointed to a quarter to seven. Miss Blair's protracted visit had really been a little fatiguing. Eleanor returned to the drawing-room in a state of exaggerated exhaustion, and sank into an easy chair. Yes, now that that dear lady had at last departed, and a certain pathos which surrounded her—her shy, unattractive manner, her woollen gloves and the rubbed piece

of fur—had departed with her, there was no doubt but that she had been distinctly fatiguing, and a little clumsy.

"My dear children," cried Eleanor, "what a tiresome woman! Is the hopelessness of my case so plainly writ upon me that she should prescribe High Church parsons and district visiting to me as to a despairing spinster?"

"Poor darling Eleanor," said the pretty sisters. They suggested ordering a fresh cup of tea, and begged that she would not be so silly as to call herself hard names.

Eleanor laughed. "Who did mamma say Miss Blair is?" she asked.

"She is the daughter of old General Blair whom father used to know, and she is too fearfully poor. Isn't it dreadful, Eleanor? She lives in a single room in West Kensington, and she augments her income. I don't quite know what that means, but I have heard her say it several times."

"Whenever I give a definition I always feel a little like 'Sandford and Merton,'" Eleanor said, knitting her brows. "To augment an income (you don't say how it is done) is a modern term, and it is full of significance, even if it is not also a little pathetic, as Mr. Barlow might say. It was invented for the use of very poor ladies who never work for their daily bread because it is not genteel, but who, from playful avarice, or from

some whim quite consistent with their rank, toil all day for some small sad pittance, which they add to that mysterious revenue they proudly call income."

"That is rather a long explanation," sighed Clare.

"Poor Miss Blair! I really will go with her and hear her pet parson some day. Why do women demand so much admiration for their belongings—their husbands, their babies, their pet parsons? A reflective vanity, I suppose. Now this week I have to give up, not only to admiring Jessie's trousseau, but in helping her to choose it; though I must admit that our cousin does not readily take one's advice."

"Dear Eleanor," Jessie had written, "Will you ask your mamma if I may have the brougham two or three mornings this week? I know you have a number of horses which just stand idle, so it would be a good thing to work them, and it will spare me in cabs."

"Just drive down Bond Street and Regent Street, and we will see," were the comprehensive orders she gave the footman; and she leaned back complacently in the carriage and remarked to Eleanor, "I always go to the Bond Street shops first and find out what is worn, and then I go and get things for half the price in Kensington High Street. I want an every-evening dress," she said, surveying the written list she held in

her hand. "I intend to dress for dinner every night. You don't know, Eleanor, how much more a man respects you for attention to these little things."

"I am afraid I dress for dinner for my own comfort," said Eleanor; "I should be very uncomfortable if I didn't."

Jessie's little bourgeois ways, inherited from the excellent Mrs. Campbell, *née* Webster, were well known to Eleanor, who could never avoid feeling irritated by them.

"I dress according to my station," said Jessie.

They entered a large milliner's shop. "But, remember," said Jessie, "I am not wedded to this establishment. If their things do not suit me, I shall go elsewhere."

She removed her tweed cape, and sat down as though intending to pass the morning here, her object being, it seemed, not so much to purchase clothing as to pass criticisms on all that was submitted to her inspection.

"There is jute in that," she said, fingering a remnant of black satin, which she desired to be further "reduced."

"Then I certainly should not buy it," said Eleanor.

"Hush!" said Jessie. "How you do spoil a bargain."

The shopwoman remarked, with exemplary

patience, that if "moddam" saw nothing to suit her, "perhaps she would give an order to have something made for her."

"What temper!" whispered Jessie, in an audible aside.

"You may call that sealskin," when some furs were shown her, "but it is just rabbit, and the poor fur-pullers die by hundreds in the trade; besides, you can get those capes at half the price at Barker's. And now," she said, having spent the morning in a general recognizance of millinery and mantles without purchasing anything, "I think as it is late we will go and have a bun for lunch."

"No, Jessie," said Eleanor firmly, "I draw the line at a bun; I shall either go home to lunch or to some place where I can have something more substantial."

"You just pamper yourself," said Jessie. "I am sure I hope you will never be a poor man's wife."

As the wedding day approached, Jessie became more than ever solicitous of her mother's welfare. She spoke touchingly to Eleanor about the widow left alone in her old age, and notified that she bequeathed this excellent and very self-reliant woman to her cousin's care.

"It will give you an interest in life," she said, "to look after mother. For, of course, although Cecil and I are going to live in London, I shall

have my home duties to attend to, but you will be glad to have something to occupy you."

In after years Jessie's babies used to be made over to her relatives in the same solemn way whenever their mamma wanted to be rid of them. Many people know well these interests in life which are so freely offered them; and indeed there are those who transfer all their burdens to others in this high-minded way.

The wedding was a stodgy affair: the guests came, for the most part, in dark stuff gowns, and there was a large contingent of Webster relations, who kissed Jessie repeatedly, and called her Mrs. Brooke as though it were some exquisite and original joke. They sat at breakfast with loosened bonnet-strings, and sipped wine in an apologetic fashion.

Lady Majendie got neuralgia, and had to go home.

Cecil was nervous, and swallowed repeatedly, which caused a convulsive movement in his long prominent throat; but Jessie was calm and collected. She made her marriage vows with laudable distinctness, and proceeded from that moment and ever afterwards to manage and rule her husband with admirable skill; while Cecil—who, it was whispered, had been quite surprisingly stingy about the marriage settlements—declared without hesitation that he endowed with all his worldly goods his bride.

"Be calm now, Cecil," said Jessie authoritatively when, in the confusion of departure, Cecil lost his umbrella and began to search distractedly for it.

"But, my dear, it was a most expensive umbrella," said the bridegroom excitedly, "and a new umbrella was an outlay I did not contemplate for a moment. If it cannot be found soon, we shall certainly miss the train."

"Get into your coat," said Jessie in her singsong voice; and she helped him into it with a wifely air, and bade him get into the carriage.

Mrs. William Campbell, who had wept unrestrainedly since the beginning of the ceremonies, became still more suffused at the moment of departure. The Webster relations were delighted, and murmured that they did like to see a few tears at a wedding.

Last of all, as the carriage was about to start, this warm-hearted, if somewhat too emotional lady, ran down the front door steps, and standing on the curb, cried to the already distracted Cecil, "Take care of her, my son, take care of the widow's only child."

The crowd on the pavement was in raptures.

"Poor chap," said some one to Eleanor; "that's trying a man a bit too far."

But Eleanor could only smile rather drearily in response. The utter commonplaceness of this

marriage, the self-satisfied little bride, so pleased at having got a husband; the fussy bridegroom, intent upon finding his expensive umbrella; the sparsely filled church, and the hurried reading of the uninterested divine who performed the ceremony, all jarred horribly upon her.

The cry of the soul that is not satisfied may oftener make itself heard in the midst of commonplace surroundings than in the silence of the mountain tops; and something within Eleanor called aloud from out this ordinary, respectable, middle-class house, filled with its ordinary middle-class people, for some fuller explanation of life. She looked at the little gathering of smiling, prosaic, conventional men and women, and wondered if they had ever essayed anything, ever aspired; and within her rose the old restless universal unsilenceable soul-cry for the essential, the Infinite.

This happy marriage—so wise, so sensible, so affectionate even, so full of promise and comfort and ease and simple lawful pleasures—companionship and small social advancements such as the simple-minded love—could it be the final issue of life, the end of ends?

"No," she thought; "even if it be good, there must be something better, something that furnishes a better reason for living, something that satisfies better the demands of the soul, something that gives a more reasonable solution to the problem of exist-

ence, something that answers better the old insistent question—'What is life?' . . . Bah! Why should I bother my head about it? . . . I am quite a happy person. I get through the days very comfortably. . . . To escape ills and discomforts, that is in itself quite a definite and tangible good . . . Jessie is happy too, in her own little narrow, prosaic way. Why fret, why trouble, why ask questions? Let us pray for little aims and a good digestion."

"How do you do, Miss McNeill? I should be so glad if you would let me know when you will come and hear Mr. Vawdry."

That importunate woman again!

"Will next Sunday do? And am I to come armed with a revolver or a tin of Keating's insect powder?"

"Oh, neither," replied Miss Blair.

Eleanor smiled and said good-bye, but she was detained by Mrs. Campbell, who advanced upon her with flying bonnet-strings, and begged her to remain until after the other guests had gone. She drew her into the little dining-room with its disordered tables, its empty wine-glasses and plates of broken bride-cake standing about.

"It's a pity so much was cut," murmured Mrs. Campbell.

The gaslight flared garishly on the dishevelled remains of the banquet, and the carpet was strewn with morsels of food and scraps of flowers and rice.

"There was not a hitch!" said Mrs. Campbell triumphantly; the words sounded like a Hallelujah. "But that is not what I was going to say. I have had such bad news from Kininvie. Roddy is there now. I am quite upset about it. Well, it's the old story of the Fraser property—(my dear, I think I will take half a glass of champagne; not that I touch it as a rule, but it seems a shame that the waiters should drink it). The case—the Laird, you know, went to law about it, but it has been going on I don't know for how long; they have taken it from one court to another. I don't understand these things, but the upshot of it all is that the Laird has ruined himself, and Kininvie has to be sold."

"I cannot believe it," cried Eleanor impulsively. "Oh, Mrs. Campbell, it cannot be true! I can't imagine the Campbells without Kininvie, or Kininvie without the Campbells."

"They are too fond of the place," said Mrs. Campbell. "Jessie was saying last night that she thinks it may be a judgment upon them. And now Alec is coming to London," she went on; "he has got to find something to do to keep himself." The Webster in Mrs. Campbell was sometimes very strong. "And the Laird has gone in the meantime to stay with some friends in Edinburgh."

Alec in London! Alec with the free step and the long straight limbs condemned to an office

stool! Alec deposed from his godship among the Highlanders! Alec with that kinship of his with the strong air and the purple heather of the moors, with his long keen sight, and his quick ear to note the song of every bird. Alec with the salt air blowing about him, and the steady hand on the tiller of his boat. Alec in a black coat and a silk hat doomed to the pavement.

It did not seem possible. Some hot tears gathered in Eleanor's eyes, followed by quick indignation that her friends should be deprived of their best, their most cherished; and then came the subjective, the more personal and self-centred thought as to how she herself would be affected by Alec's coming to London.

Life had been a little tiresome lately, a little difficult to understand; unanswered problems became so over-burdensome at last, candle-light was a little paltry. An inward restlessness had bred in her a desire to travel far and wide, and gain fresh views of life. The atmosphere of her own environment was exhausted. Thought was becoming complicated—a little involved. She wondered if Alec's coming would make things plainer. Alec was such a simple, restful person! It made life seem less puzzling even to think of him. She compared him in her mind to some strong moorland breeze that might blow away the fogs. Had she missed him a little all these years? Could it be for Alec's sake that, without knowing

the reason, she had refused all her offers of marriage? Did he—was it possible that he cared for her still?

"No, no! A thousand times no! What a foolish thought! All that happened years ago!"

But she was glad he was coming to London, very glad—dear old Alec!

CHAPTER III

" It's such a bore turning out on an evening like this," said Eleanor, next Sunday about five o'clock.

The drawing-room in Cadogan Square certainly looked an inviting place to be in on a raw November afternoon. It was a whim of Lady Majendie's to have this beautiful apartment filled all the year round with quantities of hothouse palms. Chairs and couches were placed beneath their spreading foliage, and the more feathery sort broke the outlines of the windows, while grouped everywhere were vases and bowls of flowers. The daffodil-yellow of the walls threw into relief the shining green of the plants, and the softly shaded electric lights filled the room with a sort of mild radiance, and cast dim, broken shadows from the broad-leafed foliage of the palms. It was a room to dream about in distant desert places! There were tables littered with costly trifles in silver, and Battersea enamels. Tall cabinets painted in delicate wreaths of flowers, and faintly coloured knots of ribbon lined the walls, the fragile china which they contained standing primly in rows behind the latticed doors. On the mantelpiece by Adam were groups of Chelsea china representing amorous lovers kissing each other in front of one-

sided trees upon which pink and blue flowers grew. The rich-coloured carpet was thick and soft under foot, and the silken window curtains, draped with the gracefulness and ease of falling water, gently forbade the entrance of the gloom and chill outside.

The tea-table, with its heavy silver and fragile painted china, gave an air of homeliness to the room, and the warm glow of the fire drew forth the scent of a hundred flowers.

Into this room came the usual Sunday-afternoon callers—young men in black frock-coats and stiff collars, who aired the conversation which had done duty in four or five houses already this afternoon, and who ate muffins and disturbed chair covers.

It was to a new comer that Eleanor turned and said in her charming, well-bred, clear voice, " It's such a bore turning out," and she threw a little appeal for sympathy into her words. She was sitting by the fire dressed in some rich purple stuff with old lace at the neck and sleeves; her brown hair was exquisitely dressed in the fashionable mode, and her pretty hands with their rings and ruffles lay in luxurious idleness on her lap.

" Do be sorry for me, Charles."

Charles Egerton—best of sportsmen, dearest of boys, with an ugly kindly humorous face, instantly gave the sympathy that was required of him. Charles could have sympathized with a broomstick left out in the cold! His nature was such a ready

one, so quick and impulsive, that he doubtless lavished himself, his sympathy, and his money much too freely. But then he got it all returned to him again in the quite unusual amount of affection that he inspired, and the number of good friends he had. Probably no one had ever said an unkind thing about Charles Egerton. Firstly, because there was but little to find fault with in the open-hearted, quickly sympathetic, humorously ugly young man; and secondly, because so many persons would have taken any disparagement of him as a personal insult to themselves that it would have been a daring man who ventured upon it.

Charles was thinking how beautiful Eleanor looked with the fire-light upon her delicate face and the soft purple folds of her gown. Charles had a universal admiration for women, and perhaps had only escaped matrimony by comparing them all with his mother. A delightful boy! One who believed too, that most women are perfect and that a man should ever be willing to do them service and shelter and protect them. It distressed him even to think of Eleanor going out in the cold; women should never get their feet wet, nor breathe fogs, nor have to carry anything.

"You are not going out to-night, surely?" he said. "It's a beastly evening, and there is nothing going on, is there?"

"I am going to church," cried Eleanor, with

a pretence of tragedy in her voice. "I am going to church with an elderly lady to hear her pet parson preach."

"I think that is awfully good of you," said Charles, "but it really is not a night for you to be out."

"It is the combination of circumstances that awes one a little," said Eleanor, and she checked off on her fingers, "a wet evening, an elderly lady, and a pet parson."

"I believe lots of people do go to hear that fellow Vawdry, though," said Charles. "They say he has got the best choir in London, but he is awfully high church—confession, you know, and all that. Do you know I really think I'd let the old lady go alone, Miss McNeill; you would be sure to get cold in this fog, and it is a long way to go."

"I have tried to get out of it," said Eleanor, smiling; "and indeed I am very sorry for myself leaving this delightful fire and all you pleasant people, but elderly ladies are so persistent, are they not—I mean maiden ladies like Miss Blair? I fear they have not learned the art of yielding gracefully."

"It's rather odd," said Charles, with a puzzled expression, his sandy eyebrows almost disappearing into his hair, "men seem to make women so unselfish, so I suppose it means that they are rather selfish themselves. And yet women are so awfully sweet when they are unselfish like that—I mean, when they are like my mother, you know."

" Charles," said Eleanor, " your mother is a most reprehensible weakness of yours."

Then Miss Blair arrived in her shabby black clothes and the worn fur collarette, shy to nervousness as she placed herself on a distant chair by the door. She remarked that the weather was not cold, that it was not raining, that she would not have any tea, that Lady Majendie's clock was slow—in a series of sharp contradictory sentences.

When it was time to start she absolutely vetoed the idea of calling a cab. It seems that pilgrimages to the East End are not conducted in this form of conveyance. There is an etiquette in these things.

" That is the church just ahead of us," she said, stepping out of the omnibus which had conveyed them from Aldersgate Station. " It's only five minutes' walk from here."

The lights from the stained-glass windows of St. Mary's glowed jewel-like in the ill-lighted, narrow street. The bell was ringing for Evening Service, and a number of poorly dressed people were standing about on the pavement outside. Miss Blair was important and fussy; she advanced in front of Eleanor and pushed open the swinging doors, and they entered the church.

Often afterwards Eleanor used to look back to this first time she entered St. Mary's, and wonder what feeling it was that came over her then. She used to ask herself if she knew, in some undefined,

dim way, as she followed Miss Blair up the aisle, that after this visit to St. Mary's life for her would not be the same again. She could never tell. Had she been able to look into the future it is doubtful whether she would have turned back at the door. We must all feel once. And looking back over the long years to the perhaps one vivid sensation of our lives—whether of joy or of sorrow—we feel that the thing had to be. All our life led up to this thing; our characters were moulded solely for the part we had to play in this crisis; and it crystallized them and made us what we are. There is in every life a chief event. In some, it takes the form of a blinding temptation; in others, the thing is made of a thrilling joy. But to most of us the centre of life, the crystallizing agent (any metaphor will suffice), the colouring matter which from henceforth establishes the tone of our being, making it gay or gaudy, blood-red or black, or serenely grey—is sorrow.

Aged Christians look back and talk of the turning-point in their lives. Sinners with pitiful hard faces are able to state at what place they fell. And all men in their contemplative moments—perhaps most when they are at the point of death—are able to see clearly the day or the thing which fixed them.

The act of living is such a complicated business; so absorbing too, and so urgent in its demands, that it makes realization impossible. It is only when we look back from some other platform that we see

things as they are. But it may be, that as we approach the one stupendous fact of our existence, the restless feeling of an animal before a storm may come upon us, and the causeless excitement or dread which we call a presentiment, may overtake us. Yet we may never turn back. The thing has to be. Even if it be sorrow—even if we have had our warning, there is no escape. And some of us know of those who, with the light in their faces, are set to go to Jerusalem where they needs must suffer.

The church was as yet but dimly lighted, making it appear larger than it really was, and the side aisles beyond the pillars seemed vast in the gloom. The eye was led unconsciously to the gorgeous sanctuary of the church, where seven silver lamps hung on long chains from the roof. The altar was piled high with white flowers—pure white, without even a touch of green amongst them. Over the altar and at the back of it was a rare piece of Italian embroidery forming a canopy; the frontal and super-frontal were embroidered in silk and gold. Some tall candles in burnished candlesticks burned with a steady soft flame and touched the white flowers in their silver vases with a warm kind glow. Upright against the stone pillars leaned some gold-fringed banners, making a splash of colour against the cold stone; a golden crucifix flashed out sharply from the faint colours of the brocaded canopy. And high above it, dimly seen against the black night,

was a painted window. The departed daylight had taken all colour from it, the light from the interior of the church showed its glowing tints only to those outside. But majestically against the gloom there stood out in white outline the figure of a man. A Man hanging on a cross, with kind arms outstretched, and a tired head fallen helplessly forward. . . . "Why," she asked, "did it make such a gigantic appeal to the imagination? Why for so many ages had it stirred the hearts of men? The story was such a simple one! A Hebrew peasant put to death in the common, brutal Roman fashion. A teacher who had been before a little public for a very little time. And yet the world has gone after Him. For centuries all of our nobleness, all of our patience, all of our heroism, all of our grandest and greatest and best—yea, all of our hope and of our comfort, have centred round this solitary figure on the cross. Had no one else before lived a pure and noble life? Had no one else championed the poor, and loved little children, and died for a good cause? Why Jesus of Nazareth only? Why not a number of Saviours? why not many High Priests? Other lives have seemed well-nigh as holy, other peasants have died the shameful death. Other martyrs with beautiful serene faces have met the sword and the fire and the cross. Why do we point to one death, and to one only and say, 'He died for me'? It could not be merely that he had satisfied the

popular demands of his time. Only for one brief hour had the people cried 'Hosannah!' Nor could it be because of His miracle-working power. Those who find it most difficult to believe in miracle are often the sincerest Christians. Could His resurrection prove His power, or His birth His divinity?"

"I suppose," thought Eleanor, "He is the one person whose life exactly conformed to His principles."

But the explanation did not satisfy her. It did not, for example, account for the tremendous demands that He made upon us; it was not sufficient warrant for a claim such as "Leave all and follow Me," nor, "He that hateth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple."

"Where was the warrant for these enormous claims? Surely he had died for us," she thought. "But Curtius had died for the Romans, Harmodius had bled for Greece; and since the beginning of the world brave men had shed their blood willingly, and friend had died for friend. Who then would not die for the whole world were the chance offered him? Ah! the privilege of it! No wonder the King reserved the honour for His son!

"But what was the unassailable thing about Christ, the appealing, uncontrovertible fact which remained when half the record of His life was denied? What could it be that drew all men unto Him?"

The turbid insistency of her thought worried her a little—where could an answer be found?

"Was it only because His life—like no other hero's—corresponded exactly to His convictions? Or was it just that He loved us as no one else had ever done?"

The last explanation pleased Eleanor best. She felt in need of love.

The congregation shuffled noisily in their seats. There was a good deal of unrestrained coughing and some spitting. A smell of stale incense pervaded the church mingled with the odour of the unwashed. An officious child handed Eleanor a hymn-book, and occupied herself during the service in bowing and crossing herself, looking round from time to time to see if her genuflexions were appreciated by her neighbours.

"There is Mr. Vawdry," whispered Miss Blair. "He prays thus before every service."

"Where?" asked Eleanor, as she followed Miss Blair's eye and saw a tall figure in a black cassock kneeling in lowly wise on the steps of the altar.

"What an exaggerated attitude!" she said, as the figure arose and disappeared into the vestry and the lights of the church were turned up.

She stood up and watched the long procession of white-robed men and boys enter the aisle. The foremost held aloft a gleaming cross of burnished brass, and there followed acolytes in their red

cassocks and lace-trimmed surplices, and youths carrying banners, a goodly number. After them the clergy, and last of all the tall priest who had prayed before the altar—Francis Vawdry.

He was not singing as the others were when he passed Eleanor's chair. His face was absolutely in repose. There was about it the aloofness, the obliviousness which acts upon a woman like a challenge, arousing as it does first of all her resentment, then her curiosity, and lastly her fighting instinct.

His features were clean cut and fine, but the man's soul was so distinctly in his face that one hardly seemed to consider the features so much as the character that they expressed. His eyes were remarkable. They had a gleam in them such as may be seen in the eyes of Jewish people, and they possessed the extraordinary quality, which is noticeable in some portraits, of seeming to look directly at each person who regards them. From whatever part of a room these eyes in old portraits are seen, they still seem to look directly at the gazer: so Mr. Vawdry's eyes—deep, resolute, serene—fixed the eyes of those who looked at him and held them with a compelling power.

His vestments imparted a picturesque air to his tall figure. The awkward-looking cope with its silken embroidery served to discover by contrast the splendid lines of his dark head, and the folds of his surplice hung gracefully from broad shoulders

that stooped a little. His hands were crossed in front of him as he walked up the aisle.

Each one of the long procession made lowly obeisance to the silk-draped altar, and proceeded to his place in the choir. As Francis Vawdry bent his head the action seemed more than a reverence. The shapely dark head, with the clumsy embroidered cope stiffly encircling the neck, was bent lower and in more stately fashion than those of any other that had preceded him. It was the reverence of a courtier who acknowledges his King.

"A gentleman, at least," thought Eleanor. "How is it that only a well-bred person can make a bow, even in church?"

She did not take much interest in the service, except to criticise the ritual, which she disliked. But the exquisite rendering of the anthem came to her with something of surprise.

"I shan't stand up, I am tired," she said to herself, and remained seated, the courtesying child in front looking reproachfully at her. "I am tired all through," she went on—"tired of my life, tired of society, and most deadly tired of myself."

And then the first notes of the anthem were played, and a boy's voice was singing of rest.

"Oh, for the wings—for the wings of a dove," sang the boy, his voice rising in tuneful cadence, and wafting as on a dove's own wing the sweetness of his song. Then from the whole full-throated choir came

the chorus, and the massed voices rose like a cloud of sweet incense through the mirk and gloom of the November night.

Eleanor leaned back on her rush-seated chair and closed her eyes. The music acted like an opiate upon her, lulling her senses into a delicious dreamfulness and peace. And across her face, like sunlight, there came a smile of deep content.

Rest! The Hebrew's Heaven, the Buddhist's Nirvana, was this after all the end of ends—the final good? It seemed possible. The choir's sweet singing was a choric song; the church vanished, and she was upon some thyme-scented hill-side—some hill-side like the one at the back of Kininvie—and the water was blue like the sky, and the air was warm, and life was one long afternoon. Overhead some white gulls were wheeling, and the summer sun was warm. "Let us alone." The long afternoon was eternity, and there was no need for hurry, no occasion for unrest. The afternoon was long enough for things to right themselves. Never would the night come and find friends unreconciled or hearts broken, or mistakes unexplained or motives misunderstood. The endlessness of eternity was its attraction, and not its bane. Ah! to have time for the healing of all wrongs, the accomplishment of all endeavour, the perfect fulfilment of all love. Ah! to work restfully, to love restfully, to enjoy restfully! This is the meaning of eternity. Man's innate desire

for rest presupposes its existence, or else his belief in its existence is the outcome of his need.

But the music stopped, and the sunlight and the thyme-scented hill-side vanished, and Eleanor fell to earth and found herself sitting on a hard chair in an East End church, with some toil-worn people around her who coughed and spat. She sighed, thinking of her pleasant dream, but already prepared to laugh at the woman who had dreamed so pleasantly. She wondered in her restless way if her heart could ever be at rest. Always it seemed to her that her nature was waiting for fresh developments; never did she feel complete, stablished, settled. "I might be anything yet," she used to think, "a nurse, a female politician, a typewriter." But her character, which she knew to be strong, seemed as unfinished as her nature. Often she wished that some circumstance would decide a career for her. "Even if I had to work for my bread, it would be something," she thought.

She moved restlessly in her chair, and longed for singleness of aim, fixity of purpose, unity of ego; a simple nature that could perceive but one thing at a time, and a heart that was at rest.

And then she saw that Mr. Vawdry had mounted into the pulpit; and he fixed his wonderful eyes upon her and said to her, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Afterwards, when she had learned every trick and

mannerism of this man's preaching, she discovered the extraordinary power he had of seeming to look directly at each person in church. To-night his fixed gaze startled her, and the coincidence of his having chosen this text for his sermon heightened her surprise. Her eyes fixed themselves upon his face, and the rest of the church seemed to grow dark around her. She saw nothing but the priest's dark face; everything else was a dim cloud about her.

He was telling her quite quietly that he knew just what her need was: he knew the ache of a soul that is homeless: he could feel for a tired heart. He understood.

His voice was soothing as a cool hand laid upon a hot brow. Under its influence some tired faces in the congregation took a more restful look, and those who scarcely understood his words stretched aching limbs as though eased and rested. Some joyless ones looked up with patient eyes, and seemed to see the home that was promised beyond the sad things of earth. And even hard, cruel faces softened under the spell of the preacher's voice, with the vision before them of some place of perfect rest.

And Eleanor sat on immovable and still in her chair, her eyes uplifted to those eyes that looked at her, and her hands clasped on her lap. The people round her were blurred as in a fog; the lights from the swinging silver lamps burned hazily as in a mist;

the figure of the Christ Himself was obscured. Her lips parted, and her face had blanched a little ; the rings she wore were pressed in sharp points against her locked fingers....

"Come unto Me," he was saying. She must go to him and tell him all her heart—to him, this tender human being who understood—to this strong, patient man. Not to the dim Christ with the outstretched arms and pierced hands, but to this man with a man's heart who would speak with her face to face, would answer her questions, and take her life and mould it for her...."Come unto Me." Ah! . . .

The sermon was finished, and Mr. Vawdry descended from the pulpit and bowed before the altar.

Eleanor trembled a little, and found herself wiping two hot tears from her eyes. She choked down a sob, and felt another rising.

"You have dropped your umbrella," whispered Miss Blair.

"What a wholesome and very opportune remark," thought Eleanor. She gave herself a shake, and said, "Rank hypnotism, whether he himself knows it or not! And certainly a sermon, if it does nothing else, discovers the inherent egotism in every one!"

She was inclined to be cross the whole way home.

CHAPTER IV

The following day Alec Campbell came to call.

"I must say he is singularly handsome," said Lady Majendie, in her plaintive voice, catching sight of the tall figure coming with long strides up the Square. And because personal beauty, like all other forms of beauty, appealed very strongly to this graceful woman, she greeted the young man with more than her usual kindliness and sweetness of manner. She showed him sympathy without actually touching upon his altered fortunes, and offered to act the part of careful housewife for him, and find him rooms if he were not comfortable where he was. She knew of a charming suite in Arlington Street.

"I am in lodgings in Maida Vale," said Alec. "They are very bad I think, but my landlady says they are perfection."

"I did not know that any one lived in Maida Vale," said Lady Majendie simply. "Is it nice?"

Before he had answered, Eleanor came in. She had been out walking, and the keen air had given her a fine colour. She was muffled up in velvet and dark fur; her bright face, with its little pointed chin, nestled in a boa, and the drooping velvet hat which

she wore just sufficiently shadowed her very charming eyes. She gave a little spontaneous cry of pleasure when she saw Alec. Oh, it was good to see him again! He brought with him memories and the very atmosphere of a pure and wholesome life, in which conventional falseness and complexity appeared a little contemptible. She held out both her hands to him, and smiled up into his face and told him how glad she was to see him—how very glad.

He looked down upon her in his kindly fashion, and his heart was in his eyes again, just as it used to be, as he gazed with the old loyal admiration in his face. He saw no change in her—that is love's Eternity; it preserves the beautiful and good in some pure atmosphere where time and change are not. Always to him she would appear as she did on the day he first knew that he loved her. So it was altogether a very fresh and young and beautiful face that he saw with his kind eyes.

His own face was older, sadder than it used to be. But there were no worn lines about the mouth, no worried wrinkles such as trouble traces upon a woman's face or upon those faces which belong to a smaller and more fretful temperament. He was a graver man than he had been, and there was with him always a certain air of steadfastness and calm strength which well accorded with his tall powerful figure. Rather a kingly person, though without a kingdom.

"I am afraid I must go downstairs and see how your uncle is getting on," said Lady Majendie. In spite of that undeniable beauty of his, Alec Campbell bored her always, and Sir John's health furnished an excuse for every sort of laxity as a hostess.

"Dear Alec," said Eleanor when they found themselves alone, "I am so sorry about it, so awfully sorry."

"Oh, it's all right," said Alec shyly; "some very decent sort of people have bought the place."

"And you, Alec, what are you going to do?"

"I have got a berth in a shipping office," said Alec. "They give me two hundred a year, and I have lodgings in Maida Vale."

Dethroned kings do not have lodgings in Maida Vale. Eleanor felt she could have borne with Bloomsbury, but it was a mean trick of Fate to send a dethroned king to Maida Vale.

"You will be ruined in cab fares," was all she said. And Alec replied, "I don't suppose I shall be going out anywhere. I hate London dances and dinner parties."

"Good gracious!" cried Eleanor. "What do you mean to do?" The little scold of Kininvie was uppermost again. "I do hope, Alec, you won't go for a bicycle ride on Saturday afternoons, and lie in bed late on Sundays."

"Why should I?" asked Alec.

"Oh, I do not know, only"—petulantly—"you

seem determined to take up the rôle of city clerk so very vigorously...... Alec," impetuously, "I didn't mean that! Come to us on Saturday afternoons. A Shakespearian Reading Society has its meetings here on that day, but I do not belong to it. Come and take me for a walk, Alec, and sit upon me as you used to do!"

"Did I ever sit upon you? I didn't mean to, Nellie. Was I unkind sometimes?" smiling forgiveness at her for her sharp speech.

"No, no," cried Eleanor; "fancy you being unkind to any one! I used to be horrid to you, Alec; you tempt one to be horrid to you, because—because—oh, I suppose because you never retaliate, and always look as though you minded rather."

"I don't think you could ever be unkind to any one," said Alec simply.

There is something in a woman's nature that demands appreciation, demands it very insistently sometimes. It may be the outcome of her vanity, but more probably it is the result of her predisposition for self-sacrifice, which yet must have its equivalent in some form or other. And this appreciation is the sunshine of her life, under whose warm influence her best qualities grow and flourish. Wherefore it is good that she knows that in some one's eyes she is faultless; it is good also that she believes absolutely in one man's honesty and worth. There is not a surer anchorage in the average woman's life. Eleanor

felt the balm of her cousin's kindly judgment, but laughed all the same.

"You will take me for walks on Saturdays?" she said. "Do you know, Alec, I am bored at present, horribly bored. Do try and cheer me up. Tell me some news."

Alec considered for a few moments, and then said—

"The MacVitties have been left a large fortune from an uncle in Australia. They are probably coming to London, and I was wondering if you would go and see them some day; it would be very kind of you if you would."

Eleanor looked puzzled. "Do I know them? Who are the MacVitties?" she asked.

"MacVittie used to be head keeper at Kininvie. Mrs. MacVittie lent you clothes that night."

That night! Another trick, surely, of time-forgetting love. It knows no common days, counts no trivial hours. One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, and the only dates in its calendar are "that night" or "that day!"—an epoch-making time, when roses burst their calyxes and bloomed underneath the sun, when thrushes filled their throats with song, and the blue sky was far away, and yet Heaven was so near! These are the days by which love dates its calendar; the long grey hours that come in between are of no account.

"I remember," said Eleanor gently. "Mrs. MacVittie gave us tea, and then went and fed her hens. When they come to town am I to leave a card upon them in Park Lane, or am I to go slumming and leave a tract, in the way Miss Blair wants me to do?"

"I have not yet heard where they are to live," said Alec, "but I believe their fortune is a large one." He cleared his throat. "When the crash came," he said, "MacVittie offered us the loan of an immense sum of money. Of course one could not accept it, but one cannot forget how generous he was. It will be good of you if you will go and see them when they come to London."

"Indeed, I will go with pleasure," said Eleanor, in her gracious way.

"I knew you would," he said with a confident smile, and his grey eyes softened. Was ever a woman so sweet and gracious as Eleanor McNeill!

"But next Saturday," she said, "what are we to do, and how are we to amuse ourselves when you come to take me out? If it is your only holiday the time should be well spent, shouldn't it?"

"I did think of going to see Charles Egerton," said Alec. "He has been to see me several times, but I think Charles does not understand what business hours are, and he has never found me at home."

"And I should like to see Lady Nassington!" said Eleanor. "Will you come about four, Alec,

and—wait for me here one moment, will you?" She left her cousin standing in the hall, and ran to the door of the library.

"Mamma, shall I ask Alec to dine with us to-night? He is alone in lodgings."

"Oh, my dearest, must I ask that heavy young man?"

"It doesn't matter; perhaps it would tire you, dear."

"He is so—so massive," said Dulcie apologetically.

"He is certainly very big," said Eleanor laughing, "and another night would do just as well to ask him. Perhaps it would hardly give him time to get back to Maida Vale and dress this evening." There was always some one to find an excuse or a good reason for every action of lovely Lady Majendie.

On Saturday at four o'clock Eleanor was ready, dressed charmingly as usual, to walk to Belgrave Square.

It was like old times being with Alec, and she felt young again with the little pleasurable excitement of youth. The day was bright but cold, and she walked briskly to keep up with her companion's long strides. He loved to hear the sound of her little feet on the pavement beside him. He noticed how her tiny ear was pink-tipped with the frost, and the way her soft brown hair curled about her neck.

After long years to be with her again like this!

To walk beside her, and to feel for one beautiful moment as though she, and therefore all the world, belonged to him! Sometimes she looked up at him in a pretty way she had, turning her neck ever so slightly and measuring the rest of the distance with her eyes. He wondered how she did it. No one else had these adorable little characteristics. Why, if women wanted to be attractive, did they not take her as their model? There were not two types of charming women, only one—Eleanor McNeill!

The closed windows of the shops turned blind eyes upon them. Saturday holiday-makers bowled past them on their bicycles, and the pavements were clearer than usual. Lady Majendie had asked Eleanor to call and inquire for a sick friend of hers in Park Lane before going to Belgrave Square. They crossed Knightsbridge and went into the Park. Here the trees looked bare and brown against the pale blue sky, and the Row was deserted save for a riding master with three pupils bumping painfully in their saddles.

How horribly near Park Lane looked!

"Would it be too cold for her to sit down for a little time on one of the Park chairs?" Alec asked.

Eleanor said, "No, that the sun was so warm, it would not hurt her to rest a few minutes."

So they chose two chairs by the Achilles statue, and sitting here was better even than walking had

been, for the happy minutes could be held fast, and not used too quickly; the house in Park Lane did not gain so fast upon them now.

Carriages rolled by in the broad drive at their feet; and streams of nurses with perambulators went up and down, keeping their little charges in the sun. The riding master with his panting pupils —their hair flying behind them and their hairpins strewing the tan—had bumped back to the livery stable whence they came.

"We must go now," said Eleanor.

Alec rose and walked beside her, taking the outside of the path. He wished he could defend her from something! Once or twice he laughed out loud, the happy laugh of the lover who thinks not of to-morrow, if so be that to-day his girl is with him.

"My love, my love!" his heart was saying all the time. "My love, my love!"

Was ever afternoon so full of sunshine and blue sky?"

Lady Nassington was not at home, but Charles Egerton drove up in a hansom just as they were turning away.

"Do come in," he said, "and have tea with me; it will be so nice of you if you will. My mother has got a new butler exactly like a bishop, who alarms us both very much, and who won't let us have shortbread for tea. We keep some in a tin box in

one of the cabinets and pretend that the dogs like it. But even the dogs are out this afternoon, and you will be cheering me up and doing no end of a good work if you will come in, and I think my mother will be back in a few minutes."

They went to the library, where on a table by the fire was a massive tea equipage and two small plates containing a few slices of bread and butter and a tiny cake. Charles groaned, and produced the tin box upon which he had written in a big, sprawling, childish hand, "Dog biscuits." They ate shortbread in a furtive manner, and enjoyed it with a delightful sense of guilt.

"All traces of this feast must be removed," said Charles, "or we shall be lowered for ever in the eyes of the bishop. He has only come to us as a great favour for a couple of months, while our man is ill, and he has already allowed us to know that he is distinctly disappointed in us."

Charles fetched the hearth-brush and coal-shovel with the air of a conspirator and proceeded to sweep up the crumbs, and Alec helped him gravely, bending his long back to hold the shovel at the proper angle, and intent upon not allowing the crumbs to fall through its perforated surface on to the carpet. And then Lady Nassington came in and laughed at the conspirators, and gave Alec a delightful welcome, and bade him come and dine with her some night.

"Dine early and often!" said Charles hospitably; "dine with us whenever you can. Why not both stay and dine to-night?" But Eleanor thought it was getting late already, and they must say good-bye.

Lady Nassington asked her if she would have a hansom—or the brougham, it had just gone round to the stables. But Eleanor thanked her, and said that she would rather walk, and Alec gave a sigh of relief.

The lamps were lighted now, but the streets were darker than usual because of the early closed shops. Even in the mists and darkness, London wore its own delightful air of homeliness. The people who passed were like some big family, absurdly alike in appearance and dress, and friendly and confident in their attitude towards one another. Yet withal it was a solitary place, and its vastness was emphasized to-night by its gloom. Eleanor gave a little shiver, and the cold grey shadow of loneliness fell without warning suddenly upon her. The world was such a big place, and so uncaring—and she was such a little woman! But the tall figure by her side which each successive street lamp revealed to her, gave her a feeling of security and protection. She slipped her arm into his.

"There is no one like you," said Alec simply, inconsequently, with his heart in his eyes.

"Don't, Alec!" said Eleanor. She spoke sharply,

almost as though he had wounded her, and withdrew her hand from his arm.

Of a sudden it came upon her with a feeling of irritation that it was some phantom woman—some creation of his own generous heart—that this big, chivalrous man so dearly loved. Not Eleanor McNeill, with her complexities and waywardness, and longings, and untold, unimagined powers of self-sacrifice and love. Not Eleanor at all. Perhaps some gentler, sweeter woman! But a girl like Eleanor, with her powers of persuasion, her easy conquests: with her well-bred tact bordering on artificiality, and with all the sincere humbug of the society woman. She, only dimly realizing herself, only vaguely knowing that she is not what she seems, but something a little better, a little greater than she knows, longs not only to be understood and loved for the real that is in her, she wants to find some one to discover the real for her.

"The mirror that we hold up for ourselves is so dim and blurred," Eleanor once wrote in her little red book, "we go away, having strained our eyes with looking into it, and straightway forget—because we never rightly knew—what manner of women we were. We look for ourselves in the world, in the conventionalities and platitudes of to-day, and we label ourselves all wrong, and walk with a strange woman whom we do not know, but whom Society and accepted forms have made for us. We look

for ourselves in books, and just here and there we catch sight of that greater self for whom we seek. We hear sermons, all claiming to search out our hearts for us—but most often we go empty away because no one speaks the truth to us. We look for ourselves in love, and if we do not find ourselves here, we are indeed alone. We may marry and live happily ever afterwards, but if deep has not called to deep—if heart has not answered to heart, then ourselves, the souls of us as God knows them, are indeed alone in the world."

"O God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, whose knowledge of us is less—bountifully less—than thy love of us; is it not for this that we cry, Abba, Father? Knowing that though the image be defaced, there is still between us and Thee sufficient likeness for recognition."

"Eleanor McNeill," said some of her friends at this time, "is too charming to be egotistical. But when will clever women learn to be prosaic! Why did she not marry, and take an interest in new wall-papers and a nice house and tea-parties, like every one else? Dear Eleanor! She was really much too pretty to be allowed to become singular or to have ideas!"

The shallow criticism was not unjust, but Eleanor was too humble an egoist and too sincere in her perplexities to deserve any severe censure.

CHAPTER V

LADY NASSINGTON came to call upon Sir John Majendie in a flutter of nodding feathers and plumes and a rustle of black satin. Lady Nassington, as one of the beautiful Miss Gwyneths of Wythe, had been one of the stateliest beauties of her day—so stately, indeed, and so cold that it had often been feared that no man would ever be quite daring enough to lay claim to her proud heart. Stately and proud she had seemed to remain, even after Mr. Egerton of Upfield had shown sufficient temerity to make her his wife. Alas, that such stately manners should be so easily corrupted! Alas, that the old world's school should be in its decadence!

The only son of her stately ladyship, and his almost as stately and dignified father, was ugly, well-beloved Charles Egerton. Charles Egerton had completely demoralized his mother. She, whose dignified carriage had been the pride of her household, the terror of a small village, and the outward and visible sign of high breeding to a neighbouring country town, had been seen one day

dragged at racing speed by her small son to see his rabbits—the sudden and mysterious appearance of five small rabbits in the hutch requiring her immediate consideration. Again, dragged by the same small impetuous son, she had been known to stand beneath the branches of a great oak tree in broiling summer weather, tossing a little figure in a swing right up into the cool green depth of the giant tree. And then Charles had declared that it was his mother's turn, and the little soft, chubby persuasive hands had pulled the stately Lady Nassington on to the seat of the swing, and a pair of sturdy arms had done their best to make his mother feel what rushing through the air was like.

"Don't you feel like a bird, mother?" the little fellow had cried, out of breath, but bravely putting his back into the business. "Of course, I cannot send you very far, but I will get James to come and give you a real good shove if you care about it."

Lady Nassington somewhat hastily descended from the swing. "Not this afternoon, my son," she said, with an attempt at returning to the much approved Gwyneth manner.

Then she must come and play cricket, and he would lend her his new bat, and she might bat first, although that really was the nicest part of the game. Only skirts did count. If skirts were hit, it was L.B.W. Even Susan had come to see that, al-

though Susan's sense of honour about games was not of the highest order, Charles thought.

Lady Nassington, batting bravely beneath the summer sun, had never quite understood what pleasure was before.

"It's awfully jolly, isn't it, mother?" said Charles.

"Awfully jolly," repeated Lady Nassington heartily. And from that moment her demoralization had been complete.

When Charles was a baby she spoke his baby jargon and followed where he led; when he was a schoolboy she learnt his slang and played Fives like a brick. Now that he was a man, her slanginess was established, and she went to polo matches and pony races, was an authority upon cricket scores, and knew to a shade which county was likely to "pull off" a match. She had been known to bet a little, and when Charles drove the family coach she was always seen on the box seat beside him. The two were inseparable, and had no secrets from one another. Her one disloyalty to him was during Charles's voyaging round the world, when the house was unbearably solitary without him, and out of sheer loneliness she had married an old admirer, Lord Nassington. Their honeymoon had been spent in a journey to Cairo to meet the returning Charles, and there Lord Nassington had died somewhat suddenly of sunstroke. The fortune of mother and

son and their interest were shared alike, and old Mr. Egerton, long since gathered to his fathers, might, if he had returned to earth, have learned that his rather elaborate will might have remained unwritten. For that which he bequeathed to his wife became equally his son's, while his son's portion of his houses, his horses, his purse, were equally at the disposal of his mother.

Charles was a person of schemes—schemes for draining his property, schemes for breeding horses, schemes for building, schemes for diverting roads. His mother believed in all of them.

"I think it ought to succeed—I really do," she would say with the voice which was still the Gwyneth voice, high-bred and clear, though the words, alas! were the words of that slangy young sportsman Charles Egerton. "But will the money run to it?" she asked smilingly. "We were a bit 'had' over those last shire horses."

"Undoubtedly," said Charles, "that fellow was a knave, but I really think we will pull this scheme through, mother."

"Let's chance it, anyhow," said Lady Nassington. The Nassington ménage had lately moved up to their house in Belgrave Square. Charles was to shoot the coverts until Christmas time at least, aided only by some bachelor friends. Her ladyship had rheumatism, and considered that November in the damp woodland country would be

bad for her. And Charles, ever anxious about his dearest friend's health, had advised an early retreat to London.

A fortnight later Lady Nassington had written to her son to say "that she could not stand dulness at any price: it was a great deal worse than rheumatism," and her letter crossed that of her son, in which he suggested that he had better return to town, as Upfield without her was pretty deadly. The upshot of which correspondence was that Lady Nassington gave triumphant orders for a removal of the family ménage to the country again. And she was spending her last two or three days in London in going about asking some friends to a house-party the following week.

"I am not quite a fraud," she said to Sir John Majendie, as she and the black satin garments and the nodding feathers placed themselves by the leather couch in the library. "I love seeing you, and you look awfully fit, my dear man. But it is Eleanor I want. I have come with the malicious intention of carrying her off to Upfield as soon as she can pack up her boxes."

"I had no idea," said Sir John, "that you intended returning to Upfield so soon. This departure, dear Lady Nassington," smiling at her with a twinkle in his eye, "is a little sudden, is it not?"

"It is precipitous," said her ladyship.

"Your rheumatism is better, then? I am so glad," murmured Sir John.

"Rheumatism," said her ladyship, "is not in the same street with dulness. And then, you know," in a tone of apology, "I really did mean to go back to the country at Christmas time. I am only going a little earlier than I intended."

"Charles, I think, remained at Upfield, did he not?" said Sir John slyly.

Lady Nassington admitted that this was a fact, and added hastily, to cover a certain confusion which she displayed, "Charles says he must have Eleanor."

"Eleanor tells me," returned Sir John smiling, "that she has renounced this wicked world, and is going to abdicate her place in society in favour of her two younger sisters."

"Please tell her," said Lady Nassington, "she is unanimously re-elected; we can't do without her, you know—ah! here is Eleanor. Eleanor, my child, what nonsense is this I hear about you? Are there so many charming women in this rather dull phase of society in which we live that we can afford to lose one of them? Have you got tired of us all?"

Eleanor laughed. "I am an obsolete pattern returned to store," she said.

"I much fear," said Lady Nassington, "that Charles would call that 'rot!'" Her ladyship

occasionally remembered to attribute her barbarous expressions to her son.

"I should really like you to go," said Sir John, reaching out his thin hand over the back of the sofa to his step-daughter and giving hers a little friendly pressure. "You have not been looking very well lately, Eleanor."

"And if Sir John and Charles want it," said Lady Nassington. "I really think that it leaves you and me, Eleanor, with very little to say in the matter."

So the thing was settled; and Eleanor went upstairs to the drawing-room to arrange with her mother about her departure.

"That child looks a bit moped," said Lady Nassington, when the door had closed upon Eleanor's retreating figure.

"She hardly seems in her usua spirits, I am afraid," said Sir John; "but Eleanor is so unselfish, one never seems to hear about it if anything goes wrong with her."

"How like poor Hector she grows," said Lady Nassington kindly.

"Yes," said Sir John, "I see the likeness you speak of more strongly every year. The two natures both seem to have an element of tragedy about them which they try to conceal under a light but, in my opinion, a very charming manner."

"I know what you mean," responded Lady Nassington quickly. "One has often felt, both of

her and of her poor father, that the only fitting fulfilment of their lives would be to lead a forlorn hope or to die on the scaffold."

"Yes," said Sir John, "some form of sacrifice seems to be an essential of certain temperaments."

"And those persons who crave the scourge and the scaffold are rather at a discount in these prosaic, easeful days! Well, Charles and I must try and convince her," said Lady Nassington, in her delightful way, "that the only possible and proper fulfilment of existence is to be very happy and have an excellent time."

So Eleanor returned to the pleasant world, where she was ever so welcome a guest, and it seemed almost as though Lady Nassington's happy philosophy was the only wisdom.

The big, ugly white house, built halfway up a wooded hillside, was in itself a sincere pleasure to those for whom luxury, homely ease and a beautiful interior are attractive. Even the ugliness of the exterior of the house had something homely and comfortable about it. The white stone terrace, upon which the principal rooms opened—its stones, mossy now with the damp weather—its balustrades half covered, half revealed, by creeping ivy; its horrible stuccoed front concealed by a wealth of creepers, and its great wide front door opening into a delightful spacious hall, had ever an air of friendli-

ness and hospitality about it. One wandered, half enviously, from room to room at Upfield. Their furnishing, so utterly incongruous and yet so harmonious, betrayed the taste of each succeeding race of Egertons. Its gun-room, hung with strange weapons collected by an Egerton who had travelled far and wide; its little miniature room with its quaint French paper, and the deep-carved gilt frames which encircled the smiling beauties or stern-faced warriors, scions of this ancient house; its drawing-rooms, with their beautiful hangings and air of spacious comfort; its tables littered with books, and its burnished steel fenders piled high with glowing coal. . . . I think every one who came to Upfield used to feel that even had it not belonged to these well-beloved persons, Lady Nassington and her son Charles, one would still have felt always a certain regret at leaving the old house, its personality was so distinct, its exterior so rugged, its inward self so warm and kind.

One wonders I think, sometimes, what it can be which gives some houses this delightful personality, even where their faults of architecture may be glaring. Whether it is that some dead and gone architect, in spite of his many failings, has put a living kindliness into the stones, or whether a long line of good-living, fine-hearted English squires and dames, long since departed, have left behind them] an atmosphere, a spirit of cheerfulness and honest friendliness,

although their simple uneventful lives have left no other record behind them.

Upfield was a house where every one offered himself or herself on a visit, and it had become a proverb that, like the Highland hospitality of old, it was considered a want of courtesy to ask a man his business until he had been in the house a year.

Lady Nassington had found several unexpected guests on her arrival at her own house—friends of Charles, who had written or telegraphed to say they were coming, and these, with the somewhat large contingent that Lady Nassington had brought with her from London, would have overfilled any house of the same size except Upfield. Its fine old walls always seemed able to extend themselves to the required limit. There was something very refreshing and wholesome about the life there, and guests departing would leave their address with half a dozen people whose friendship they had made and wished to continue. And then Charles Egerton's winning kindness was in itself a guarantee for a good time. The boy had the gift—surely it is a gift almost as much as a virtue—of a serene and happy unselfishness. Even as a child, his pleasure had been to share everything with those about him—the larger half generally falling to a companion's share—and in his own house it was sometimes difficult to realize that he was owner and host.

Poor Edward Lecky was amongst the house party

at Upfield. Poor Edward, whom people had begun to avoid lately; the boy was so hopelessly unprincipled, so horribly inclined to dissipation of every sort. And he had begun to know that he was avoided, and that his father's friends, for instance, were not particularly anxious to have him at their houses. So Edward went for sympathy and indulgence to that section of society which did not dare to be particular, and where vice was considered the mark of good fellowship. Edward's face, so pathetically like that of his fine old father, the Earl of Drawbridge, had acquired lately a blotched and unhealthy appearance which was somewhat offensive to any one of refined sensibilities. So, except amongst those ladies aforesaid, to whom dissipation was the mark of the good fellow, the Honourable Edward Lecky had few women friends.

Eleanor was kind to him. Dulcie's charming daughter was indeed almost universally kind. And poor, weak Edward Lecky showed his gratitude by falling very seriously in love with this gentle-mannered lady. After all, the boy had not been brought up to know the second-rate and the vulgar, and although he solaced himself with their sympathy, and excused himself by looking at things with their breadth of view, it was salutary, not to say a little refreshing, to revert once more to manly instincts and good manners.

Charles Egerton said to her affectionately, "I

knew you would be nice to Lecky, Miss McNeill. My mother and I think it's awfully sweet of you, and I am sure you will do him no end of good."

The delicate task of reform was not a very difficult one. Edward Lecky was pliable, repentant, full of gratitude, and promised immediate amendment of life. There was a distinct pleasure in guiding his very uncertain footsteps, and the boy's love, at least, was wholesome, although it had to be gently repulsed.

"I am quite old enough to be your mother," Eleanor would say, with that somewhat matronly manner which she sometimes assumed, "so we won't put the matter upon that ground at all; but you will try and pull up, won't you?"

"I will, if you wish it," said Edward.

"I wish it very much."

"Everything is against a fellow," said Edward despondently. "Of course, you do not know about that, Miss McNeill, but it is."

"I have sometimes thought," said Eleanor, "that perhaps things are a little difficult for all of us."

"You are such an angel," said the boy impulsively, "that you can feel for a wretch like me, even though you are so awfully good yourself. I know if you would marry me, I should never do anything idiotic again all my life."

"Except that one idiotic thing that marrying me would mean," said Eleanor, smiling.

"I wish I knew what keeps a fellow straight," said Edward. "I mean, there is Charles Egerton, you know, I don't believe he has ever done anything that is not as straight as a die all his life. But then he was born like that. But suppose you felt inclined to do the wrong thing ever since you were a schoolboy, I do not quite see what is going to make you any better."

Some conventional religious phrases rose to Eleanor's lips and died away again unsaid. The temptation to pose as guardian angel to erring youth was resisted.

There was a little pause, which the young man interpreted with some quickness of perception. "It is so nice of you," he said, "not to tell me that if I am a good boy I shall be happy ever afterwards. I don't a bit want a harp and a golden crown, and that sort of thing. I don't think any one does want them, you know, because they are not greatly in demand here, even amongst people who could easily purchase them."

Eleanor laughed at the youth's droll materialism, but her face grew grave again as she said, "I suppose we have just got to go on trying. I am afraid I have no other advice to offer you. We know so little."

Eleanor and her young companion were walking through the woods at Upfield. The trees, so thick with greenery in the summer time, were

now stripped and bare, but the bracken still glowed with colour, and some tall fir trees stood upright with a sort of solitary, majestic, pitying wonder at some felled companion amongst the fern.

"You will let me see a lot of you when we get back to town?" said Lecky. "It is when women like you are friendly to us that it seems possible for a man to reform."

There was a sort of conventional egoism in the speech which cheapened him for a moment in Eleanor's eyes. This boy, in spite of his likeableness, was so vastly inferior to their charming host, with his frank eyes and clean, wholesome mind. And she was wondering, with perhaps a little of that security which those may feel whom sin in its grosser forms has never touched, and to whom therefore the perfect cleansing of pardon is unknown, whether the soul that has been sullied, smirched by sin, can ever look so fair as the one which has stood in no need of cleansing.

Charles Egerton and his mother came riding towards them through the wood, and drew up in a manner somewhat ashamed, like two children playing truant. The houseful of guests had not left them much time to themselves, and this was a stolen ride that the two were enjoying together.

"I believe I ought to be driving three ladies

in a landau into Brencham this afternoon," said Lady Nassington, "but Charles beguiled me, and I ordered the horses for him and me. Do I look very guilty?"

"It is a hopeful sign in you," said Eleanor, "that you both look dreadfully guilty; in fact, as you came towards us I half fancied you wanted to turn and run away."

"We are going down to see the new cottages," said Charles. "I have been waiting to get my mother's advice about them, but her fortnight's exile in London has really hindered everything dreadfully." He looked at her, sitting grey-haired and upright on her sober cob; her undiminished beauty was a constant pleasure to her son.

"My exile in London is still being mourned by us," she said. "We are going to make a little Wailing Place by the garden wall, and beat our breasts like the Jews every Friday morning."

"And it was so unnecessary too," said Charles regretfully. "Her rheumatism was really worse in Belgrave Square than it ever was before."

"We must move on, as the afternoons are so short," said Lady Nassington. "The workmen go home at four o'clock, and we want to see them about the floors. Why not walk on and join us there, Eleanor? You know where the new cottages are, just outside the South Lodge."

Eleanor consented, and the riders went on before them through the wood.

"I always feel," said Eleanor, as she watched their retreating figures down the long green ride, with the golden bracken on either side of it, and the stately firs above it—"I always feel when I am with them a little bit like an undesired chaperon or a green gooseberry—rather *de trop* in the presence of two lovers."

It was, after all, a very pleasant world to which Eleanor had returned. The men and women in it were so kindly, so likeable, and so cheerful. All the tragic side of life were surely wiser forgotten. The cry of the poor, the wail of the sufferer, the problems of existence, the importunate questionings of the soul can be put on one side. Those ragged, hungry-looking faces in church last Sunday, why think about them? Their lives and ours need never touch each other. Subscriptions should be sent to deserving charities, of course, but there the matter may end. And those longings after a higher life, surely they also might be wisely suppressed. To take life as one finds it, and to enjoy it; to delicately help a rather feeble-minded young man like Edward Lecky, whom the polite society he had outraged had already severely punished; to live the sweet, graceful, natural home-life, to visit amongst cultured and charming people, surely that was the reasonable pro-

cedure. After all, it was the life to which she was born. Had Fate designed for her a brawling East End tenement as her environment she would have been obliged to accommodate herself to it and make the best of it. But as Fate, having been more kind, had placed her in a world of luxury and ease, why not enjoy that world and make it yield every particle of pleasure that it was possible to extract from it?

In the quiet, happy, golden woods of Upfield, Eleanor felt ashamed of her acquaintance with the girl of last Sunday evening. In the very sane, homely, and reasonable atmosphere of this gathering of friends at Upfield she had no knowledge at all of the woman in that comfortable bedroom in Cadogan Square who had cried out, "I could love, I could love!" feeling within her the burden of non-fulfilment, convinced that a soul is not set free of itself, but that the hand of another must touch it.

These emotions were altogether disturbing and dangerous, and even destroying. The mighty flood of love within her must just wriggle its way softly and gently over the walls of that reservoir which is the heart, and then there would be no danger of ruined cities nor turbulent, unmanageable torrents to contend with. Why always long for the best, the highest? It comes to so few people, and seldom really reaches its highest tide-mark save in the case of motherhood.

Even then, how much wiser to be less fond! Take Lady Nassington and Charles, for instance, if anything were to happen to one of them—but that was a gloomy thought again.

"A penny for your thoughts!" said Edward Lecky.

"A penny!" said Eleanor. "My thoughts at this moment are worth a million times that."

He offered her a million pennies. "I don't quite know what it is in pounds," he said, "but I will add it up if you like. Meanwhile, please consider that your thoughts have been purchased at your own price, and tell me what it is that makes them so valuable."

"I think I had just discovered the philosopher's stone," said Eleanor; "it is Enjoyment. I really believe, on an afternoon like this at Upfield, that nothing sad nor ugly nor painful exists in all the world. We croak too much, you know, and lacerate our feelings for no cause. Why be serious? Let us all live at Upfield, and do as we like, and be happy ever afterwards."

The woodland path opened here and joined a broad carriage drive, with tall bare trees on either side of it. The afternoon was wonderfully mild and sunny for the time of year, and down in the meadows one or two pale primroses might be seen, while here and there even a honeysuckle had pushed forth its little green leaves.

"I wonder if they have still got the same old lodge-keeper here," said Edward. "I must tell you rather a good story about her. A girl who was stopping here had a chat with her one day, and remarked what a nice house Upfield was. The old lady said, 'So I have always heard, Miss, but I have never seen it myself.' The house, you know, is not a mile from this gate, and she had lived here or in the village all her life."

Eleanor laughed. "What a delightful old woman!" she said. "No doubt her placid mind has never even craved the sensation of seeing a new house."

"I should very much doubt," said Edward, "if she has even seen the new cottages yet which Charles is so keen about. Those are they just ahead of us, are they not?"

"I think so," said Eleanor. "I wonder who this can be, riding down the road like John Gilpin?"

A young farmer passed them at a gallop, his horse's hoofs thundering on the quiet road, and his own face a ghastly white. "An accident," he shouted, pointing with his riding-crop over his shoulder. "The doctor," they heard him shout, and then, more faintly borne back to them, "Egerton—a fall."

Lecky cleared a stile at a bound, and raced by

a short-cut to the new buildings, while Eleanor tore after him. There was a group of workmen standing in the unfinished room of one of the cottages. One of them had stooped, and with clumsy fingers had loosened Charles Egerton's shirt collar, and unfastened his necktie.

His mother supported his head and wiped his brow; she had not even lost colour, but her face in its tragedy was almost unrecognizable. Edward Lecky burst into tears.

"What—what"—panted Eleanor—"what has happened?"

A workman pointed dumbly to some joists overhead, and a young fellow standing near said with a sob, "It were just a slip done it, Miss, and him so active; but a loose board caught his foot, and that's how he seems to have fell on his head."

Lady Nassington did not seem to hear him; she sat on the ground without speaking, damping her boy's forehead with a handkerchief soaked in water, moistening his lips, and keeping his head with the awful bruise upon it in her lap.

"Get brandy at the lodge," said Eleanor to Lecky, who darted off to do her bidding. And then the doctor arrived, and they lifted Charles Egerton on to a shutter and carried him home; and in the evening he died. And with him there

passed away from the world something that was very clean-minded and honest-hearted and youthful and happy. And there passed away too, on that same chilly November evening, the whole of the love of a woman's heart.

CHAPTER VI

FATE works with such clumsy fingers sometimes. She smashes into a thousand pieces the delicate porcelain, and spares the common piece of potter's clay; she is stupid to cruelty, and remorseless as she is unheeding. "Why, why, why?" Eleanor was asking herself as she stood by poor Charles Egerton's grave. "Why this hideous indiscrimination, this spoiling of the best and leaving of the worst? Why not Edward Lecky, for instance, sobbing with feeble unrestraint at his friend's burial? Surely he, or almost any other young man she knew, might have been better spared than this one—beloved of every one, the best of sportsmen, the dearest of friends?" Her whole nature revolted against this obtuse ordering of things, and the old scepticism which has shaken so many faiths smote sharply upon her. God is not right nor wrong, nor kind nor cruel, but only strong. All nature seemed so unheeding to-day—the sun blazing down upon the newly-turned fields, larks rising as though it were summer time, and a robin piping shrilly amongst the berries on the hedge—and Charles dead.

Did no one care? Was no one sorry for the young life cut off and the broken heart left behind? Then why allow these things to be?

The grace that might come through pain were surely hardly bought, even supposing that pain is a purifying agent. Why, then, this reckless waste of life? Why, even if death be the gateway to life, why should the departing ones be thrust through that gateway with so much painfulness, so much suddenness, with such an unsparing, ungentle hand? Then, relapsing into that childish plaint with which even strong natures may relieve their feelings, she cried out, "He was not doing any harm here; he was happy, he made others happy—why remove him? Surely it were admissible sometimes to say that the Most High is capable of some gigantic mistakes!" The thought was a terrible one, and yet—and yet—Eleanor knew that it was the best within her that had uttered the thought, that part of her, call it soul or mind or what you will, which knows that there is a just God somewhere, even though He is so hard to find. And with this revelation there came also to this introspective woman a discovery of a curious trinity of being within herself.

There were so many quiet hours in which to think of these things—so many awful nights at Upfield, when the only sound in the house was the restless pacing of feet in the room below her

own. Most of us have had to live through such a time as this at one period or another of our existence, when natural order seems to be disturbed, when the door is shut in the street and the sound of the grinding is low, and the soul looks straight into itself and asks questions. The triple nature is disintegrated then, and its several parts are divided sharply and definitely. The first person of her nature Eleanor was disposed to call the spiritual woman in her; this one was analytical, morbid, self-impassioned, eager, intense, splendid, unfulfilled. And the second person was the woman of the world—witty, bright, pleasure-loving, intelligent, conventional, sensible, and normal. These two were quite equal and opposed. And there was yet a third person, who it seemed to Eleanor was herself. This one looked on with interest at the other two, and kept the record of their several victories; she was judge, umpire, and score-keeper, but not otherwise active. It was a matter of intense interest to her which person would triumph over and absorb the other, and she was scrupulous in the way she watched the issues of the game.

Lady Nassington suddenly desired to be alone. She had said to Eleanor at first, "If you leave me, I will kill myself." But that mood had passed; a wish for perfect solitude overcame her. She had begun to leave the house some-

times and to wander in the woods alone, and the very sight of a friend's face was disturbing to her.

Eleanor decided to leave Upfield at once, and she returned to town to hear "poor Charles Egerton's death" discussed over five o'clock tea-parties in conjunction with the latest gossip, or commented upon in the church porch before taking a turn in the Park. This gave her a bewildered feeling at first, and she laughed out loud when some one said to her, "I suppose his mother feels it very much."

"Miss McNeill is getting a little heartless," the friend said who heard her laugh. "Considering she had been with poor Lady Nassington at the time, it was a little unfeeling."

Her mother, always antipathetic to sadness in any form, wept a little because dear Eleanor was rather depressing at present, and Eleanor kissed her and promised not to be depressing any more.

And the practical woman of the world within her said, "After all, self-revelation is a great mistake, and the wish to be understood is merely a form of egoism. Sympathy is rare, and rarely well bestowed. Why then should we crave it? Why should we so ardently desire the 'mirror in the answering mind,' the responsive heart? Why wish that any one—mother or lover or friend—should know one as one is? Is soul commu-

nicable? All our lives we are doing our best to conceal ourselves behind speech and actions. Really there is something almost indecorous in self-revelation, and the bareness of an action that is the simple outcome of an avowed principle fails in interest because it fails in suggestion

But the spiritual woman cried out suddenly for the plain grandeur of simplicity. We all throw back sometimes, and long for the unadorned plainness of the primeval man! But this is an age of clothes, and the function of clothes is to provide covering. This is an age of speech, and the function of speech is to mislead. This is an age of intercourse, and we are simply a company of solitaries. So be it. Let us live on alone—clothed, decorous, silent.

Eleanor heard the conclusion of the whole matter, and determined to go to that rest-giving church in the East End and hear preach the man who understood. And so it came to pass that Sunday mornings, and most weekdays as well, found her at the arched doorway in the humble street, or saw her in her place in the side aisle of the church. Always it was the same told tale — the restful, patient, pleading voice, the power of dominant eyes. Never had she come away without some message for herself, some gladdening of heart. Ah, he knew! Not in the shallow, superficial way that others knew, but

with that deep, tender knowledge which seems to embrace all human understanding—with something of that knowledge, perhaps, which One possessed to whom all hearts were opened. To-night, at a late Sunday evening service, she sat with clasped hands looking and listening. She watched him as he mounted the pulpit stair, saw him kneel to pray, and was surprised that she had never realized before the impressiveness of seeing one man, alone in the sight of his fellows, bend his head and place himself in the very presence of his God. When he uncovered his face, it seemed to the watching woman that for just one moment a glow of light as from the radiant city gleamed and glowed in his eyes. It stirred her even to watch the play of his hands, his tricks of manner, and the way he had of grasping the pulpit desk in moments of strong excitement, until his knuckles looked white under the strained skin.

She remembered to have heard men who had loved and admired her, say that they knew every turn of her head by heart, and that they could tell how she drew her pretty eyebrows together, and the way she smiled when she talked. Often she had been told of little characteristics and mannerisms of which she herself was unconscious, but which had seemed lovable in another's eyes. She had not guessed that a woman should ever note

with this feeling of absorbed attention these trifles in a man. Nor could she tell why it was that these small peculiarities should appear so admirable.

It was the man's goodness, of course, that appealed to her, harmonizing as it did with his personal attractiveness and the finely tempered reserve of his every action Those eyes that looked with such calm courage at the world, what had they not seen of its woes and its ugliness and its crimes! Here was one who fought with evil hand to hand—ay, who had taken up deadly things and had suffered no hurt thereby, who had carried his torch-light to the darkest places, and lit up with it the nethermost glooms of sin's dark haunts. Was it any wonder that the flame of the lamp that he carried so high shone like a shekinah round his head.

Eleanor sat and looked and listened. She had found a chair in a dim corner by a pillar — it seemed to belong to her—and she loved to think that always when she was perplexed or tired she could come and sit in this dim shadowy place by the pillar and find rest by the very sound of this man's voice, and gain courage by looking at his face.

To-night he appeared tired, and it was with something of an effort that he made his voice heard through the church. There were dark lines under his eyes, and the lean hands on the pulpit-desk had a transparent look.

These signs of physical weakness in a man—how they appeal to a woman's imagination !

Eleanor remembered to have heard Miss Blair say that the Vicar was worn out—overdone with work—breaking down under the strain of it. She would help him ! Yes, he should not fight single-handed. Here was another on his side !

Her excitement was keen as a child's during the remainder of the service, and she kneeled down feeling uplifted, inspired with a mission. She would take some burden off these tired shoulders. Henceforth she would not be useless in the world.

As she came out of church, Mr. Vawdry was standing in the porch in his cassock shaking hands with each member of his congregation as they filed out. Eleanor held out her hand like the rest, and Mr. Vawdry turned his glance full upon her for a moment.

"I want to speak to you," said Eleanor impulsively.

"I am afraid I must ask you to wait for a few moments," he replied courteously. "Will you sit down in the vestry ?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Eleanor quickly; "I will stand here till you have finished saying good-night to your people."—"Perhaps he thinks I am a penitent," she said to herself—"I !"

She had noticed the confessionals in the corners of the church ; the two plain rush-bottomed chairs

with the surplice laid across one of them. The feeling half of fear, half of fatefulness, which had beset her when first she had entered St. Mary's came over her again, and she had half a mind even now to leave the porch and say nothing more.

"I am ready to speak to you now," said the Vicar's voice at her elbow, and they went and stood inside the church together.

Eleanor's heart beat strangely. Her hands trembled. "Would to God I had not stayed," she thought, and marvelled at the intensity of her feelings.

"Can I do anything for you?" said Mr. Vawdry. No other words could have been more characteristic of the man.

"Will you give me some work to do?" said Eleanor. "I," smiling a little, "am one of the unemployed. And Miss Blair—you know Miss Blair, I think—tells me that there is a great deal of work to be done in your parish, and not many workers to do it."

"That is very true," he answered smiling.

"I think I could district-visit," said Eleanor, "or teach. I am not stupid."

"And you love our poor folk," the Vicar said, "and wish to do something for them?"

"No," said Eleanor, awkwardly for her—it was her first attempt at telling awkward truths—"No, I don't love poor people. But I am very

useless; and work is a good thing. Perhaps if I were to do some of the drudgery, it would allow time for others to rest a little."

The man looked at her keenly while one might count a dozen heart beats; his eyes dilated somewhat, and he seemed to look into her inmost soul. The silence of the church was palpable, penetrating, a little dramatic.

"You are nearer than you know to the Kingdom of God," said Mr. Vawdry.

"Don't mistake me," cried Eleanor quickly. "I am not good nor church-loving like the good women who work in East End parishes. I only thought—I thought I might help you a little. But I could only take round soup, or keep accounts, or something humble of that sort. I could not preach to people nor tell them to come to church. I do not go to church very often myself, and I don't believe in much that others hold necessary of belief. But that would not prevent my being useful, would it?" she asked wistfully. "I mean I could tidy up a sick person's room or keep accounts without being a very orthodox person?"

The Vicar was still looking at her keenly. His eyebrows were drawn low over his eyes, and from beneath their shadowing blackness he seemed to be reading all the mind of her.

"They that do the works shall know the doctrine," he said. "Come and learn."

"Thank you," said Eleanor gravely.

She left the church in a dream. Or was it only to-night that she realized? Was all that had happened to her before, a dream. The strangeness of her surroundings gave her an odd feeling like that of being some other person. The triumvirate within her were more widely divided to-night. The opposing forces were more at variance. The third person of her being—the one who looked on—was alert, watching the game with more than usual keenness. As she stepped out into the darkness of the November night, she felt exalted, out of herself.

By the iron railings of the church stood Alec Campbell.

"Why are you here?" asked Eleanor, her surprise showing itself in a touch of petulance.

"They told me you had come alone," he said. "It isn't safe for you."

"Alec, how absurd! I came in a cab, and I suppose I can get a cab to go back in."

"You are not at all certain of getting a cab here. We shall probably have to walk a good distance."

"I should have been quite safe," said Eleanor. "What could possibly happen to me?"

"Will you have your cape?" said Alec; "it is bitterly cold."

"Thank you; did you bring it?"

The street through which they were passing

was one of those that lead off the Whitechapel Road. It was narrow and dirty, and the men and women lounging in it were of the class that flourish in the dark places of London. The women especially seemed of the lowest type. They jostled Eleanor, then ran off down the street with bold laughter. The men kept the pavement to themselves, and forced others into the roadway in a manner that was as irritating as it was offensive. Most of them appeared quarrelsome and half drunk; their language was stupid and foul, and their faces vicious. And over the narrow street, permeating everything, was the sickly smell of East London hanging heavily in the cold damp atmosphere.

"You mustn't come here alone, Nellie," said Alec.

"Other people do it."

"Other people are not you."

"Oh, but I can really take care of myself. Don't bother about me, Alec."

A brawny-armed woman lounged down the street, and purposely flung the weight of her shoulder against the girl in passing. Eleanor uttered an exclamation of pain, and turned indignantly to the woman, who answered her with an unspeakably coarse jest and continued her rolling walk.

"I can't knock her down. Come along quickly," said Alec.

They emerged into the Whitechapel Road and walked towards the tramways. Eleanor allowed herself to be put into a green car which went as far as Aldgate. The car was filled with shabby folk, most of whom seemed ignorant of the use of a pocket-handkerchief, and who sat dully, without speaking, on the hard seat, or gazed through the blurred glass of the windows for fear lest they should pass their destination. They seldom spoke, and contented themselves with many small personal indulgencies, of which using their fingers as combs or toothpicks seemed the least objectionable.

"Alec," said Eleanor suddenly—she and he were sitting at the far end of the car, and the glare from the oil lamp above her head threw a cold light and some pathetic-looking black shadows on to her face—"Alec, at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration there was an idiot child."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I have been on a mountain-top where everything was transfigured, transformed"

"Am I the idiot child?" asked Alec, smiling a little.

"No, but the world is. The ugliness and dirt of it, and the prosaicness of duty, and the opposition that one meets with. It's a tremendous come-down from the mountain-top, with the golden light upon it, to the valley and the idiot child."

"I suppose," said Alec fiercely, "that that man Vawdry has been trying to persuade you that you ought to work amongst these drunken brutes we saw to-night. Parsons only care to get hold of ladies and work them to death. They don't care a hang what they see and hear."

"I suppose," replied Eleanor coldly, "that Mr. Vawdry sees no reason why a woman should be of no use in the world."

"No use!" repeated Alec; then he hesitated, because speech came unreadily to this quiet man. "Don't you know, dear, that every one you meet must be the better for having known you."

"Please don't, Alec."

"But it is so," he said simply.

"I wish you did not think so well of me."

He looked at her gravely, with a shadow over his eyes. "Let me keep my good opinion of you, since it is all of yourself that I can ever call my own."

At that moment Eleanor could almost have said, "Take me, and all that I am, for all that you think me worth. Take me for your loyal faith in me and for the dear trust that you have in me. Take me because my world is all disordered, and I am groping in the dark! And amid the many complexities of existence, let me anchor my life to the simple-heartedness, the fearlessness, and the faith which I find in yours."

But with the vision of this happy, prosaic, easy solution of life's problems, came also the vision of a man who had gone deeper into the profundities of being than this kind, honest, good fellow at her side would ever go. The vision of a man who had sounded to the very bottom of life, and who had been in storms on a lonely sea —ay, and in the great water-floods had come nigh to his God. The man who knew, who could understand, and for whose guidance she longed.

"There is a hansom," said Alec. "I'll hail it."

They seated themselves in the cab.

"Those High Church parsons," began Alec, laboriously, "they are rather Jesuits, you know. They work upon people's feelings, and——"

"Do talk of something else," said Eleanor pettishly. "You know how much I dislike to hear people harp on one subject. It's so tiresome. We have quite finished discussing Mr. Vawdry; now let us talk of something else."

"Nellie, I believe you are unhappy about something."

"Because I am so cross? No, I am quite happy, thank you. Quite happy." She laid her hand for a moment in his. "It is good of you to care whether I am happy or not," she said. "Good night, Alec."

CHAPTER VII

Miss Blair was never at home to unexpected callers. The furnishing of her room forbade it. It was a bed-sitting room, and it bore the air of comfortlessness peculiar to this combination. To the casual observer—only Miss Blair did not admit the casual observer—the room appeared like an ordinary bedroom into which some pieces of drawing-room furniture had inconsequently strayed. But when visitors were expected the room underwent a strange metamorphosis. A faded cretonne curtain was drawn to hide the bed, a Japanese screen was artfully placed across the washing-stand. And Miss Blair's boots, dresses, and other impedimenta took flight into a trunk kept for the purpose, and cunningly draped with a tablecloth. This adjustment of her property transformed the room—in Miss Blair's eyes at least—into an unmistakable drawing-room. "Quite the room of a lady," she used to say, surveying her handiwork with nervous admiration. For the re-organizing of the apartment was always now attended with a certain haunting dread which destroyed all pleasure, as it destroyed faith in the bed-sitting room. Its bedroom aspect was so familiar

to its owner that she could never feel quite satisfied that all traces of its more utilitarian character had been removed. And upon one fatal occasion, when the curate (fortunately a married man) had been invited to tea, and Miss Blair fondly imagined that the drawing-room had completely obliterated the bedroom in her apartment's dual nature, she discovered during tea-time that the towel-horse, to which her eye had grown fatally accustomed, still occupied its usual place on the hearth-rug.

Miss Blair blushed for a fortnight after the curate had gone.

To-day she stood in the middle of her room, full of doubts and fears, repeating to herself, in a distracted and somewhat unintelligible manner, "Am I looking at anything; am I looking at anything?" and endeavoured to realize the position of every article in the room.

At four o'clock she heard Eleanor's knock, and in a frenzy she had just time to seize her brush and comb which lay on the mantel-piece, and to fling them behind the curtains of her bed.

"I have come to ask you a favour," said Eleanor. "I have taken a district in Mr. Vawdry's parish——"

"Ah!" interrupted Miss Blair. "I knew you would come round to him!"

To persons who believe that the law of invariable sequence does not apply to them, the fulfilment of

another's prognostications is not always palatable. The "I told you so" of a weaker mind is offensive to a person of any originality whatever.

"I only want to be useful," said Eleanor.

"I thought you said you did not like district work," said Miss Blair, still nervously contradictious.

"Call it a whim," said Eleanor pleasantly. "But I have got my district! May I go with you to the East End on Monday mornings?"

"I go third class," said Miss Blair, compressing her lips.

That sounded a suitable proceeding, and Eleanor said she should like to travel third class also.

"How is Mr. Vawdry?" she asked presently. "I thought him looking ill on Sunday."

"Nerves," said Miss Blair. "I could cure him; but one would hardly like to mention the subject of pharmacy to a gentleman—especially pills—the cure I speak of is taken in the form of a pill."

Eleanor asked how she was to find out what were to be her duties in her district. "I am wofully ignorant," she said.

Miss Blair was fussy and communicative. "The ladies at the Mission House will instruct you in your duties," she said. "I do not know what district you will have. Probably Miss White's (she has lately left us for Clewer). You will find

it is chiefly inhabited by receivers of stolen goods—so, sad, but they do not drink so much as the navvies, and as they are mostly Jews the women will not be so dirty. They are obliged to clean their houses once a year before the Passover, lest a crumb of unleavened bread be found in their rooms."

"Moses was a wise man," said Eleanor. "I always liked the way he combined sanitary with religious laws." The talk turned upon incense, which Eleanor included amongst sanitary things. "It was a necessary disinfectant in a hot climate," she said, "and in a place of worship where animals were killed."

"Profane, profane!" cried Miss Blair. And she rushed in hot foot, as women will, into the holiest of holies, discussing the profoundest questions with a sort of personal fervour, and scarcely pausing to take the shoes off their feet on ground where the angels themselves fear to tread.

Here was another aspect of East End work—the High Church lady—sensitive, reverent according to her lights, priest-ridden, not very wise, who condemned without explaining, and was as intolerant as she was devout. At the Mission House the tale was still the same. Here lived some half-dozen dear, holy women — English ladies, wearing no distinctive dress and doing good all their days—who loved their Church, worshipped their clergy, made little innocent jokes amongst themselves, and

frequently, it must be confessed, found each other very trying. To come amongst them was to come into a new world. Their simple minds yearned only for fresh phenomena to enroll in the giant record of their faith Their creed embraced gladly all contradictions, their loyalty rejoiced in an impossibility. To most of them their Bible and Prayer Book were not sufficient tests of their boundless powers of acceptance, but lives of saints and accounts of miracle-working bones formed a part of their creed.

The Mother Superior—playfully so called, for none of the ladies had taken vows—was a short, stout, bustling little woman, with a heart so universally kind that no one dared venture to claim a special place in it. It was a want which every one who worked under her felt. Miss Bryce loved them all as she loved the whole of St. Mary's parish, but it was often remarked that a vacant place called forth no sign from her; there was not one living soul for whom she had the smile that is given but to one. Looking at her, one was tempted to wonder whether motherhood would not have developed the best in her, while undoubtedly it would have narrowed her sympathies, and made her a less useful member of society.

Miss Damer was thin and delicate, with blue eyes and long white teeth. She had at one time

permanently injured her constitution by over-fasting, and now, grey-haired, meek and holy, she passed her days in the darkest places of a dark city and saw beauty everywhere. Hers was a nature that could lie among the pots and yet remain spotless as a dove who is covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold.

A third lady at the Mission House was Miss James—bright, intelligent, and impatient of stupidity. She had the misfortune to possess a sharp temper, which at the period of her conversion she resolved to control and subjugate. The result was as painful to Miss James as it was to her friends. One always had the uncomfortable sensation when talking to her that it was with difficulty she spoke civilly to one, and her short speeches did not help to dispel the feeling. She alluded frequently to her "besetting sin," as she called it, and it seemed to be known amongst all the ladies that even the smallest display of irritation on Miss James' part was a subject for confession and repentance.

"I have no friends," Miss James used to say. "No one with my temper could expect to have any. No, I never leave the Mission House, because I have nowhere else to go. I receive no invitations to stay away; I don't see why I should."

There were two younger women who did not particularly interest Eleanor. A fat, good-natured girl who had adopted Church work as a profession,

but hoped to marry some day. And a shabby girl with cold hands who did not get on at home.

Eleanor was introduced to them all in the bare little dining-room which they loved to call a refectory, and where now they were assembled at luncheon.

Immediately after this meal, which was the principal one in the day, the whole party went into the tiny chapel of the house—a room not much larger than a cupboard, and furnished with a few rush-bottomed chairs and a small altar like a narrow shelf, on which were placed a crucifix and a pair of candlesticks. Nones was read by the Mother, and then there followed a short period of rest, when the ladies adjourned to their bare sitting-room with its uneasy furniture. Writing-boards and blotters were produced, together with stockings that required darning, and conversation was sustained with the new-comer by such questions as "Do you like parish work?" "Have you been in the East End before?" "Did you come by omnibus or train?"

Presently Miss Bryce bustled in and gave Eleanor a small black book containing the names of the people in her district. "The morning is our time for visiting," she said; "but as you will not like to have come so far without doing something, you might take the right side of Essex Street this afternoon, and do the rest of it some morning in the week.

The district nurse attends in the Parish room at ten and one o'clock. You must report all cases of sickness to her. Perhaps you will like to start at once, as the afternoons are so short."

"I wonder if you would take round a few Church almanacs which we give away to our poor," said gentle Miss Damer. "The Essex Street people have not had them this month, and they so love getting them."

"Thank you," said Eleanor; "it will be nice to have something in my hand as an excuse for knocking at doors."

She departed smiling, and rapped at No. 1 Essex Street. The door was opened by a lady in the act of dressing her hair. She twisted one strand dexterously with her finger and put the end of it in her mouth, while she coiled the back portion and fastened it with a hair-pin.

"I have brought you an almanac," said Eleanor pleasantly. And she held out one of the large sheets with its red and black lettering and simple illustrations.

Mrs. Nowdy scratched her head thoughtfully, without offering to take the gift. "Well, mum," she said at last, "I don't believe I'll take it. I don't see the desirability of it, and that's the truth. Here have we been taking these almanacs for months and months, and I would like to know what the St. Mary's people have done for us?"

At the next door she had not time to rap, for a shrill-voiced child thus announced her: " Hi, Mrs. Cohen! Tell the lady upstairs that the tract-woman is here!"

"I didn't know it was going to be *funny*," said Eleanor to herself. "I have come to see you too," she said in her winning way to the child.

"No you ain't," said the small person abruptly; "we're Jews. Aunt's baptized and can eat pork," she added, as a piece of polite intelligence which could hardly fail to interest her visitor.

Eleanor mounted upstairs and left an almanac and admired a baby, and proceeded to the next house. Here she had to admire two babies, about whom she made the usual flattering remarks that babies seem to expect. 'If the walls of the houses are thin," she thought to herself humorously, "everybody in this street will soon know that I am surprised at every baby's growth, its weight, its intelligence, and its number of teeth."

She was laughing over the absurdity of the notion as she left the house, and she almost ran against Mr. Vawdry in his black cassock and biretta, and carrying a big bunch of early violets in his hand. The delightful humour in her face awoke an answering smile in the priest's. His lady-workers had not, as a rule, a sense of the comical.

"How many babies are there in Essex Street?"

asked Eleanor, extending her hand. "I am only at the third house, and I have already exhausted all my polite remarks."

"There are a great *many* babies," he said, still smiling. "Have you tried asking to hold one?"

"Not on my first day!" cried the girl, laughing. "Let me get accustomed to the Essex Street babies before I try any dangerous experiments."

They were interrupted by two tiny children, who hung about the priest's cassock, and begged for some of the flowers. "Here's a bunch for each," he said, dividing the nosegay; "but you must take them straight home to mother."

It was his habit in this way to place entire confidence in the smallest child as well as in the biggest ruffian in his parish. Needless to say, his faith got many a rude shock, but it was almost impossible for a man of his fine honour to be suspicious.

"I hope I shall get on with your poor people," Eleanor was saying rather nervously. "At present I feel very stupid, and as if I should not be a bit of good in the task I have undertaken."

"Live the life," he said, "live the life. God will see that the work is done."

He looked at her with a blessing in his eyes, and with a sweet impersonal kindliness which was as distant as the stars.

And then he walked on down the narrow, dingy street.

Eleanor stooped down and picked up a few scattered violets that had fallen from his hand as he stopped to talk to her.

CHAPTER VIII

When Jessie heard of her cousin's new departure she expressed strong disapproval. "It's just nonsense," she said, "the way girls go on nowadays, neglecting their homes and meddling with poor people. Eleanor won't find a husband that way—and she is getting on."

Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Brooke had returned from their honeymoon in all the importance of the newly-wedded. They had taken a newly-married-looking little red-brick house in a newly-married-looking red-brick street—a sort of Matrimony Row amongst streets; and Jessie began to fulfil all the duties of her new position in her usual virtuous, self-satisfied way. Jessie was a thorough housekeeper. Her parlour-maid, in white cap and frilled apron, and with the ineffaceable suburban air peculiar to parlour-maids, was the perfection of neatness and good manners. The afternoon-tea equipage, and the little rush-work stand filled with cakes, the bright brass tea-kettle and the "Art" tea-cosy, all wore the same air of virtuous decorum and neatness. The tasteless furniture of the house

was clean, new and prim. The very hat-stand in the hall (best walnut, seven-pound-ten) bore a look of repressive virtue on its polished surface which seemed to forbid light laughter or any but the most decorous conversation. The wall-papers had taken many days to choose ; thick white lace curtains hung across the lower windows, and shielded the little sanctuary of home from the prying eyes of the passer-by ; the evergreens in the window-boxes grew with a sort of correct deportment.

On any morning of the week, having seen her husband off to the Temple, and finished giving out a few very carefully weighed stores, the thrifty little housekeeper might have been observed, string-bag in hand, doing her day's marketing at Harrod's Stores, and never failing to make complaints on the minutest points where complaint was justifiable.

Jessie had a passion for keeping accounts and for giving small teas. Teas, she was wont to say, were the most becoming form of entertainment that a young bride could give. Dinners would have been out of place and expensive ; luncheons, this sensible little person declared, were a foolish waste of money, for people have a dishonest way of returning such a civility by an invitation to tea only ; indeed, in some cases Jessie's chicken and mutton-cutlets received no return civility at all, and such an obvious violation of justice was a thing Jessie did not feel justified in countenancing for a moment. Her small

teas, she said modestly, were quite a speciality of hers, and she chiefly loved to invite thereto the unmarried young ladies of her acquaintance whom she had outstripped in the matrimonial race. To them Jessie aired her orthodox views on the duties of wives, and encouraged them one and all to follow her example and marry. If Cecil were at home on these afternoons the little bride's satisfaction was complete. She would frequently sit rather elaborately holding her husband's hand until the drawing-room door had opened, and then would rise hurriedly, exclaiming, "Oh, Cecil, not before people!" in a way that provoked Cecil's admiration as well as his respect.

"And her father really was quite a nice person," Lady Majendie used to say plaintively. "It is the Websters, I suppose. Poor Jessie could not prevent her mother being a Webster. These things are so sad."

That Eleanor could never spare an afternoon to come and be impressed by her teas was a source of some bitterness on Jessie's part, and perhaps served to provoke her expression of disapproval recorded in the beginning of this chapter. Lady Majendie had been once to the little house, but her visit had not given entire satisfaction. "She had been a little cool about the drawing-room carpet, and had hardly seemed to notice how bright the silver was," Jessie told her mother that evening, and Mrs. William had

felt the slight too, and "hoped the Majendie girls would do as well, that was all!"

Jessie liked to lay herself, her husband, and her house out for admiration, and her "Wednesdays" were the days on which the silver received an extra polishing, and Jessie sat in state to receive the laudations of her friends. It was particularly annoying of Eleanor, who certainly always said the pleasant thing, not to come and see her.

Eleanor was living in another world altogether now. Her work absorbed her. When Lent came, and the already over-burdened workers in St. Mary's had their hands fuller than before with extra services and extra work, she left the luxurious house in Cadogan Square, with its palms and pictures and flowers, and went to spend the six busy weeks before Easter in the tall, bare Mission House in dingy, criminal Essex Street. And from early morning till night the girl worked and taught, visited in her district or attended services. There was a strange sort of excitement in the life. Here in East London one faced realities. Here one lived and fought. Here the world's pulse seemed to beat more quickly, and the fever of life ran high.

It was a glorious life, she told herself, this hand-to-hand struggle with sin and poverty and sickness; while its beautiful antithesis was to be found in calm moments of prayer and meditation in the dim-lit church.

Her body seemed to gain new strength, and her spirit rose to the work. At last she had found the meaning of existence—the final issues of life. And lying awake at night in her little room with its austere furnishings, its uncarpeted floor, and the black crucifix on the wall its only ornament, her heart was filled with a strange exultation, and she would smile to herself in the darkness, saying, "I have found myself, and more than that, I have found my God!"

Her time was too full of work to allow room for speculative thought. Every hour was occupied. The little household of devout women rose at seven o'clock, and directly, without holding communication of any sort with each other, they went to the church from which the Mission House was divided by a single door only. Here they prayed and meditated till a bell summoned them to their simple breakfast. Following breakfast came a shortened form of Morning Prayer, conducted in the church by Mr. Vawdry, and this over, the ladies met in the parish room to discuss and arrange the day's work. After the mid-day dinner and the usual Nones and hour of recreation, the work of the afternoon began, to be followed by the busier evening. Mothers' meetings; temperance meetings; girls' clubs; boys' clubs; Sunday schools; Saturday schools; Swiss drill; gymnasium—all the thousand and one items, secular and religious, that make up the work of an

East End parish of to-day. And tea for all comers! Oceans of tea, regiments of cups and saucers; tea for mothers; tea for church workers; tea for boys' brigades; tea for girls' Bible classes; tea for temperance guilds; tea for Sunday school teachers; tea for clubs and institutions.

"I had never realized before," said Eleanor to herself, with that little touch of humour which never deserted her, "I never quite realized what a potent factor in the work of the Church tea is. I do not think we are quite up to date with some of our similes about the spread of the Gospel. We talk of its winging its way on a dove's wing, or being shod with the Gospel of Peace. Would it not now be appropriate to speak of it as being borne on a river of tea?"

Her physical strength seemed to increase as the work increased. "I am so happy too," she said with that wondering new joy of hers, "so strong and well and happy."

"I suppose," she said to Miss Blair one day, "it is because I have found my work."

"Is it not rather that you have found your home in dear Mother Church?" said the devout woman.

"I do not know," said Eleanor, "I do not know; it is all very beautiful, and I love it dearly—but—but——" for the power and all-sufficiency which Miss Blair so glibly claimed for the Church had awakened a passionate negation in the girl—the

old sense of free will, with its one and only and final court of appeal in conscience being hers by inheritance from those thrawn Scottish ancestors who had shed their blood for the Covenant.—" It is all very beautiful, and I love it dearly—your Services and dear St. Mary's. But suppose that I failed to believe everything that you Church people hold essential and that I love it only for its beauty and restfulness. Suppose, even for an instant, that I happened to do my work solely out of love for humanity, and with no thought of pleasing God, should I not still be doing good? I mean, if, at the end of my life, I should say, 'I have not held the beliefs that religious people say I ought to hold, yet weary pillows have been smoothed by me; I have comforted some broken hearts'—might I not take some satisfaction to myself just for the work's sake?"

"There is no righteousness," said Miss Blair, with the strangely fettered, strangely paralyzed mode of thought peculiar to priest-ridden people, "there is no righteousness except in obedience to Mother Church. Not to work at all would be more meritorious than to give one's life to work if the Church or your Director should not so order it."

"No, no," exclaimed Eleanor, "even a heathen, if he sees an ox or an ass fallen into a pit, will pull it out. And if I saw some suffering which I could relieve, not all the Directors nor all the churches in the world——"

"There is only one Church," said Miss Blair, compressing her lips, while the nervous flush that a religious discussion always brought to her face flamed in her cheek.

"——would prevent my alleviating it if it were in my power to do so."

"There is no righteousness but in obedience," said Miss Blair doggedly.

"If you should say there is no other means of saving one's own soul," said Eleanor, "I will try to believe you. But in East London I think one learns to care less for saving one's own soul than for saving other people's bodies."

"Ask Mr. Vawdry about it," said Miss Blair, helplessly.

And one day, coming away from a sick-bed where they had prayed together, Eleanor put some of her questions to this man who understood.

"Come in and have a talk with me," said the Vicar simply; and he opened the door of the clergy-house and led her into his study.

She told all her heart to him. The difficulties of a life-time; the pent-up thoughts of years; the stifled longings of a nature that had never revealed itself—all were poured out before him. Thoughts that had remained latent since childish days; difficulties that no one had ever heard of from her lips; feelings of which she was half ashamed, because it seemed to her that they were a unique possession of

her own for which she dared not ask sympathy—everything was told to him.

The afternoon began to darken a little, for it was still but early springtime. There was a small fire in the grate—a fire made of not very cheerful coal, and glowing sombrely in the plain black-leaded fireplace. Outside there was the sound of busy life, the sharp "ting" of the tramcar bells, the heavy rolling of traffic, and the restless movement of hurrying feet. Within the room there was a stillness upon which their two voices sounded distinctly, quietly, as when one will hear a watch ticking amidst the roar of a storm. This little study was remote from the world as a sea-girt island in mid-ocean is, round which the waves of the sea roar in their unrest. Here the laws of conventionality did not apply—it would have been profanity to admit their entrance into this room. Here soul spoke to soul, and the ignoble rulings of a baser and more trivial world seemed paltry, immaterial, incongruous. It was a little comtemptible to think that they should ever have had any weight.

Mr. Vawdry leaned against the mantelpiece, his clear-cut face silhouetted against the smoky looking-glass behind it. The heavy shoulders, with their look of latent strength about them, leaned heavily on the bare board of the mantel-shelf; his look of good breeding, which in another man might have suggested pride, was softened by a certain humility

which became him perfectly. There was a single deep line upright between his eyebrows which betokened thought, and the eyes themselves were full of restfulness combined with quick apprehension. He still wore his cassock, and its ugly lines and sombre colouring were an insult to the man's grace of form and the beauty of his face. But the priestly dress was in accord with that impersonality and remoteness which characterized him. The spiritual teacher was fitly garbed in the dishonouring ugliness of the cassock.

Eleanor sat opposite him in an elbow-chair with a quaint carved back and stiff arms, upon which goblins' heads were finely cut. Some instinct told her that this was a relic from an old and stately home.

"I am all in the dark," she was saying, throwing out her pretty hands with a gesture of appeal.

"I know," he said.

And he led her so gently—this patient, loyal-hearted man, this tender, oft-tried soul, to whom many hearts had been opened, many difficulties revealed. He took, as it were, her poor wayward, restless nature in both his strong hands, and in his comforting, uplifting way he showed her herself as *he* seemed to see her—on her best and highest side. Oh, she must not despair! She was better than she knew! That was the glad news of his message, "she was something better than she knew."

Who would not respond to such teaching? The girl's heart glowed, and the quick tears of gratitude stood in her eyes. "You have been such a help to me," she said, and she rose impulsively and put her hand in his; "I can never thank you enough."

She told him all those difficulties which Miss Blair had so sharply reproved. "I often feel," she said, "that I love humanity, even the worst of them, so much better than I love God."

"I think," he said thoughtfully, "that there are not two sorts of love." He reached out his hand and took a Bible from the table, turning the leaves over quickly with his powerful, sensitive hands. "God is love," he said, reading the words out slowly, "And whosoever loveth is born of Him." He closed the book again, still keeping a finger at the place, "*whosoever loveth,*" he repeated, "not 'whosoever loveth Me.' I think, myself, that the love which one may feel for the meanest child here in East London may bring us nearer Him, may be a proof that we are the sons of God."

He shut the book and bade her good-bye, and they stood for a moment by the fire together. From henceforth this room would always remain in her mind as hallowed ground, and she took a long look round before leaving.

She regretted nothing that she had said to him. His calm acceptance of the situation left her with no hot feeling of shyness at having come to him. Even

her doubts and perplexities, her dissatisfaction, and the thoughts which she had believed to be unique and therefore to be concealed—he had understood them all.

Yes, he knew her perplexities; he also had been perplexed. He knew her grief for the littleness of her life; he also had grieved in that very same way. He had known what it was to feel that the soul is very big, and its opportunities very small. Yes, and he had known many doubts. But light would come, he told her, light and rest and joy, only let her pray without ceasing, and do the day's work as the day's work came.

He gave her some books to read, and went with her to the door. But the girl lingered a moment. "Sometimes one can't pray," she said; "and then if one has learned to depend upon it for something which I can only call companionship, then one feels so horribly alone."

"Nay," he said, and his beautiful eyes flashed a divine kindliness upon her, "nay, not alone, for I shall be praying for you too."

For one moment the conventionally-minded girl, the woman of fashion and the world, could have knelt and kissed his feet. Henceforth he was her director in all things—her confessor, her priest. Even in common things she used to wonder what he would have her do. And sometimes it made her less decided than she used to be, for she stopped to vex herself by

trying to guess intuitively what would be his wishes in respect of this thing or that. Now it was a child in her class who was troublesome—how would he wish her to treat it—with gentleness, or with firmness? Or it was a question of her meditations: would he think that she dwelt too much on this thing or too little upon that? Or it was a dress she was choosing: something told her that he liked warm dark colours best. She sang strongly and clearly in church, because she had noticed his quick look of pleasure when he heard her voice at a week-day service rising bell-like and sweet above the rest of the congregation's. Day after day she brought great dewy bunches of violets, cool and sweet from the big gardens at Farant, and laid them in their fragrance silently upon the altar. He should never know she had brought them, but because he loved them they should be there.

She accepted the humblest work, going with her pail and brushes and washing the marble steps of the sanctuary, because he wished that within the rails no careless feet of an hireling should tread. He had done so much for her; why should she not do something to please him? The self-sacrificing spirit (the common heritage of womanhood) never shows itself more strongly than in divinest gratitude for spiritual help, or in admiration for character. The woman with the alabaster box has had many unconscious imitators.

Chiefly she loved to go to those poor houses where the women would sit and talk of him. It satisfied her reason for the faith she had in him to hear those poor creatures tell stories of his goodness. It was a common interest between her and them, where otherwise there was but little to link them to each other; and the inhabitants of Essex Street learned to love the girl who chatted to them so pleasantly, and met them on their own ground.

And Eleanor's heart grew warm to these humble folk for their own sake also, and it filled her with a happy glow to know how much they loved her.

"You have won all hearts," Mr. Vawdry said to her one day; "our poor folk will talk of nothing but you."

And the happy tears welled up into Eleanor's eyes.

Even a visit from Jessie, who made a pilgrimage to Essex Street to show her cousin her new brougham, did not provoke her by its overdone patronage.

Jessie, the little Presbyterian, had come to the Mission House in the true reformer's spirit. She thought of John Knox once or twice that afternoon. It was with no uncertain sound that Jessie voiced her disapproval of St. Mary's and all that was connected therewith.

"It's just Popery," she cried, lifting her hands in horror when she was conducted through the church, which she had asked to see. "Images! and those

pictures! Well, they are the most irreverent things I ever saw or want to see!"

She made a special onslaught upon one of the curates who happened to come to the Mission House to tea that afternoon. Him she warned of his probable lapse into conceit and self-glorying if he continued to wear that ridiculous man-millinery. And over a toasted muffin she faced him boldly, and said, "To think of you clergy taking good Protestant money to keep up these Romish services; it's what I call dishonest."

"We are not Protestants," said the curate indignantly.

"Well," said Jessie, calmly, "all I can say is, you ought to be. England is a Protestant country, and its established Church is the Protestant Church. And an English Church which is not Protestant should not be recognized by the Bishops nor by the State."

"Come and work amongst us," said Eleanor, and the curate echoed her request.

"Come and work amongst you!" said Jessie, as she picked her way to the new brougham. "No, thank you! I have got my husband, without running after good-looking curates who can't even give you a plain answer to a plain question."

She drove away to her comfortable little home with its tidy furniture and its decorous wall-papers and warm fires, its companionship and protection.

And Eleanor returned to her little attic room, with its bare walls, and the crucifix hanging above the fireless grate. And as she dressed herself to go out into the chill night to sit in stuffy club-rooms teaching rough lads and wild-haired, coarse-tongued girls, she was saying to herself over and over again, in a tone of happy exultation, "I would not change places with her! No, not for anything that the world could give would I change places with any woman that lives!"

CHAPTER IX

But the work was to receive a check. Lent with its rigours, its penances, its fastings, and prayers, and its sad penitential services in the chilly church —Lent was over, and a lovely Easter day was here. The tired workers in St. Mary's parish, after a Holy Week of fasting and prayer, hailed the risen Christ with a wan, tired, faithful joy, hardly able through physical weakness to exult over the empty tomb. Very early in the morning the little company of devout women went, like those of old, to greet the risen Lord. Some of them had eaten little but bread since Thursday. They blamed themselves for their inability to make a good Easter, and, sick and empty, prayed for a deeper feeling of joy.

The church was filled with the soft glory of early sunlight which lay as if with a special blessing upon the faithful few who kneeled by the altar rails. Banks of green moss, starred with pale primroses and yellow daffodils, lay cool and soft upon the marble steps. The sunlight through the stained-glass windows touched the golden chalice which Mr. Vawdry held high above his head, and lit his face with a holy radiance. The perfect beauty of

the scene remained for ever fixed in Eleanor's mind. "Surely he is Sir Galahad! the holy knight; the pure, strong, patient soul who alone was worthy to find the Holy Grail!"

Her spirit rose on wings, and it seemed to her in the silence of the beautiful church, with its dewy flowers, its silver lamps, and its white-robed priests, that the world—her world, and all that was in it—was left far behind, and that nothing of earth, neither its weal nor its woe, could ever touch her now. Her life was consecrated to God and His work for ever.

In the afternoon she got a message to say that her mother was dying.

Dulcie died as she had lived—died, if one may use the expression, gracefully. For a few days she lay on a couch with flowers all about her, and her dear ones ministering to her wants, and then she was gone—had passed out of her happy world—and her place knew her no more. During her short illness there was nothing of the ugliness, hardly any of the tragedy, of the sick-room. Everything was peaceful, beautiful, serene. When a clergyman who came to see her asked if she had no fear of death, she said, "Ah, no, why should I fear? Every one has been so kind to me always. God will not be less kind."

"I am sure he did not mean to annoy me," she said to Eleanor, after the clergyman had left, "but

he had false teeth which moved up and down ; please do not let him come again."

She did not suffer much, and the sweet, smooth face hardly bore the trace of illness upon it.

To the end she took a gentle interest in those about her, and discussed the trivial things of to-day and to-morrow, when it hardly seemed that to-morrow could be hers. On the very last day, when Eleanor came into her room dressed in a pretty, quiet brown dress, her mother looked at her with loving eyes, and said in her sweet, plaintive voice, " Brown was always your colour, darling ; you should never wear anything else." Then she turned languidly on her couch, and put one soft hand under her cheek as you will see a child do before it goes to sleep. " I am a little tired," she said patiently. And the moment after, Eleanor knew that she was dead.

Surely a woman was never more deeply mourned. She had been every one's care, the best-beloved of so many fond hearts. Dulcie's household had been an undivided kingdom in which there had never been a disloyal subject. Perhaps she had not been more loving than other women, perhaps not so lofty-minded as some. But she was charming. And surely in the rush and hurry of to-day, and in the midst of all-leavening modern vulgarity, our charming women, with their grace, their distinction, their faultless manners and their sweet soft voices, are almost as much wanted as our saints.

The household in Cadogan Square was overwhelmed with grief. Sir John Majendie's feeble health was almost shattered by the blow, and Angela and Clare and Violet could only cling with helpless grief to their step-sister.

"I'll see about everything," Alec said in his plain way when he came to see the stricken household; and quietly and unobtrusively he made every arrangement for the funeral.

"What a good friend he is!" Eleanor thought. And quite suddenly she remembered, as if it had been of some other woman, that, long ago as it seemed, she had wondered if she could ever have come to regard Alec as something more than a friend. "Ah, that was before I found my work," she said to herself.

But for the present at least, the work had to cease. When it was decided that the whole family was to go down to Farant for their period of mourning Eleanor went with a sad heart to say good-bye to her friends at St. Mary's.

The humble district seemed like home to her. She had made friends with this hawker at the corner, with that poor flower girl at the railway station; there was the newspaper boy whom she had sent to the sea for six months, and the coster-girl whom she had saved from a life of sin. These were the people for whom she could do real work, whom she could strengthen and help and save, who loved her, and

whom she loved with something of that selfless quality which is divine.

"Don't let any one have my district permanently," she said, with almost a sob in her voice, to the Mother Superior. "I must try and take up my work again next winter; I—I can't live without it."

She lunched at the Mission House, and afterwards went to the miserable tenements which she knew so well, to say good-bye to her poor people. There was much sickness amongst them, and they all seemed to want her so badly! They mourned her departure in their effusive, shallow, cockney way, and sympathized ingenuously with her grief at leaving them.

One woman had made her a cup of tea, bitter strong, which she begged Eleanor to drink. "It will hearten you up a bit," she said, "and I know it's good, for I've had it drawing on the hob three hours." One of her club-girls—a young woman who worked all day in a pickle-factory, and carried about with her a professional odour of pickled onions—brought her an offering of fried fish wrapped up in a piece of newspaper; while a handsome factory girl, of no character whatever, contributed a souvenir in the shape of a pair of gloves which her young man had given her.

"I am coming to the Club to-night," said Eleanor, her eyes full of tears, as she surveyed the incongruous gifts. "I shall be there at nine o'clock."

She returned to the Mission House for tea, and then, as the April afternoon was soft and mild, she went for a farewell stroll in the ugly, sordid streets.

Crossing Commercial Road she met Mr. Vawdry, clad as usual in his cassock and biretta. He stopped and shook hands with her. They had not met since Eleanor's loss, but the priest uttered no conventional words of sympathy, and merely turned and walked with her.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Nowhere in particular," said Eleanor. "I am only saying a sort of general good-bye to everything."

Their steps drifted down Christian Street and across Cable Street.

"Do you know an old Square near here? It is rather quaint," Mr. Vawdry said, and they wandered into Prince's Square.

This is one of the few fertile spots—quiet, peaceful, old-fashioned—which have not been improved off the face of East London. There is a Swedish Church in the middle of it, and some old trees grow there which now were bursting into leaf. Round the square are old-fashioned little houses with quaint doorways and red roofs. In the midst of surrounding squalor and degraded-looking courts and street, this little square bears the impress of dignity upon it—the plaintive dignity of old age.

The girl in heavy mourning and the black-robed

priest walked round the square together without speaking.

"Once," said Mr. Vawdry—and his voice broke the silence unexpectedly—"Once the Master set forth to do a good work—a work of healing such as He loved to do, and as He went to the place another duty assailed him—another wanted His healing touch. And while He turned aside to this new claim upon His care, a message was brought to Him that the child whom He was on His way to cure had in the meantime died."

"Yes?" said Eleanor.

"He knew what a divided duty was," said Mr. Vawdry. "He had many interruptions in His work."

"Ah," exclaimed Eleanor, turning impulsively towards him, "you understand! You always understand!"

"The child did not die," went on the gentle voice. "She only slept till He came."

"And will my work wait for me?" asked Eleanor wistfully, "while I go to another duty?"

"Waiting is the hardest work of all," he answered; "and it is the task that is often given to the most skilled and active workman."

He walked with bowed head, his hands lightly clasped behind his back. They wandered round the old square with its budding trees and chirping sparrows, and the soft April sky overhead.

" I know, I know," Mr. Vawdry was saying as the girl unburdened her heart of its recent sorrow to him. And indeed it seemed as though words were but little wanted as a means of conveying her thoughts to him. " I feel so rested," said Eleanor at last, though the tears were streaming down her cheeks as they had hardly done since her mother died, and her voice shook with sobs. " And I am stronger too. I will do all you tell me, and the work must wait. Only keep some little duties for me here,"—she raised her pleading eyes to his—" don't quite fill my place."

One more turn round the quiet square—Spring was a time of gladness ; why was there in the air to-day such an aching sense of parting and sadness, such a heaviness of farewell ?—then they turned and went back through Christian Street, and so to the Mission House.

" Good-bye," he said to her, standing by the door, and his smile was full of assurance, of confidence, as though his lips were saying, even while no words came : " I have faith in you—you will not fail."

" Good-bye," said Eleanor. The Spring and the Autumn seemed to stretch such a long way before her ! " Good-bye." For half a moment it seemed as though she must detain him a minute longer on the Mission House steps ; as if, could she but keep that strong hand-clasp a second more, fresh strength could be gained from it. But their hands parted, and she turned and went inside the house.

"For a good man some would even dare to die," she was saying to herself; and again, with shining eyes and an exultant ring in her voice, "Some would even dare to die."

In the evening she went to her Girls' Club, and the difference of class and class smote her strongly as she noticed how little these rough girls respected her mourning attire and recent grief. They were sorry she was leaving, honestly so, for the time. And doubtless their class is capable of being touched by sentiment when it acts directly upon themselves. But it requires a finer nature, a nicer perception, a greater discernment than they have any knowledge of, to understand the meaning of vicarious suffering, or to feel deeply for any grief which does not immediately concern them.

These girls expected dances and dance-music as usual, and their rough heads, ornamented with many rows of Hinde's curling pins, bobbed up and down to the jigging music, while their laughter and fun were not for an instant damped by the sight of Eleanor's sad face.

"Surely sympathy is the test quality of the highest type," she said to herself, thinking of the finest nature she had ever known. "Why it should be so, I do not know. It is not reasonable to suffer just because others suffer. It is utterly illogical. Suppose my neighbour has a fever, would it not be more sensible, instead of making myself unhappy about

him, to feel an added satisfaction in my own calm pulse and cool brow. Suppose a friend, one whom even I may love, is bereft of a dear one, why should I not, in consequence of that fact, increase my satisfaction in my own unbroken circle, instead of bewailing his empty chair? The chair will not be less empty because I fret. And yet—and yet, gregarious creatures that we are, the thought that follows on all emotion, be it joy or be it sorrow, is, 'With whom shall I share it?' Joy itself is dead until another has kindled at it, and of the cup of sorrow who shall say 'we are able to drink of it alone'?"

Eleanor said good-bye to her girls with a heart that was a little heavier than it had been before. She was not sleeping at the Mission House, and her brougham was waiting to take her home. The very luxury of this mode of conveyance—how suggestive it seemed of the life to which she was returning! Work, hard work—a good fight—that was what she wanted; and Fate had ordained for her instead, a quiet life in a peaceful, luxurious country house, with two pretty sisters to chaperon to teas and tennis parties, some flowers to arrange, and some dinners to order.

Those of us who work are sometimes inclined to be proud of our activity. We are even disposed to think a little hardly of those whose hands are idle. We are honestly proud of our horny hands, our busy brain, and we look with pardonable satisfaction at

the accomplishments of the day or of the year. But it may be that, just as we are in the glow of endeavour, and warm with the healthy fervour of toil—just as we are lifting our voices in a song that swings with the hammer or chimes with the beauty of thought, a song whose words are just these (sung anthem-like and gladly) "I have found my work!"—it may be that just then there comes a voice which says, "Not your work, but Mine. Not what you would choose, but what I send."

It is then, and only then, that we can prove our worthiness to work at all. If we can lay aside the tools to which our hands have grown accustomed, and cheerfully take up the others so foreign to our touch, so painful to manipulate—if we can begin all over again, learning painfully with hard practice the irksome details of a new craft, then only are we good workmen, worthy of our hire. For we shall have learned many things besides our craft: firstly, patience; then perhaps, or it may be much later, we shall know the difference between what is success and what is failure. Perseverance; initiative; courage—the noble heritage of the workman! these too will be ours. And last of all we shall begin to understand that to succeed is not the meaning of work, nor is accomplishment its only end; but that work is in its soul and in its essence something greater and nobler than these.

CHAPTER X

The days at Farant passed very slowly in the sweet Spring weather. A turn round the garden with her step-father in the morning, a drive with him in the afternoon; Violet's lessons to superintend, and the two dear, pretty sisters to love and sympathize with. It was a useful enough life in its own quiet way, but one that allowed too much time for contemplation. Eleanor read and prayed by the prayer-desk in her room, with its crucifix, its flowers and devotional books upon it, and wondered why her heart felt so cold and empty. If she were only back for a few hours in her familiar place in St. Mary's her spirit would lose its dryness and heaviness. But it was impossible to leave home, and the dryness and heaviness continued. Added to this, Eleanor's grief for her mother's death was almost inconsolable. The beautiful house seemed so utterly empty without Dulcie. It smote Eleanor's heart every time she sat in her mother's place, and the mourning aspect of every one seemed to sadden the brightest day.

In August, however, a very happy break occurred. A house in the neighbourhood was rented for the autumn by an old friend of Sir John's. Sir George

Pelham, lately made a baronet on his retirement from a foreign Legation, was an elderly man with two good-looking soldier sons. The two good-looking sons came to stay with their father at Coombe Priory, and became constant visitors at Farant. And when Eleanor saw day by day that her two pretty sisters seemed to grow prettier, and their blushes more frequent, the reason for such sweet display was not difficult to find.

Were ever two girls so delightfully accommodating, so easily arranged for? The two young soldiers fell in love; the two Misses Majendie instantly did the same. They did it, too, so prettily that everybody, including the two young soldiers, was more in love with them every day.

For these two charming pink-and-white girls the course of true love ran very smoothly indeed. Certainly they managed to shed a few tears sometimes—happy tears made of foolish anxieties and doubts such as we know all the time we have invented only to give ourselves a delicious torture.

On these tearful occasions Angela and Clare would seek the ever-sympathetic ear of their step-sister, and would pour into it all their tender fears and the little loving doubts which beset them. Philip, perhaps, had promised to come at four o'clock, and four o'clock had already struck—at least, it had struck on the schoolroom clock, which was certainly very fast, but she, Angela, went by that clock—

and still no Philip! Did Eleanor think that anything could possibly have happened to him? She never liked that horse he rode. Or was it, could it be, that he had forgotten the appointment? Worst of all (her fears ascending in a scale) could it, could it be that Philip did not care?—that he had ceased to love her? . . . And then, long before any clock of any character whatever had chimed the hour, the big grey horse with its handsome rider would be seen trotting up the drive, and blushes and dimples would come back to Angela's face as she fluttered downstairs to be lost for hours in the rose-garden.

Or Clare would creep into Eleanor's room at night and fling white arms round the elder girl's neck—"she was so happy, she could not sleep." Had Eleanor ever known any one so handsome, so brave as Montague? But, just think of it, if his regiment should be ordered to India! There were snakes in India, and tigers! And, oh, perhaps he would not be able to take her with him! Then the tears would begin to flow. Did Eleanor know any one in the War Office whom she could beg and pray to use his influence to allow the 1st Hussars to remain in England?

Eleanor comforted all, even the most imaginary woes of the loving-hearted girls. She thoroughly liked the two young fellows who were to be her brothers-in-law, and all the innocent love-making in the yew-hedged garden and in the walks and alleys about Farant imparted a happy note to the

quiet, long summer. The girls wore white dresses now, by their lovers' desire, and little expeditions and mild festivities were arranged for the benefit of the happy couples. Then trousseaux had to be thought of, for the double wedding was to take place in September; and although it was to be a quiet one, the relations on both sides of the house were invited. The preparations went forward, and Eleanor had hardly a moment to herself. She was not so contemplative as she had been, nor did her thoughts cling quite so tenaciously to the interests that had absorbed them all through the winter.

And now the day before the wedding had arrived. The church was filled with flowers, and the ringers were primed to ring their heartiest peal. The village school children had been in the woods all day gathering leaves and berries and blossoms to strew on the churchyard path for Miss Clare and Miss Angela to walk upon. The two houses, Farant and Coombe, were filled with guests, and there was a delightful feeling of expectancy over everything. The charming brides looked pretty, blushed divinely, and took no active part in the arrangements. "Ask Eleanor about it," was their response to every appeal for information or instruction, till Eleanor laughed in her old bright way, and said, "I shall have to say the responses for you both to-morrow, I am sure!" and the two girls laughed back, and asked her fondly what they should do without her.

That evening the little red common-day book had a new paragraph in it.

"A spinster is a person who bestows her love universally, and is quite sure of picking up some little scraps in return. The married woman stakes her all on one throw, and gains all or nothing as the case may be. The spinster bestows unceasingly her touching little gifts of love—here in praise of the baby, there in admiration of the bride; she is an acolyte who burns incense before every shrine. But even a humble acolyte may have his aspirations, and as he swings his little censer the thought may come even to his orthodox mind that, just for a change, it would be pleasant to stand in a shrine and have a golden censer swung before himself."

So, while she worked and praised and sympathized, the old, womanly thought—the eternal feminine craving which has made half the marriages—came over her, and she stretched out her empty arms with a gesture that was half pitiful, all womanly, and said, softly, "I also would like to be some one's best."

Her maid interrupted her meditations by bringing her a note for which an answer was required.

The Vicar who was to have performed the marriage ceremony to-morrow, wrote to say that he had been summoned to the death-bed of a near relative, and, while deeply regretting his unavoidable absence, suggested that his curate should take his place.

"I can't have that man," said Sir John fretfully,

on being consulted in the matter. "He buried Dulcie, and his voice hurts me every time he speaks. Do suggest some one else, dear."

"It will have to be some one from a distance," said Eleanor thoughtfully, "for it would seem like a slight to Mr. Grieve to refuse his services in favour of a neighbouring clergyman. . . . Ah! I have thought of some one! Will you allow me to telegraph to Mr. Vawdry and ask him to come? I could get his reply to-night."

She drove to the village herself with the telegram; and then, for the sake of the relief the rapid exercise afforded her, drove onwards in a strange tumult of thought, and called for the reply on her way home.

"With pleasure; will arrive to-night by the train you suggest."

Eleanor thrust the message into her pocket and raced her ponies homewards. She, who had a genius for calm organization, began to get into a fever over the wedding preparations. Was the church sufficiently decorated? Was there a sufficiently luxurious guest-chamber at her disposal to give him? No, none of them were good enough. She would give up her own room to him. It did not matter where she slept. The man who lived so austerely must have the best that the house could afford. She hastily assisted her maid to move her things into Violet's room; she would share the child's sleeping

apartment to-night, and to-morrow she could take possession of the twins' empty chamber.

Her own beautiful room—half bedroom, half boudoir, divided by pale blue hangings and lit by the southern sun—should be his. She arranged flowers in tall glasses upon her dressing table, drew the carved prayer-desk that she loved into the eastern window, where the early morning sun could touch the cross upon it; then she placed some of her favourite books upon the table, and, because the evening was chilly, had a fire lighted in the tiled hearth.

There was now a new element in the preparations for to-morrow, something oddly disturbing and exciting, which at the same time made all her duties doubly worthy of fulfilment. She was restlessly solicitous of his comfort; exacting in ordering the late dinner that should await his arrival, and nervously anxious that the brougham should be sent to the station in good time. Once more she took a peep into his room, stirred the fire and turned up the lamp.

"How pleasant it is to wait upon people!" she thought; and the little domestic attentions which women love to bestow seemed to make her wonderfully happy.

The wedding-day came, serene and quiet, with the sort of stillness that one unconsciously connects with a Sunday morning. The two shy brides, with

their hands locked in Eleanor's, came with their sister to the early morning service. The church was empty, save for the three sisters in their white dresses; but it was sweet with the fragrance of flowers placed there in honour of the wedding-day, and there was an expectant hush of happiness in the air. It seemed to Eleanor that to-day for many reasons the little church should look its most beautiful.

The wedding and the wedding breakfast followed. Such a happy wedding! such happy brides and bridegrooms! And the service, how reverently and beautifully it was performed. How it seemed that the solemnly spoken words united two souls together in deathless union!

In the afternoon, while Eleanor was moving about amongst her guests, she heard a neighbouring archdeacon, who had buttonholed Mr. Vawdry in a corner, say to him—

"Ah, my dear Vawdry, if you would only drive over and preach at our Festival to-morrow night! Won't you do it for us? We should be eternally grateful!"

Mr. Vawdry answered that he was leaving the next morning, and Eleanor drew him aside and said, "Won't you stay another night, and preach at Burbridge as he wishes? It will be very quiet when all the guests have gone, but we—my step-father and I—shall be so glad if you will stay for the Festival."

"I shall be pleased to stay," said Mr. Vawdry simply, "if you are quite sure that I shall not be in the way."

"No, indeed, you will not be in the way. My cousin, Alec Campbell, is staying on too," she added.

The wedding guests departed by an early train next morning, and the house was empty again save for the two who stayed behind. After breakfast Alec gave his arm to Sir John, and they pottered round the garden together, and Eleanor took Mr. Vawdry to see the village, the church, the schools. She hardly heeded where they went. There was so much to talk about, there were so many things to tell him.

At lunch-time she satisfied her conscience, so far as her other guest was concerned, by saying to him hospitably, "What are you going to do this afternoon, Alec?"

"I think I shall just walk round the fields with my gun," said Alec slowly.

This was perhaps the unhappiest day he had ever spent.

"I believe you like your gun better than anything else in the world," said Eleanor lightly.

"Mr. Vawdry says he would like to see the garden," said Sir John.

She wandered along the broad terrace by his side.

Her dress was of the soft colours that he loved, and her drooping hat cast a tender shadow over the sensitive, pretty face. The sun was hot, and she carried a big sun-umbrella to shade her. Her companion walked slowly in his usual fashion, with his hands clasped behind his back. In the quaint walled garden they rested on a sunny bench placed at the end of a grass walk. On either side the brilliant strip of green, tall holly-hocks lifted their heads, while flaming nasturtiums rioted along the borders; velvet dahlias and straight-stemmed gladioli, Michaelmas daisies, and every sort of gaudy, autumn flower glowed in the old-fashioned border. On the south wall the pear trees stretched out long arms heavy with fruit, and beyond, the roofs of the greenhouses caught the sun and flashed like a giant electric light.

They talked a little, but more often they were silent. Each had brought some favourite book to the old bench beneath the apple tree.

"What a perfect rest this is!" said Mr. Vawdry.

He spoke with a tranquil quiet as though nothing jarred, but all made for restfulness and deep content.

Eleanor did not speak much. Oftener she sat silent as if in a dream, her book open upon her knee and their gaze far, far away. A robin hopped about almost at their feet, and in the sunlit silence

one or two apples dropped heavily, with a dead, fateful sound, from the heavy-weighted boughs.

And the shadows lengthened, and the sun declined towards the fir trees on the western hill; and Alec came home over the fields with his gun over his shoulder, and his grave face a little graver than it was wont to be, and the afternoon was over.

"We must go and get ready for dinner," Eleanor said.

While the world lasts we must dine.

"What carriage will you have?" Sir John asked. "I did not know what to order for you."

"You will come with us, won't you, Alec?" said Eleanor.

"No, thank you, Nellie," he replied in his slow way. "I think I shall not come—that is, unless you want me."

"Oh, of course it would bore you dreadfully," said Eleanor, flushing a little. "We had better have the phaeton, had we not?" she said to her step-father—"that is, if Mr. Vawdry will drive me."

The five miles seemed very short in the twilight of the September evening. The pale sky was already lit with stars, and a bold harvest moon rode gloriously in the clear heavens. The air was still and keen, without a breath stirring, and a light frost was just settling on the hedges and the wold. The horses' hoofs rang out sharply on

the level road; they pulled well together, and Mr. Vawdry drove them with a strong, skilled hand.

"These horses are considered rather a hot-tempered pair," said Eleanor; "where did you learn to drive so beautifully?"

"I used to break in the horses at home," said Mr. Vawdry, and Eleanor found herself longing to hear more of his home, his boyhood, his parents, and his friends.

But the phaeton had drawn up at the door of the church, and the Archdeacon had come down the path to conduct the preacher to the vestry.

The church was crowded, and the harvest decorations, which every year were a special feature and the pride of the place, were sumptuous in their profusion and their gorgeously massed colouring. Purple grapes hung in clusters from fringes of wheat and barley, berries and fruit hung above the rood screen, and red-ripe apples and mellow pears were piled upon the old tombs. In the midst of these tokens of abundance and praise sat the horny-handed sons of the soil, lifting their voices in the harvest hymns. The front pews of the church were full of neighbouring squires and gentry who had "turned out" to hear Mr. Vawdry preach.

His sermon was more scholarly than any that Eleanor had heard him preach before, and it thrilled her to notice the rapt attention of the usually

indifferent congregation. Ah, he made them think! he had wakened them as with a trumpet blast! This was the man to lead souls to a heaven of which they had never even dreamed before. His voice went sounding on, full-toned like an organ, urging, compelling, witnessing mightily. His eyes seemed to burn with a slow, steady flame: they caught the light from a hundred other eyes, and held them as with a spell. And the deep, grand voice called from far up the mountain height, vibrating with the triumph of his message.

Was it any wonder that the girl's heart thrilled? Compare him with the sleepy parsons who droned through the services, and spent much time in grumbling at the poorness of their stipends. Compare such with this brilliant man, a man of fortune and of family, who had cheerfully embraced poverty, and had given up all that he had to live with the poorest of his flock, and to suffer with his fellow-men.

"Thank you for some beautiful thoughts," she said as he handed her into the phaeton, and they did not speak again until they reached home.

The light from the carriage lamps flashed upon the silver mountings of the horses' harness, and their breath, tossed from their wide-spread nostrils, looked foam-like and white for a moment where the light caught it, and in the next had been swallowed up in the night.

The frost lay thick and cold now on the hedges and the grass, and some heavy white mist hung low upon the meadows. The trees flashed past them in the ghostly silver light, and the mists wrapped them round in a cold shroud. The mystery of moonlight and of night pulsated with the scintillation of the stars, and the weird, wan spirits of the mist hushed earth to sleep with their cold breath.

Oh, to drive on like this for ever. To drive on till the world was left far behind. They two together, and God overhead. To drive on to an eternity of two souls whose heaven would be this, that their souls were one. To know that his heart beat near hers, and that no clumsy words were needed for the perfect understanding of one another. So to drive into the pillarless spaces of the Great Beyond, with never a trivial thought to dim the rarefied atmosphere.

XI

In November, when London calls with its hoarse, kindly old voice to all good Cockneys—(and most of us are Cockneys at heart)—to come and shelter close together in the cold short days; to light all our fires, and laugh at the grey skies and gloom without—when friend meets friend with a new sense of his value after roses and rustics in some dear, dull, distant shire, and every one is saying with a sense of mutual congratulation, "You are back again!" When the shops are full of women buying winter clothes and furs; when "lessons" are beginning again, and the houses smell of fresh paint; when the Park still claims its faithful votaries for a stroll after church, and the club windows are clothed once more with tall hats and black coats—then is the time to feel the charm of the homely, lonely, sad, bad, glad, old city—the kindliest and the cruellest in all the world.

In November, the big house in Cadogan Square opened its comfortable doors, and Alec Campbell, passing there as he often did, saw the fires once

again burning within the rooms, and the lamps lighted in the wide hall. It looked a happy place enough, but its owner could not settle to anything in the memory-haunted house. Sir John was restless and depressed, and when his sister suggested that he and her god-child, Violet, should come and spend the winter with her in Florence, Eleanor could see that, were it not for his unwillingness to leave her alone at home, the invitation would be at once accepted. She begged him not to consider her in the matter, but Sir John would not be persuaded to leave her, until it so happened that a very pressing call came to her from an unexpected quarter. The old General at Clapham was ailing, and at his great age it seemed doubtful if he would live through the winter. He sent and asked Eleanor, "if she would like a warm, comfortable house for the cold weather," to come and stay with him; and although the invitation was not very cordially expressed, Eleanor could see that she was wanted, and prepared to go to the Bungalow.

"It will be dreadfully dull for you," Sir John said; "but you were always unselfish, Eleanor."

He begged her to re-open the town house whenever she wanted it, and suggested that she should have a friend to keep her company till their return. But Eleanor shook her head. "If my uncle gets tired of me," she said, "I should like to

go back to East London again, and take up my work there till your return."

It seemed more than likely, however, that the poor old General had but little time left to get tired of any one. The sick-room scenes of life are always full of pathos, even when they are touched with an element of the grotesque.

The old man lay in a bed filled with hot-water bottles, and piled high with blankets and eider-down quilts. He wore a large grey plaid round his shoulders, while his head was covered with a much-worn sealskin cap. His face had a grey look of pain about it, but his eyes were still bright and his brain was generally clear. Somehow, suffering had given a look of distinction to the hard-featured face, and the utter helplessness of the man, whose obstinacy had ever seemed to him a virtue, was made more pathetic by his uncomplaining submission to it. Perhaps he was more rude even than he used to be, and the blows that he occasionally aimed at his nurse were doubtless intended as a vindication of his old-established right to do as he liked. But neither the blows nor the very bad language which he used could make him appear the terrible old gentleman he had so long essayed to be. True, he had always been a loveless man, and the revenge that the loveless take is to make themselves as unlovable as possible. Love is like a river, flowing abund-

antly, giving freely, singing with the very joy and rapture of giving; but when it is met by bitter cold, then the river ceases to sing. It lies hard and grey, and ugly in its rocky bed, unyielding, unresponsive, unheeding, and the world says, "Ah, the cruel, cold, ice-bound river! ah, the hard hearts!" But the river knows and the hard hearts know that once it was all different, and that the bleak cold that froze them was a thing outside themselves, the atmosphere of the country through which they passed.

The General looked at Eleanor as she entered the room, and remarked, "What have you come bothering here for?"

"I have come to pay you a little visit," said Eleanor, smiling.

"Well, then, you might just as well have stopped away," said the old man grimly.

"Do you call that a hat or a bonnet?" he asked presently, his eyes following her about the room.

"It's a hat, I suppose," replied Eleanor; "but perhaps my milliner might call it a *toque*."

"It's remarkably hideous," said her uncle, "and most unbecoming."

Eleanor laughed as she removed the close-fitting velvet toque, and stuck her hat-pin through it, then drew forward a chair and sat down beside the bed.

"I have heard from Florence," she began conversationally; "they arrived safely."

"You mean your step-father?" said the General. "A silly fellow that, a very silly fellow. I always said so. It's astonishing to me what your poor mother could ever have seen in him."

"He has always been a very kind friend to me," said Eleanor gently.

"What will he leave you?" said the old man sharply. "What will he leave you? That is the point."

Eleanor replied truthfully that she did not know. And presently she suggested that they should have a game of bèzique if her uncle felt equal to it.

She propped him up with pillows, and put an extra shawl about his shoulders, and began to deal out the cards on the counterpane. But they had each, by the General's desire, staked sixpence upon the game, and the excitement of trying to win it was too much for him. He cried bitterly at his want of luck, and the faithful Pope had to be summoned from the pantry to advise and sympathize as of old. The fact of there being money at stake redoubled the look of reproach in Pope's disapproving eye every time Eleanor declared her cards. And when at last the game grew to hopeless confusion through the General's inability to hold the cards, to cut, or draw, or deal, and Eleanor handed him the stakes declaring him to be the

winner, he tied the two sixpences into the corner of his pocket-handkerchief and lay back exhausted upon his pillows.

She read the newspaper to him day after day in the way he loved to have it read—from its title and price to the last advertisement, and the old man listened attentively, and kept up a running commentary meanwhile.

"The Queen and Princess Beatrice drove out yesterday. . . ."

"So they say, so they say. But I have no reason to believe that the statement is true. I didn't see them driving, and I think the Queen is much too sensible a woman to drive out in that cold wind we had yesterday. . . ."

". . . A pair of splendidly matched cobs for sale. . . ."

"Painted most likely, got up to deceive the silly public, as horses and men and women are nowadays. Faked up, that's what I call it. Everything for outside show! Toques, and shiny hats, and glazed collars, and patent-leather boots! Everything and everybody so smart. Ugh!"

". . . Madam Felice begs to intimate respectfully to her numerous customers that she has returned from Paris with all the season's latest novelties in millinery and hats and——"

"Impertinent baggage, to dare intrude herself and her hats into a respectable paper! I saw

you had on another new hat to-day. Paid five pounds for it, I suppose, and it isn't worth five shillings, although you are so proud of it. Oh, my hanky! I have lost it again! If I put it under one side of my pillow it is bound to get round to the other; and if I lay it outside the counterpane it is never there when I want it. Sometimes," he continued sorrowfully, "I make so sure I have put it where I shall be able to find it—but it is never there, never."

"Inanimate malice," said Eleanor, smiling, and handing him the active pocket-handkerchief. "When I am ill in bed my breakfast tray always gets upon my feet and sits there."

She was constantly with the old man, and her leisure was spent in walking in the dull roads, or musing and reading. She read religious manuals by the hour together, and lived in an atmosphere of high devotion and all-absorbing contemplation. The nursing and attention which she bestowed upon her uncle—nursing and attention which formerly she would have given half kindly, half humorously, pitying the old man, but laughing at herself in her new rôle of guardian angel—she now offered as an outcome of her piety, and the small services of the sick-room were performed in sacrificial spirit. Eleanor was living at high tension.

Sometimes she was reminded of her childish

days spent in this very house, and half humorously she began to connect herself with that introspective, religion-troubled little girl of years ago. And still she wondered in dangerous solitude which was her real self amid the manifold complications of her nature. Always that nature appeared incomplete, always did it seem to await fresh developments. Never was it fulfilled. At one time it had seemed that one man's simple, strong nature, his faithfulness and his truth, would be what would give her the balance of her being. This phase had been followed by a time when even the wish for balance had departed. The only reasonable acceptation of life was not to reason. The best thoughtfulness was not to think. To rush quickly through life; to laugh and to enjoy; never to dip below the surface of things; to occupy one's self entirely with externals. To live quickly—that was everything. For if only life is lived quickly enough, what fears or troubles can overtake it! So Eleanor had laughed and sung and danced and flirted—what a giddy, joyous, careless time it had been! But underneath the glitter and ripple of life there was a deep that was ever calling to deep, calling with the sound of a mighty flood and finding no deep to answer.

"Wherein lies the necessity for development?" she wondered painfully. "Why not sleep on in

unenquiring embryo? Why not rest content with the unfulfilled?"

Only once did she allow herself time to slip away to St. Mary's. There, in her old familiar place, amidst the beauty of her surroundings, and the exquisite rendering of the late evening service, with the hush of the softly-spoken prayers ascending upwards, and the sound of sweet singing making the heart tender—there, this woman with her aspirations, her powers of worship, her wordless longings, the capabilities for sacrifice, and the mingled mysticism and energy of her nature—there, from her dark corner she looked up with tear-dimmed eyes, and holding out trembling hands to the figure on the cross that the darkness drew with white lines on the window, she whispered, "Lo, I have found myself!"

And the white-robed choir sang on, and the organ pealed forth solemn chords; and between her and the dim figure of the crucified Saviour was a man's beautiful face with a look of holy rapture upon it.

The old General lingered on, greatly to the surprise of every one. The winter was an unusually severe one, and the cold seemed to penetrate even to the warm room and piled-up blankets of the poor old gentleman.

"I am keeping you out of a very pretty fortune by lying here," he said to Eleanor one day. "Very

bad for a woman to have money," he muttered. "But you have not got it yet, my dear."

Eleanor could only murmur the obvious reply that she hoped her uncle might live to enjoy his fortune himself.

"Pack of nonsense," said the General; "every one likes money."

He became weaker as time went on, but so long as there were no draughts he did not complain much. "Things would be more bearable," he said one afternoon, "if only I did not always lose my hanky!"

Eleanor found the truant for him again, and Pope came up to sit for an hour with his master, as he loved to do, while Eleanor went for a walk.

Pope had but one topic of conversation—the iniquities of the new valet whom the General had engaged at the beginning of his illness. "A nasty fellow," Pope called him, "and a great trouble downstairs."

The old gentleman in bed somewhat enjoyed hearing the complaints the two servants made of each other, and he always seemed brighter during the hour that Pope was with him. But now a heavy charge had to be made against the interloper. Some of the General's clothing was missing. Pope was in the habit of counting over all his master's possessions with jealous eye, especially such things

as came within the jurisdiction of the valet. An overcoat was really missing from the hall stand, and the " valley," as Pope called him, was reported to have said " that his master would not require the garment again in this world."

When Eleanor came in from her afternoon walk the General was sitting in his chair by the fire. The valet had been dismissed, and Pope reigned triumphantly in his stead.

The General affected some surprise on seeing his niece, and inquired of her, with overdone surprise, why she was staying here?

Horrified at finding him out of bed, Eleanor half thought he was delirious.

" I'll teach that scamp to say I won't wear an overcoat again!" said the old man. " A little spotty-faced, contemptible manservant to speak in such terms of a distinguished General like me! But that's what the world is coming to with their theatres and cabs, and excitement, and patent-leather boots. You are a good girl, Eleanor," he said, patting her head. " Wait for your fortune a little longer, my dear, while I show them who is master in this house. If I could get a decent fire made up, and become thoroughly warmed through, I could fight that ruffian yet. Wanted a night out, did he—to go to a music-hall, perhaps, to hear Dan this and Teddy that?"

His overcoat was retrieved and brought to his

room, and laid on a chair where he could see it.

"I headed the charge when we rode against the Sikhs," he said, "and I won't be defied by a ferret-faced little manservant." Pope beamed genially upon him, and even made a faint endeavour at applause.

"Go back to your Mission House," he said to Eleanor. "Your heart is there, although you have done your best to conceal the fact. Go back, and tell them all that there is a fine old English General down at the Bungalow who could shoot down a regiment of valets from his own front windows if he were so minded! Tell 'em that, and see what they make of it. I'll manage my house single-handed. You too, Pope," turning suddenly upon his old servant; "I'll hold the fort against the lot of you!"

Within a week the General drove to London in his brougham; and her father and sister being still abroad, Eleanor returned to the Mission House.

CHAPTER XII

THE work of the church at this season of the year was unusually heavy; the services were longer, the fasts more frequent than usual. Also there was more illness than was common even in the teeming, crowded parish of St. Mary. There were foes to fight on every side, foes of sickness, of sin, and of self. Alike in the fogs and rain the clergy and the ladies toiled their utmost. There were some tragic cases of need to help, and money had to be found somehow. One of the curates—a thin, emaciated man, who lived in the lowest of the slums, amongst some boys whom he had rescued from the streets, broke down suddenly in the midst of the work. He had been trying with all the strength and persuasiveness of his being to rescue one of his parishioners from crime. Failing utterly, he came into the Mission Room one evening and asked Eleanor for a cup of tea; then laying his head on the table, he burst into tears.

"I am done," he said. And there was nothing for it but to put the extra work on some one else, and send him away for a change of air for a time.

And still the poor had to be met with a cheery

word; still the romping and the games with the children had to be played, with a bright face and unfailing vivacity; still the young had to be taught and the old reformed, and the dying prayed with; and only Francis Vawdry never seemed to tire nor to give in.

His face, always a little remote in expression, wore something of the look which one sees in pictures of St. Sebastian; the piercing arrows of fatigue, of failure, of distressing fighting, hardly seemed to make any impression upon him. He worked all day, and report said that he spent half his nights in prayer. But the great peace of his face never altered, his smile was as ready and as loving as before; the deep eyes looked with a brooding watchfulness over everything. The charm of his manner was undiminished. A certain courtliness, even to the very poorest and most degraded of his people, never forsook him. Children plucked at his skirts as he passed, and women told him all their sorrows.

Eleanor saw him every day; saw him in the empty church and by dying beds, or in fever-stricken courts; worked for him with passionate zeal, leaned upon his counsel, gave her soul into his keeping, and said, poor child, that she kept her heart in her own.

There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen. The lion's

whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. Some name it the way of sorrow, and some call it the finding of wisdom, and some will say it is the revelation of the soul to itself. But all know that the path is dark, and all know that it must be trodden alone. And to whatever place it may ultimately lead, that lonely path is full of gloom in the memory of each person who has trodden it, for it is always night there—neither the sun nor the moon shines upon it.

Eleanor fasted rigorously and prayed far into the night. Her body became weak and pitifully thin. She was too tired to teach, and sometimes she failed altogether to hear what was said to her. Also she began to lose the proper perspective of things: her word was out of focus, and her sense of proportion failed.

And thereupon the nerve woman was born—born of long vigils and still longer fasts; born, to confess the truth, of a life wholly out of proportion to the girl's strength. The morsels of dry bread which she ate for her breakfast had to sustain her through a morning of class teaching and visiting, generally amongst cases of poverty and distress. Her temper often failed her with children, and they found this out and provoked her intentionally, as children will sometimes.

Then one day Lady Nassington came to see her. She was an old woman now, quite suddenly old

and infirm; but her eyes were still sharp and shrewd, and she looked keenly at the girl, and decided in her own mind that even if she could persuade her to leave the Mission House for a time, no ultimate good could be done in this way. "Things must come to a crisis," she said. "Heaven knows what that crisis will be; probably some illness which she will get amongst these poor folks in her present low state of health, and it will go hardly with her. Poor Eleanor! Hector's little girl. What could she do?" thought Lady Nassington, turning from her own grief to consider how to help her friend. "She left me alone when I wished it," was her conclusion; "I believe the best thing I can do is to leave her alone now." But she sent her own physician to the Mission House, with injunctions that he should see the Mother Superior himself, and enjoin upon her the necessity of more food and less work for Miss McNeill.

"She is living entirely upon her nerves," was the doctor's verdict, "and that cannot go on for ever. She probably sleeps little, and is full of fear and fancies. We see so much of this sort of thing amongst those who overtax their strength."

"Probably," he said to Eleanor, "you often feel a sense of disaster or impending trouble?"

"Yes, yes," said Eleanor impatiently; "I know it is very silly."

"And your head," he said, "often aches. Well, Miss McNeill, there is nothing for it but complete rest and good nursing."

Eleanor shook her head. "Who is to take my classes?" she said. "And I am doing half the district nurse's work just now, too."

"I can quite believe it," said the doctor gravely.

He and Lady Nassington had a long talk about it that very afternoon, and her ladyship went so far as to write to Sir John to come home.

And the same night Eleanor sat up with a dying woman, and came home in the morning in a state of exhaustion that rendered her almost speechless.

Unity seemed lost in a plurality of personality; there was no cohesion in her ego. The charioteer in Plato's simile struggles with unequal steeds; Eleanor laid the reins upon their necks, and wondered whither the mad steeds would carry her.

Outwardly, at this time, she was a pale-faced woman, who prayed much and fasted beyond her strength; but inwardly she was discordant and incoherent—an aggregate of states without unity, without cohesion.

She slept but little, generally waking in the small hours of the morning, and afterwards being unable to doze again. She heard hour after hour chime on the clocks of the City, and learned, as weary watchers do, all the signs of the early dawn. She lay and watched the reflections of the street

lamps upon the ceiling, and then saw the grey light of dawn come, and heard the lamplighter, with his heavy step, walk round and extinguish the lamps. She heard the cocks crow in the dingy yards where her poor neighbours kept them, and listened to the dustman rolling by in his yet empty cart. Sometimes she could not lie still, so glaringly, broadly awake was she; and then she would rise and pace her narrow room. At seven o'clock she would steal down to the cold church, and there she thought that the restless woman of solitude and darkness would give her peace. But as the day wore on the tale was still the same—first the throbbing head, the loss of true proportion, the tormenting exaggeration of possible results; the sense of disaster; the long day of stress and strenuous work and effort followed by a sleepless night. In the morning her exhaustion seemed to exceed that of the night before, and neuralgia had become an almost daily and unbearable torment.

Eleanor's physician urged rest, and Eleanor continued her work.

CHAPTER XIII

SHE was kneeling in church, cold, almost rigid. She had knelt there since early morning. It was a bitter, dark day, the vigil of some saint. She had been on her knees since before London was awake. Now it was six o'clock.

Her head swam a little, and her feet were cold as ice. There were hassocks, but she did not use one; her knees felt as though they were frozen to the stone floor. She clasped a little crucifix which she wore at her side. There was a faint smell of stale incense in the church.

At seven o'clock the pious ladies from the Mission House came in for their morning meditations, but no one could see her where she knelt in her dim corner. One of the curates entered and read the shortened form of Morning Prayer, and he and the ladies went out again. The church was empty once more. Oh! the awful emptiness of it, and the silence and the cold—the penetrating cold. She felt she would like to move—to raise herself upright at least. But found herself unable to do so. She laid her aching head on the back of the chair in front of her, and for a moment she

was only conscious of a dizzy faintness, and a feeling of overpowering exhaustion and hunger.

Nine o'clock boomed from the church clock, and broke the solemn stillness of the place. She raised her head and tried to collect her thoughts.

"I think I must have fainted," she said, "for it seems only a few moments ago that eight o'clock struck, and I said 'I will give myself ten minutes more, and then I will go and tell him.' I can't give up everything. I can't cut myself off from all happiness and all my work. But I must end it. . . . I can't say the words; I am not strong enough. I feel so weak and stupid."

She knelt on—cold and rigid, and her hands fell to her side in utter abandonment. Some sparrows chirped upon the roof, and the bitter wind howled round the steeple of the church.

"I don't want to see him. He will look down into my eyes and know all the heart of me. Oh! this horrible silence! I am afraid of it."

Still she knelt.

Then there was a movement up in the organ-loft. The organist rustled his keys in opening the instrument, glanced from behind the red curtains, and rubbed his hands together. Human companionship at last! The awful tension was broken. Eleanor rose—"I am a woman of the world," she said; "nothing shall betray me. I have a simple message to give; I shall give it."

She dragged herself to her feet with an effort, raising herself painfully with the assistance of her chair. She shuddered, and passed her hand across her eyes. "Ah, that was not the world I was in just now! I think," she whispered, "I was among dead people—and the dead are awful company."

The organist had begun to play a simple prelude with a sound of comfort in the tuneful air. The noise of the pedals working beneath his feet brought something wholesome with it. A vendor of oranges was shouting his wares in the street; some boys called to each other with shrill voices. Some one unlocked the outer door of the vestry, and Eleanor's heart gave one tremendous bound and stood still.

"I shall not think," she said, pressing two cold hands to her head, "until I have knocked at the vestry door."

She passed down the aisle, scarce noticing how she swayed in her walk, or the way in which she clung to the backs of the chairs for support. Then went through the side chapel to the vestry. One more great heart-bound, and Eleanor's face, though she knew it not, had grown whiter than before.

Then she knocked at the nail-studded door.

There was a big oak table in the room; a hanging-press for surplices, a newly-lit fire, with

a common little clock ticking on the mantelpiece above it, and two plain Windsor chairs. The Vicar was seated upon one of these with his back towards the door.

"Come in," he said, and turned round in his place and saw Eleanor.

"Sit down, Miss McNeill," he said kindly. His dark eyes travelled from her blanched face to the shaking hands. "I am afraid you are not well," he said. "I wish there was a better fire."

He stirred the newly-kindled sticks, and left the poker in the fire to make it burn more brightly. The organist in the empty church had begun to play a piece of music with one insistent note in it like the sounding of a pleading voice.

"Thank you, I am quite well—a little tired, perhaps—and that is really what I have come to speak to you about. I am afraid I am not quite strong enough for parish work. I think I must give it up. I mean all of it, you understand?" she added with emphasis. "I do not think I shall come to the East End again."

It was not nearly so hard to say now that she had begun to say it, and volubility was of great assistance in keeping down those agonizing leaps of her heart.

The Vicar's eyes looked like deep, calm wells that reflect all things clearly. He was leaning his elbow upon the arm of the Windsor chair upon

which he sat. He looked steadily at her without speaking.

"You quite understand," began Eleanor again feverishly, "I don't merely want to stop for a little while and rest."

Still no answer.

She became more voluble. "I hope you will get some one to take my Sunday class and the Girls' Club, but the girls are a little difficult to manage, I am afraid."

Her hands were fluttering again, and her head felt on fire.

"I think—you know——"

Then the deep voice interrupted her, and the Vicar said, with his gaze still fixed upon her face, "You are unhappy about something. Tell me about it."

There was silence—for how long Eleanor did not know. Then the voice, with all its old magic influence, was heard again. "You feel, perhaps, that you are not worthy to do so much in the church?"

It was Eleanor's turn to be silent now. And the Vicar went on: "You must not be discouraged by that; the saints themselves were often downcast in the same way."

Silence. "Silence," says one who knows, "is the source of the undercurrents of our life. If I tell some one that I love him my words will

convey nothing to him; but the silence which will ensue, if I do indeed love him, will make clear in what depths lies the root of my love, and will in its turn give birth to a conviction that will itself be silent; and in the course of a lifetime this silence and this conviction will never be the same again. . . . "

He closed the dangerous gates of silence with a firm hand. "Or you wish to confess something to me?" he said, "or you are troubled about something?—tell me all."

The clock ticked on the mantelpiece, busy and loud, and a piece of coal fell with a clatter into the grate. The maddening, insistent note sounded still upon the organ; it beat into Eleanor's brain, and disturbed her as the drip of a cistern or the banging of a door will disturb a man in delirium.

Again the kind voice, "Tell me all."

"I must go," she said. "I know I ought to go away." She covered her face with her hands for a moment, and of a sudden she heard as it were some other woman give one difficult sob. "I am not working for God at all," she went on; "I don't even care what He thinks . . . I must leave—I must leave," she said brokenly.

"If you feel that it is best," he began. And the note of farewell in his voice was as the grating of the key that closes the gate of Heaven. Prisoners know the moment when they make their last appeal,

and then fling themselves against strong bars. It is the final opportunity. No one is prepared for the last speech of all; the moment comes, and the heart speaks. . . .

"Pity me a little," said Eleanor. "Tell me to stay."

The words fell simply, involuntarily from her, like stones dropped helplessly from a powerless grasp, and she held out her two hands with something of the inconsequent appeal of a child.

The beating of two hearts seemed audible for an appreciable fraction of time. Eleanor heard rather than saw that he had begun a rapid walk up and down the narrow confines of the vestry. His face was very white, and a blue vein started out like a cord on his forehead. He stood still presently, but he did not look at her, and the expression of his face was so full of pain that even the features of the face seemed to be altered.

"I must not tell you to stay," he said gently. "You are tired, and have need of rest." And the woman of the world laughed suddenly and sharply, "I believe I have asked him to marry me, and he does not wish me to know it! He is trying to save me from myself, and to give me back a little self-respect." For already the words of farewell seemed to have been spoken. She heard them dully when they came—words of regret for the loss of her devoted work amongst the poor—of compassion for her loss of health, and warm praise for

all that she had done ; and then at the end a blunder —the outcome of the very quality of his kindness, a passionate desire to put this woman right with herself. "Forget this as I shall forget it," he said. The words came back to Eleanor afterwards with something of that strange power of recollection by which we recall dreams. At the time she scarcely heard them.

It was over. Eleanor could not have told you how the interview ended—whether they bade each other a conventional good-bye, whether he opened the door for her, or whether she groped her way out by herself.

She was in the aisle of the church again, and it seemed very long. She forgot her lowly obeisance to the silk-draped altar, and the whispered prayer with which she usually left the church. Her feet dragged after her, and she stumbled badly.

The door was there at last, and air, blessed air, to cool her head. Snow had begun to fall slightly, and a bitter wind was driving it up from the pavement almost before it fell.

She hailed a passing hansom, wondering stupidly, blindly, where to direct the driver. . . . Not to Clapham! Ah, no, the silence of the Bungalow would drive her mad. . . . The house in Cadogan Square was shut up. . . . She stood irresolute, bewildered, upon the footboard of the cab. "Just drive on," she said. "I do not quite know where I am going."

CHAPTER XIV

THERE is a holy sorrow which is called the sanctification of life. It is bearable. We say it is the visitation of God, and each tear that we shed brings us nearer to him. It is to heaven that our sad faces are turned, and in the great darkness we cling more closely and lovingly to our God. We kiss the hand that smites, in proud subservience to a Higher Will. And whatever the sorrow may be—be it bodily pain or unmerited misfortune, or the hushed, awful grief of the death-chamber, when we look at each other and whisper, "He is gone"; be it the pain of separation or the hopelessness of defeat that follows a fight for a noble cause, or the suffering of loving patiently when there is no response, still we look upwards with our dim, sad eyes; we may even, if we are loyal-hearted, whisper "He knows best!"

But the sorrow which is not holy. Ah, that is hard to bear. The hideous pain of regret, the wounded pride which bleeds inwardly, and no physician's hand can touch. The maddening irritation of a common, selfish disappointment; the hopelessness of real bad luck; the shame of

disgrace; these, and other kindred sorrows, what will soothe or heal?"

Some comfort we must have in every sorrow. Not much, perhaps, but some. The demand is an outcome of our instinct of self-preservation. All our lives we are unconsciously annulling pain—it is the philosophy of life. It is only, however, when pain is palpable, severe, that we consciously seek its antidote. Consciously—by the way of the Cross to still the heart's unquiet or by the way of easefulness to satisfy our lesser selves, we are trying to overcome something and to be happy. All this goes to prove, perhaps, that happiness is the soul's inalienable heritage, and the meekest of us lay claim to a share in it.

With some it is believed that there is a spirit of revenge against sorrow which (the case is generally supposed to be applicable to a man rather than to a woman) inclines them to tend towards lower things; it often follows upon some grave misfortune, and is vulgarly known as "going to the dogs." The matter, considered ethically, shows a distinct and inherent belief in polytheism—when the good God has failed us, we will throw in our lot with the God of Evil. With a woman, however, the spirit of revengefulness is seldom present. Her physical frame, less robust under grief than a man's, generally suffers a breakdown, and the broken-hearted woman, the disappointed

or the over-tired woman, goes to bed. The bathos of the thing is irrefutable, but it is none the less a fact. Where a man perhaps drowns suffering, a woman becomes physically incapable of any intensity of feeling. Her salvation probably lies in the immediate necessity for doing something when she has recovered.

Eleanor McNeill, after a long, protracted illness at Upfield, whither Lady Nassington bore her to be nursed through a distressing period of nervous breakdown, came back to an empty world. She had dropped out of her place a little, and the world looked appreciably older since her absence from it.

Lady Nassington, walking by her side in the quiet glades at Upfield, wondered sometimes what form the crisis which she had foretold had taken. Something had very considerably altered Eleanor McNeill, and with returning health there came a growing restlessness which it was almost impossible to control.

"I won't urge you to remain with me," Lady Nassington said one day. "I do not think the time for peace has come yet."

"I wonder," said Eleanor, "if any one quite knows what peace is?"

"I think some do," said her old friend gently. "I think it springs from death."

"Death of self?" asked Eleanor.

"Yes, or the best part of one's self," replied Lady Nassington, looking towards the village churchyard in the shadow of the elms.

"Come back to me some day," said Lady Nassington as she bade her good-bye; "but go back to the world now and have it out with yourself, dear. No one can help you—all one's fights are fought alone, I think."

"I want to forget," said Eleanor, "I must forget," and she tried to cure her hurt, in the old, woman's way, by hurting others.

Forgive me if I record that Eleanor caused a good many heart-breaks without the least satisfaction or consolation to herself. Conquest was a trick with her; it was very easy to gain admiration, and no one guessed that underneath a certain recklessness which she assumed, she was fighting herself with the courage that is born of despair.

No one knew how much she suffered. The dominant tragic element within her could not cast the trouble aside; the inherent capacity for suffering which she, in company with all sensitive natures, possessed, transformed pain into horror. She never got away from it, never forgot.

And always, beneath an impenetrable smiling mask, which only a woman knows how to wear, a storm was raging. At night often when the house was still, she would pace her room restlessly for hours. Up and down, up and down, till the

small hours sounded upon the clock and the fire went out in the grate, saying over and over again, "I said it! I! What can he, what can any one think of me?"

To the conventionally bred woman, the very unconventionality of her action had in it something ignoble. That her religious aspirations should have resolved themselves into a love affair humiliated her in her own eyes, and made her shrink from the mere mention of the theme. Oh, to forget, and to think of nothing but the easy conquests of to-day, to dream only of soft speeches and flattering words! But in the place of this happy vision Eleanor heard always a woman's faltering voice saying, "Tell me to stay!"

Had it been to a less noble and spiritual nature to whom, all unpremeditated, she had revealed her love, the thing would have seemed less a matter for self-abasement. But (she did not spare herself) her words had been for this man a terrible surprise. "Forget this as I shall forget it," he had said, and the words seemed the kindest that could have been uttered under the circumstances. But who talks of forgetting! There is no such thing!

During the summer time there was hardly a ball or a party which Eleanor did not attend. She had ever been popular, and the very tastefulness of her way of dressing was in itself a charm and a distinction in the gay world.

"She is no longer young," the world said; "she is looking horribly thin, and yet how extraordinarily pretty she still is."

When the season was over, country-house visiting began, and Eleanor had a dozen engagements to fulfil. At Cowes she was the central figure of a gay party on board Lord Mure's yacht, and her amusement consisted in being seen everywhere with that most popular of men, the Master of Mure. People began to say that Miss McNeill was going to marry and settle down at last, and her friends felt glad that her choice had fallen upon so distinguished and charming a young fellow. But Eleanor disappointed everybody by treating her present admirer as she had done the rest, and seeming to care very little for the mortification she had occasioned. Her laughter seemed just as light the day after she had seen a white-faced, very miserable young man return to town with a vague intention of going somewhere and shooting something.

"*He* would be sorry if he could see me," thought Eleanor, as she sat on deck with a red umbrella over her head amongst a laughing grup; "but no one can despise me as much as I despise myseif."

Mr. Brand, whose yacht, the *Capuchin*, lay alongside the Mures', was at present the source of much amusement to those on board the *Esmeralda*. Mr. Brand, with a very gay party on board, was in his

element. His ladies were among the smartest of that which calls itself the "fast set." He had—oh, happy combination!—a fair dame, who was at once a countess and an ex-music-hall singer, as one of his guests. He had poor little Edward Lecky, who drank much more than was good for him, and the rest of the party was made up of young men in obtrusive yellow deck-shoes and ladies of indefinite principles and with unvarying complexions. There were three banjos on board, and presumably there was a great deal of champagne; and if noise means fun Mr. Brand and his party were certainly enjoying themselves.

He met Eleanor in Cowes one day, and beamed affectionately upon her. Eleanor nodded in response, and this was quite enough for Mr. Brand, who crossed the road and began to speak to her.

The man was so perfectly kind in his own vulgar way that Eleanor had not the heart to repulse him, and she stayed chatting to him outside a shop for some moments.

"Now look here," said Mr. Brand, "why don't you and all your smart friends come along and lunch with me? The old ship shall do her best for you, and my cook is an out-and-outer."

Eleanor thanked him, but declined with some firmness.

"Well, I tell you what I'll do," said Mr. Brand, "I'll send you an invitation to come for a cruise

in Scotland this autumn. Heaps of chaperons! Champagne every night! No refusal entertained!"

He waved his fat hand in a jocose manner, and walked down the street in his tight shoes and his aggressively nautical suit, and with his peaked cap stuck jauntily over one eye.

Excellent Mr. Brand! His entire yacht, not to speak of his gig, was at the service of every titled personage in Cowes, and when not employed in offering his services to a becalmed sailing yacht with a prince on board, or tendering his assistance to "some of the R.Y.S. lot" in getting in and out of their own boats, he was raking their decks with his binoculars just to find out, as he naïvely remarked, "how they did the thing" in correct circles.

Eleanor drew rather a funny little picture of Mr. Brand in his tight shoes which provoked a good deal of fun on board her friend's yacht. Oh! this endless laughter and gaiety, how wearisome it was.

Sometimes Eleanor would look over the side of the yacht when the stars were clear in the sky, and think with longing of those who were at peace, the choir invisible, for whom the stress, the sadness of the world was passed. "Who would really miss me?" she thought, looking with a sense of longing at the still, dark waters. Perhaps only Alec Campbell. And he was going to India; she might never see him again. She often wondered

how much he knew about her life in the East End and its ending. Love seemed able to tell a man so much, and there had been an added tenderness in her cousin's speech for some time past. She thought she would tell him everything before he went. Alec would understand as no one else could, and she believed that her perfect confidence in him would be more pleasing to him, even with all its painfulness, than any reserve would be.

"Come and say good-bye to me," she wrote. "I cannot let you go without saying good-bye." It was agreed that they should meet when she should be in London for a few days in the following week, and Alec came to the house in Cadogan Square to say good-bye.

"The house stifles me," said Eleanor, suddenly, when they had sat for some time in the palm-filled drawing-room. "Let us have a last walk together, Alec." She broke down suddenly into tears, and said between her sobs, "A last walk."

The place was so utterly without sentiment whither they bent their steps. Along Brompton Road into Cromwell Road, and then up and down the broad space in front of the Imperial Institute.

"I feel as if I had wasted your life," Eleanor was saying. "But long ago, Alec, quite long ago, and even after you came up to London, I used to think perhaps that I might be able to make you happy, but"—she struggled with something in her

throat, and he took her hand quite simply in that conspicuous place as though they were in the Glen again. "I want to tell you something, dear," she went on brokenly. "I care for some one very much."

"I know you do," said Alec.

"Then I need not tell you anything," said Eleanor, raising eyes full of unshed tears to him.

"No, dear," he said, "you need tell me nothing."

"And since then," said Eleanor, "I have been unkind to other people. I have made others suffer because I was so badly hurt myself. Alec, dear, help me! Tell me what one does when love is over?"

"I have often wondered," said Alec, slowly.

"Jessie has been writing to me," said Eleanor, smiling a little. "She says that she and Cecil strongly disapprove of the way I have been behaving lately."

"She never leaves Cecil out," said Alec, smiling too a little.

"She says poor mamma would have been shocked at my present behaviour, and she mixes it all up with an account of the baby and its bath, and something about the perambulator, for which there is just room in the front hall."

These two were both making a brave attempt at smiling this afternoon.

They took a turn towards Prince's Gate again,

and then back to Queen's Gate. Some children passed them bowling their hoops, and a flower girl offered them some flowers.

"So many people think hardly of me now," said Eleanor; "I mean even people who really like me."

Alec was never fluent of speech. His face was white, and his voice unsteady. "I shall never think hardly of you," he said. "For me there will never be any other woman in the world but you." The words fell like a knell.

"Ah, don't say that!" cried Eleanor. "Love some one else—be happy."

"And if I never see you again," Alec went on steadily, "I should like you to know this."

The girl was weeping softly, so he took her home with tender carefulness, through the busy streets and the uncaring crowds; and on the doorstep they said good-bye, as those who love each other have often done before. And that was the end.

All that she would have said to him failed her in its utterance, and when he was gone it was her grief that she had not been able to say more. Thus Eleanor returned to the house whence she came out. The pretty drawing-room looked much the same as u ual; the Square and the pavements had not altered. This was the first time she had been at home since her life in the East End of London, and the tame familiarity of her surroundings vaguely

surprised her, as such things do surprise those who have been for a long time in a strange land, or when all those things which seemed so much more enduring than paving stones and area railings have passed from us, or, what is worse, have utterly changed.

Violet was beginning her happy girl's life in the world, and must have sympathy and kindly counsel and affection. Sir John was still living somewhat painfully his long invalid days. There were duties to take up, work to do, and a trivial round to be lived. But joy was over—youth was past; and in front of this woman whom you have followed so far on her way the future stretched in a long, grey, level, monotonous road. All the charm of existence was gone, and with it was gone, too, any very great desire for happiness. The days passed slowly one by one, and the very familiarity of her occupations showed how utterly the old power to enjoy had left her.

"I have returned to the house whence I came out," she said, "and I find it swept and garnished."

The utter emptiness of existence, the hideous blankness that follows on a period of intense feeling, hurt her like some tangible physical suffering. The time for taking up fresh interests had gone by, and she found herself envying Violet her zeal and delight in throwing herself into this or that fresh occupation. Eleanor was like some old person who, having aspired and again longed to

aspire, cannot now even wish that the feelings that once absorbed him could be experienced again.

She wondered sometimes if this was because she had been living too feverishly. Had she suffered and enjoyed too keenly? Had sensation grown weary before its time? And had she exhausted it in one short sparkling draught, greedily as a drunkard drinks his wine?

There is a wine cup which we call life. Wise men warn us that we must drink it slowly, and good men tell us that it must be pure. But each one mixes the cup for himself, and drinks it as he will. "Take this," the old and wise say to the young and foolish, "for this is the best wine." But the young and foolish have set their mind to some that sparkles in a golden cup. "Its sparkle is deceptive," say the old and wise, "and the cup is burnished by pain. Taste it not, for though it is sweet to the mouth, it is gall to the soul. It will render you dizzy with pleasure, but your eyes will be blinded so that you will not see which way you are going. Nay, you will be hardly conscious, as you hurry on, that you are treading upon the wounded and the weak. You will forget whence you came and whither you are going, yet you will hasten on as one pursued. And one morning you will wake to find that the wine is all drunk, and your cup is empty."

Why do the old and the wise waste their words?

While the wine draught sparkles in the golden cup will not the young and foolish drink of it ?

The days went by very slowly in a heavy, monotonous way. And some of the hopeless questionings of those who experience world-nausea, with its accompanying loss of appetite for life, began to nag at Eleanor McNeill. Why fight ? Why always try to smile ? Why work when nothing was worth the doing, and there were far too many people to do it. The essential of work here seemed to be failure—it was too evidently the condition attached to being allowed to work at all. Enthusiasm ended in sadness ; and the primary conception of the world beyond, which might provide some explanation of the life here, was its uncertainty. The recognized goods of life—what was the surest thing about them but that they vanish ? Their transiency was sufficient to render any thoughtful person inconsolable.

What solution had the cheerful optimist himself to offer but the hackneyed cry " Get up and do something ! " But such cheerful stupidity, buoyantly expressed, was surely not a rational answer to the perplexities of existence. What, indeed, did the words mean but " occupy yourself somehow, so that you may not have time to think ? " Those who dream of ultimates must necessarily be hopeless. The sadness of human

life may be idealized; it may be forgotten—it cannot be removed.

Why were so many people born—why so many tired lives—why such a crowded world? Yet even the sad ones of the earth do not wish for death. Death does not appeal to us as a cure for soul-sickness. Death sets its seal on failure and makes it irrevocable. It is only those who have accomplished something who are content to die.

The essential loneliness of each one's life in the world appalled her by its strange inexplicable melancholy. "We are a company of solitaries," she thought, "each one with his own longings, his own desires and hopes. And no one can tell what his brother thinks of. Love alone might be able to break down the barriers which hide us each from each, and separate us from our fellows. But for the solitary and the lonely life there is not even the sense of companionship in the dark. There is *Nothing*—nothing at all in the whole world.

And so the winter passed away. And it happened once, on an April day, as Eleanor walked down Cadogan Square, walked along the commonplace pavements in front of the conventional comfortable houses, she looked up and saw a light in the sky above the chimney-pots to the west. And of a sudden there arose a thought within her like the rising of the sap in Spring. She walked onwards, ever towards the west; her lips

parted, and her eyes were lit with the western light that shone upon them. The ugly crowded streets did not exist. She was alone, and her heart was stirring; and still she walked on, and found the place where she and the man who loved her had said good-bye.

She would never see him again: six feet of sandy soil in India covered Alec Campbell now; but the memory of a chivalrous and faithful love still remained.

It seemed to Eleanor that they had never felt nearer each other than they were this afternoon, as she walked up and down alone where they two had paced together.

Surely God had given him some greater love where he was!

The light faded, and she turned to walk to her home again. And that night, before she went to bed, Eleanor opened her window and listened. The hum and noise and unrest of London were audible even here; but the stars—another company of solitaries—shone serenely overhead.

She looked upwards and stretched out her arms, and into them she seemed to gather all the aching hearts, all the tired lives, into an infinitely compassionate, a splendid brotherhood.

"There is *Something*!"

Later, for she could not sleep, she went to her writing-table, and took from it paper and pen and

the little red volume with the locked clasp, and she began to write.

Eleanor found the fragment years afterwards, when she was an elderly woman with grey hair and a beautiful still face, thoughtful and courageous. I myself when I see her think sometimes of the multitude of the Redeemed, upon whose foreheads is set the mark of the Lamb. And her eyes wear the look such as one sees sometimes in the eyes of sailors, who can look further than a landsman can towards the world's outer rim, or in the eyes of those who have learned in some lonely voyaging to see beyond the line where the sun seems to sink.

The light was dawning as she wrote—

"There was once a woman who was alone, and her heart was empty. And one day God came to her and said, 'My child, I see that thy heart is empty. Choose now of Me what thou wilt, that thy heart may be filled.'

"And the woman said, 'Give me, I pray Thee, Love. For I have no one to call me dearest, nor any one to love me best.'

"'I will not answer thee yet,' said the King, 'but I shall go away and return to thee, and after that thou shalt make thy request.'

"It came to pass, after some while, that God came again to the woman, and said to her, 'Choose what thou wilt.'

" 'Give me Love,' the woman answered as before.

" And the King said, 'I will return once more to thee, and then thou shalt choose.'

" The woman wept, because her heart was empty. And she heard the cry even of those whose hearts seemed to be filled, saying also, 'Give us Love.'

" When God came to her the third time, the woman said, 'Oh, my Father, Thou knowest what are Thy best gifts, and Thou knowest me. Choose for me what Thou wilt, for I cannot choose for myself.'

" Then said the King, 'Lo! I give thee Myself, which is the Great Love. For this is the love of which all other love is but the shadow, and this is the gift which all the world is seeking.' "

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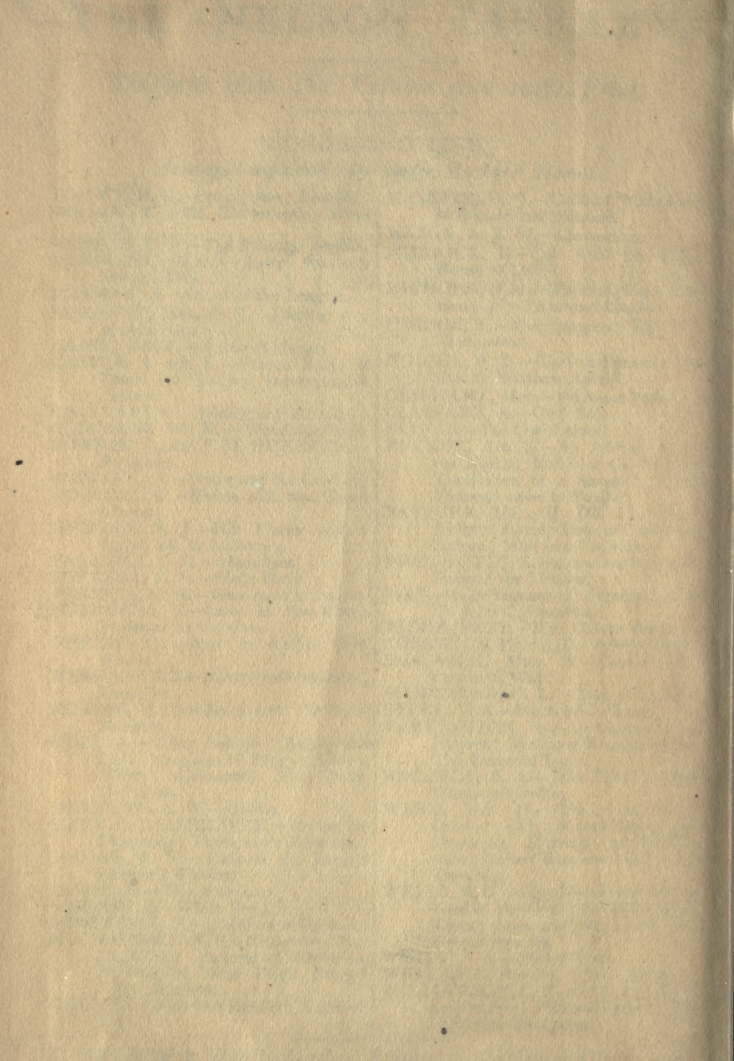

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