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NELLY CHANNELL.

"Until she came to the side of the brook." — Page 196.

NELLY CHANNELL.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"Strangers Yet," "A Woman's Glory," "What's in a Name," "Nothing but Leaves," etc.

With Four Illustrations.

Boston.

IRA BRADLEY & CO.,

162, WASHINGTON STREET.

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THE HOME AT HUNTSDEAN AND ITS NEW INMATES.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME AT HUNTSDEAN AND ITS NEW INMATES.

IT was the dreariest of November days. The only bright spot was a crimson sumach, spreading its gorgeous foliage against the watery grey of the sky, and misty back-ground of fog-hidden fields. It was a day that made the burdens of life seem heavier than they really were, and set the heart aching for the sunshine of the vanished summer.

The scene was as still as death. There was not wind enough to lift the pale vapours that hung over the meadows. No kindly breezes came to the poor brown leaves, heaped on the wayside, and carried them off to quiet hollows where they might have decent burial. Better rain and tempest than such a gloomy calm as this; and better the roar and rattle of the train

than the heavy jog-trot of the carrier's horses, and the rumble of his wagon.

"It will never be the same home again," said Rhoda Farren to herself, as the old grey cottage came in sight. There was the low, moss-grown wall, built of flints—there were the splendid sumachs, brightening the desolate garden. Rhoda and her cousin Helen had chased each other along those grassy paths when they were children. But they were women now, and had put away childish things. Rhoda loved her cousin reasonably well, yet not well enough to give up her own bedroom to her and her baby.

The baby was the principal grievance. Rhoda had had very little to do with children; and being of a studious turn, she did not want to improve her acquaintance with them. In reading her favourite books she always skipped the parts that related their sayings and doings. It was, therefore, no small cross to find an infant of two months old introduced into the family circle. For there she had hoped to reign supreme.

She had a presentiment that there would be rivalry between the baby and herself—a struggle for mastery, in which her little opponent might possibly be victor. "Baby lips would laugh her down," if she attempted remonstrance. Even parents and a fond brother might be won over to the cause of the small usurper.

For three years Rhoda Farren had been living away from home, only coming back for a fortnight at Christmas, and sometimes for a few days in midsummer. Neighbours and friends had looked upon her as fortunate. She had held the post of companion to the rich widow of a London merchant, and had been well treated, and not ill remunerated.

The widow was lately dead, and Miss Farren was returning to her home with an annuity of twenty pounds, to be paid regularly by Mrs. Elton's executors.

Mrs. Elton had not been difficult to live with; and her companion had adapted herself to her ways more readily than most girls of twenty

would have done. The quiet house in Cavendish Square had been no uncheerful home. But the mode of life there had strengthened Rhoda's habits of self-indulgence. She had had ample time for reading and musing. No harsh words had chafed her temper, no small nuisances had planted thorns in her path. They had few visitors. Weeks would pass without their hearing other voices than those of the servants. It did not matter to them that there were mighty things done in the great world. It was an unwholesome life for two women to lead—a life of cramped interests and narrow thoughts.

Helen had been living in Islington, while Rhoda was in Cavendish Square. But in those days Miss Farren never went to see anybody; and she excused herself for not visiting Helen by saying that Mrs. Elton did not like her to be gadding about. Thus it came to pass that she had not even once seen her cousin's husband.

She knew that Robert Clarris had taken

Helen from her situation of nursery governess, and had married her after a brief acquaintance. Rhoda's parents were Helen's only surviving relatives, and they had given their full consent to the match. It was not a bad match for a penniless girl to make; for Robert Clarris was a confidential clerk in the office of Mr. Elton, son of the widow in Cavendish Square.

It was in July that Mrs. Elton's health began to fail. Rhoda Farren saw the change stealing over her day by day, and knew what it portended. In a certain way she had been fond of the old woman; but it was an attachment without love. There would be no great pain when the ties between them were broken, and Rhoda was conscious of this. She was even angry with herself for not being more sorry that Mrs. Elton was dying.

"The worry of life is wearing me out, Rhoda," said the widow one day, when Miss Farren had found her violently agitated, and in tears. It surprised her not a little to hear that Mrs. Elton had any worries. But when the

wind shakes the full tree, there is always a great rustling of the leaves. The bare bough does not quake; it has nothing to lose. Mrs. Elton had been a rich woman from her youth upward, and she could not bear that a single leaf should be torn from her green branches.

"I have had a dreadful loss, Rhoda," she continued; "a loss in my business. The business is mine, you know. I always said my son should never have it while I was alive. But of course I have let him carry it on for me, and very badly he has managed! That confidential clerk of his—Clarris—has robbed me of three hundred pounds!"

"You surely don't mean my cousin Helen's husband, Mrs. Elton?" cried Rhoda.

"How should I know anything about his being your cousin's husband?" said the old lady peevishly. "His wife is a very unlucky woman, whoever she is. Three hundred pounds have been paid into Clarris's hands for me, and he has embezzled every shilling of it. My son always had a ridiculous habit of petting the

people he employed. This is what has come of it."

"Is he in prison?" faltered Rhoda

"No; I am sorry to say that he isn't. Those lazy idiots, the detectives, have let him slip. He has had the impertinence to write a canting letter to my son, telling him that every farthing shall be restored."

The fugitive was not captured. Perhaps Mr. Elton had a secret liking for the *ci-devant* clerk, and did not care to have him too hotly pursued. Poor lonely Helen had travelled without delay to her uncle's house, and there her little girl had entered this troublesome world. At the end of October Mrs. Elton had ceased to fret for the three hundred pounds, and had gone where gold and silver are of small account. And on this November afternoon Rhoda Farren had returned to her old home once more.

Bond, the carrier, had picked up Miss Farren and her belongings when the train had set her down at the rural railway station. Then came the five mile drive to Huntsdean, over the roads

that she had often traversed in her girlhood. The pallid mist clung to every branch of the familiar trees, and veiled the woodland alleys where she had watched the rabbits and squirrels in bygone times. Not a gleam of sunshine welcomed her back to the old haunts; not a brown hare leaped across her path; not a bird sent forth a note of welcome. Nature and Rhoda were in the same mood on that memorable day.

But if the whole scene had been radiant with flowers, Rhoda would still have chosen to "sit down upon her little handful of thorns." She told herself again and again that her good days were done. Was she not coming home to find the house invaded, and her own room occupied, by the wife and child of a thief?

Yes, a thief. She called him that hard name a dozen times, and even whispered it as she sat under the wagon-tilt. It is a humbling fact, that humanity finds relief in calling names. Ay, it is a miserable thing to know that we have fastened many a bitter epithet on some

whose names are written in the Book of Life.

"Wo!" cried Bond to his horses.

The ejaculation might have been applied to Rhoda; for it was a woful visage that emerged from the tilt and met the gaze of John Farren as he came out of the garden gate.

"You don't look quite so young as you did, Rhoda," he said when he had lifted her from the wagon and set her on her feet.

There are birds that pluck the feathers from their own breasts. For hours Rhoda had been silently graving lines upon her face, and deliberately destroying the bloom and freshness that God meant her to keep. But she did not like to be told of her handiwork. When Miss So-and-so's friends remark that she is getting *passé*, is it any comfort to her to know that her own restless nature, and not Time, has deprived her of her comeliness? Many a woman is lovelier in her maturity than in her youth. But it is a kind of beauty that comes with the knowledge of "the things that belong unto her peace."

John looked after her boxes, and paid the carrier. The wagon rumbled on through the village, the black retriever barking behind it, to the exasperation of Bond's dog, which was tethered under the wain. Then the brother put his hands on his sister's shoulders, glanced at her earnestly for a moment, and kissed her.

"Mother's waiting for you," he said.

As he spoke, Mrs. Farren appeared in the porch, and at the sight of her Rhoda's ill-temper was ready to take flight. But Helen was behind her, waiting too—waiting to weary her cousin with all the details of her wretched story, and expecting her, perhaps, to pity Robert Clarris.

"It's good to have you back again, my dear," said the mother's soft voice and glistening eyes.

"Ah, Rhoda!" piped Helen's treble, "we were children together, were we not? Oh! what sorrows I've gone through, and how I have been longing to talk to you!"

Before Miss Farren could reply, a feeble wail arose from the adjoining room. The baby had

lost no time in announcing its presence, and Helen hurried in to the cradle. Dim as the light was, her mother must have detected the annoyance on Rhoda's face. Or perhaps her quick instinct served her instead of sight, for she hastened to say—

"It doesn't often cry, poor little mite! But it has been ailing to-day."

There was only one flight of stairs in the house. As Rhoda slowly ascended them, the loud, steady ticking of the old clock brought back many a childish memory. Would the hours pass as swiftly and brightly as they had done in earlier years? She sighed as she thought of all the small miseries that would make time hang heavily on her hands. It never even occurred to her then that

"No true life is long."

A fretful spirit will spin hours out of minutes, and weeks out of days.

"I told you, Rhoda, my dear, that we had given your room to Helen. I said so in a

letter, didn't I?" remarked Mrs. Farren, leading the way into the chamber that she had prepared for her daughter. "This is nearly as good. And I felt sure that you would not grudge the larger room to that poor thing and her child."

"What is to be, must be," Rhoda replied.

"Don't stop to unpack anything," continued her mother, trying not to notice the gloomy answer. "Come downstairs again as soon as you can. There's a good fire, and a bit of something nice for tea. It's a kind of day that takes the light and colour out of everything," she added, with a slight shiver. "I'll never grumble at the weather that God sends; yet I'm always glad when we've got through November."

It was Rhoda who had brought the damp mist indoors. It was Rhoda—God forgive her—who had taken the light and colour out of everything. In looking back upon our lives, we must always see the dark spots where we cast our shadow on another's path—a path

which, perhaps, ran very close beside our own. It may be that our dear ones, enfolded in the sunlight of Paradise, have forgotten the gloom that we once threw over their earthly way. But we never can.

When Rhoda went down into the old parlour, she found it glowing with fire and candle light. Her father had come in from the wet fields and the sheepfolds, and was waiting to give her a welcome. Red curtains shut out the foggy evening; red lights danced on the well-spread table. The baby, lying open-eyed on Helen's lap, had its thumb in its mouth, and seemed disposed for quiet contemplation. The black retriever, stretched upon the hearth-rug, had finished a hard day's barking, and was taking his well-earned repose.

They gave her the best chair and the warmest seat. All that household love could do was done; and she began to thaw a little under its influence.

Once or twice Helen tried to introduce the subject of her troubles, but the farmer and his

wife quietly put it aside. Rhoda had made no secret of her resentment. There were many other things to be told; little episodes in village lives; little stories of neighbours and friends. The talk flowed on like a woodland stream that glides over this obstacle and under that. It was threading a difficult and intricate way, but it kept on flowing, till night broke up the family group.

II.

BROTHER AND SISTER.—RHODA FARREN PERPLEXED.

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THE father and mother retired first, then Helen. John seated himself in the farmer's large arm-chair, and looked at Rhoda as she sat on the other side of the fire. These after-supper talks had been a custom with them in the old days. The sister knew by her brother's glance that he understood her mood, and was prepared for a long chat.

It is a trying thing for a woman that a man will seldom begin a subject, however full his heart may be of it. He will wait, with indomitable patience, until she speaks the first word, and after that he will go on glibly enough. Rhoda first learned to understand something of man's nature by studying John, and she knew perfectly well that she should never get a

sentence out of him unless she broke the silence.

"Well," she said at last, with a little movement of impatience, "this is a miserable business. I never thought that I should come back to the old home and find the wife and child of a felon comfortably settled in it. But there is no end to sin—no limit to the audacity of criminals. It is not enough for Robert Clarris to rob his employer, he must also thrust his own lawful burdens on other folks' shoulders."

"When one commits a crime," replied John gravely, "one never foresees what it entails. When Clarris found that discovery was inevitable, he came home to his wife and asked her to fly with him. But she would not go——"

"How could she go?" interrupted Rhoda indignantly. "Think of her condition, and of the misery and disgrace of following his fortunes. He is a base man indeed."

John moved uneasily in his chair, and kept his eyes fixed on the burning log in the grate. More than once his lips opened and shut again.

"I suppose you'll be very hard on me," he said at length, "if I own that I've a sort of tenderness for this poor sinner. I don't mean to make light of his crime, but I believe that when he took the money he intended to pay it back."

"Oh, John," said Rhoda severely, "I am really ashamed of you! What has come to your moral perceptions? There is a saying that the way to hell is paved with good intentions; —of course this man will try to excuse himself. The world has got into a habit of petting its criminals, and it is one of the worst signs of the times. As Mrs. Elton used to say, it would be well if we could have the good old days back again!"

"The good old days when men were hung for sheep-stealing, and starving women were sentenced to death for taking a loaf!" retorted John with unusual heat. "How I hate to hear that cant about the good old days! And when the gallows and the pillory and the stocks were so busy, did they stop the Mohawks in

their fiendish pranks at night? or did they put down the Gordon riots till the mob had begun to sack and pillage London? I am glad the world is changed, and I hope it will go on changing."

"If we change from over-severity to over-mercy, we shall just have to go back to over-severity again," replied Rhoda.

"No, Rhoda," he said more calmly. "By that time we shall have got to the days 'when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas.'"

Rhoda looked at her brother and wondered. These were strange words to hear from a young man living in a Hampshire village, where everything seemed to be standing still. There was no more talk that night. It was evident to Rhoda that John had shot ahead of her in the road of life. Not being able to say whether he were in a bad way or a good way, she said nothing and went to bed.

III.

A SPARED LIFE.—NEWS FROM ROBERT CLARRIS.

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A GREAT sorrow is like a mountain in our way: we must either climb to its top, or lie grovelling at its base. If we grovel, the path of life is blocked up for ever, and the shadow of our misery is upon us night and day. If we climb, we shall find purer air and fairer regions. Heaven will be nearer to us, the world will lie beneath our feet;—we shall bless God for the trial that has lifted us so high above our old selves. We shall comprehend a little of the vast Love that reared the mountain;—ay, we shall break forth into singing, "Thou, Lord, of Thy goodness, hast made my hill so strong!"

It was clear that Helen would never climb her mountain. In the old days, although she was three years older than her cousin, Rhoda

had found out that nothing would ever lift her above the dead level of life. Always beautiful, always common-place, always a little sly—such were her childish characteristics, and they were unaltered by time. Her beauty was of that kind which inevitably gives a false impression. Every smile was a poem ; every glance seemed to tell of thoughts too deep for words. She was the very impersonation of the German Elle-maid—as hollow a piece of loveliness as ever sat by the roadside in the old Schwarzwald, and lured unwary travellers to accept the fatal goblet or kiss.

When she said, tearfully, that Robert Clarris had fallen in love at their first interview, and would not rest till he had married her, Rhoda knew that she spoke the simple truth. No one who looked into the eloquent brown eyes, and watched the play of the sweet lips, could marvel at Robert's impetuosity. One could understand how that fair face had drawn out the old Samson cry, "Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well."

"I might have done far better, Rhoda," she said, plaintively; "but I had a hard situation, and I wanted to get out of it. You don't know the misery of being nursery governess. One is just like the bat in the fable, neither a bird nor a beast—neither a lady nor a servant. The position is bad enough for an ugly girl; but it is ten times worse for a pretty one."

No one could blame Helen for speaking of her beauty as an established fact.

"When I was married to Robert," she continued, "I soon began to be disappointed in him. There was an end to all the nice little attentions. I was almost his goddess until I became his wife."

"Oh, that's a very old story," responded Rhoda. "Lovers are just like our old apple trees; one would think to see the quantity of blossom that there would be a deal of fruit; but there never is. Great promise and small fulfilment—that's always the case with men."

"He was dreadfully stingy," went on Helen, "He worried me sadly about my expenses. I

was not allowed enough money to keep myself decently dressed. I think he liked to see me shabby."

"You are wearing a very good dress at this moment," remarked Rhoda.

"Yes, this is well enough," answered her cousin, colouring slightly. "I was obliged to get things without his leave sometimes, or I should have looked like a scarecrow. Robert would never believe that I wanted any clothes."

"What did he do with the money that he stole?" Rhoda asked abruptly.

"How should I know?" sighed Helen. "He never gave a shilling of it to me. One day he came home and told me, quite suddenly, that his sin must be discovered. I thought that he was crazed, and when I found that he was in his right mind, I nearly lost my senses. Never get married, Rhoda; take my advice, and be a single woman. It's the only way to keep out of misery."

"I'm not thinking of marrying, Helen," replied Rhoda, rather sharply; "but every mar-

riage is not such a mistake as yours has been. God knew what He was about, I suppose, when He brought Adam and Eve together. There's little sense in abusing a good road just because you couldn't walk upright on it."

"You would not have found it easy to walk with Robert," said Helen, mournfully. "And now he has gone off, and has left me sticking in the mire! It's worse than being a widow."

Rhoda melted at once at the thought of Helen's desolate condition.

"Perhaps he may really get on in Australia," she rejoined, trying to speak hopefully; "and then he may send for you and the child.

"Oh, I hope not!" returned Helen, with a little start. "If he gets on, he will send home money for us; but I do not want to live with him again."

There can be no separation so utter and hopeless as that which parts two who have been made one. The closer the union, the more complete is the disunion. Even at that moment, when Rhoda's wrath was hot against

Robert Clarris, she was struck with Helen's entire lack of wifely feeling. She could almost have pitied the man who had so thoroughly alienated the mother of his child. And then she reflected that this dread of reunion on Helen's part told fearfully against him. Helen was weak, but was she not also gentle and affectionate? Better, indeed, was it for them to keep asunder until another life should present each to the other under a new aspect.

She did not pursue the subject further. With a sudden desire to be away from Helen and her troubles, she wrapped herself in a thick shawl, and went up the fields that rose behind the cottage. On the highest land the farmer was mending a fence. She could hear the strokes of his mallet as he drove the stakes into the ground.

As Rhoda drew near, she stood still and looked at him—a hale, handsome man, whose face, fringed by an iron-grey beard, was like a rosy russet apple set in grey lichen. His smock-frock showed white against the dark

background of brown trees. The air was so quiet that one could listen to his breathing as his strong arms dealt the sturdy blows.

She was proud of him as she stood there in the wide field watching him unseen. He would leave her nothing save the legacy of an unstained name, but the worth thereof was far above rubies. No one would sneer at her as the daughter of a disgraced man. No one would whisper, "She comes of a bad stock; take heed how you trust her." Many a rogue has wriggled out of well-earned punishment with the aid of his sire's good name. Many an honest Christian has gone groaning through life under the burden of a parent's evil reputation.

With this pride in him Rhoda was unconsciously blending a pride in herself. "Some eyes," she thought, "are too blind to see their blessings; I am quick of sight. The Author and Giver of all good things finds in me a grateful receiver."

Thus she loudly echoed the Pharisee's cry

"Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men." And never, perhaps, is the Divine patience so severely tried as when that self-complacent voice is heard. How sweet in Christ's ears must be those other voices—stealing up to Him through the egotist's loveless *Te Deum*—breathing the publican's old prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

It was a day of sober brightness. A white mist had risen above the western slopes, and the setting sun shone through it. Brown furrows had begun to take a rich auburn tinge; tree-shadows crept farther and farther across the green sod; crows flew heavily homewards. From the wet thickets came the old fresh ferny scents, sweetening the calm air. The mallet blows ceased; the farmer had ended his task, and turned towards his daughter.

"You are not sorry to get back to our fields, Rhoda?" he said. "You'll see the primroses showing their pretty faces by-and-by. Ah, it seems but yesterday that you

and Helen were filling your pinafores with them!"

"Helen's winter has come before its time, father," answered Miss Farren, gravely. "Her wicked husband has made her life desolate."

"And his own too," added the farmer, in a pitying tone.

"That is as it should be," returned Rhoda, quickly. "He has escaped the punishment he merited; but there's satisfaction in knowing that God's justice will surely reach him."

"Ay," murmured the farmer softly, "God's mercy will surely reach him."

"God's favour is for those who walk uprightly," said Rhoda.

"Ah, Rhoda, the mercy is granted before they learn to walk uprightly," replied her father. "It comes to those who have fallen and are ready to perish. There are few of us who can see ourselves in every criminal, as old Baxter did. And there are fewer still who can believe that a man may come out of the Slough of Despond cleaner than he went in."

They turned towards the house, walking silently down the green slopes. Rhoda was angry and perplexed; what was the use of living a respectable life if sinners were to be highly esteemed? When she spoke again it was in a harsh tone.

"Robert Clarris has found defenders, it seems! A man who has committed such a crime as his should scarcely be so lightly forgiven!"

"There is one thing I'd have you remember, Rhoda," said the farmer, patiently, "and that is, the difference between falling into sin and living in sin. It's just the difference between the man who loves and hugs his disease and he who writhes under it, and longs to be cured."

"Even supposing that this is Robert's first fault," continued Miss Farren, "there must have been a long course of unsteady walking before such a fall could be brought about."

"Maybe not," her father responded. "Some men lose their characters, Rhoda, as others lose their lives, by being off their guard for

one moment. And when you talk of God's justice, recollect that it means something very different from man's judgment. The Lord hates the sin worse than we do, but He knows what we can never know—the strength of the temptation."

By that time the pair had descended the last slope, and were drawing near the cottage. The back-door stood open. Rhoda could see the red glow of the kitchen fire, and the outline of her mother's figure as she moved to and fro. It was a pleasant glimpse of household warmth and light, and it charmed her ill temper away. But she did not remember that there might be wanderers in the world at that moment—driven out into life's wilderness by sin—whose hearts would well-nigh break at this little glimpse of a home. She did not think of that awful sense of loss which crime must leave behind it. Perhaps that open house-door had suggested thoughts like these to the farmer, for he paused before they entered.

"Rhoda," he said, solemnly, "never fall into the mistake of thinking that sinners aren't punished enough. It's a very common blunder. Many a man might have hanged himself, as Judas did, if Christ hadn't stepped in and shown him what the atonement is. It is to the Davids and Peters and Sauls that He says, 'Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.'"

November came to an end. December set in with biting winds and gloomy skies, and then followed a sharp, wintry Christmas.

It was a hard time for the birds. Rhoda would sit at the window and watch them congregating on the brier-bush in the corner of the garden. Now it was a plump thrush, puffing out its speckled breast, and feasting on the scarlet hips; now it was a blackbird, with dusky plumage and yellow bill. Then a score of finches and sparrows would alight on the frozen snow, and quarrel over the crumbs that she had scattered there. All day the sky was grey and clear; but sometimes

at sunset, a flush would rest upon the white fields, tinting them with the delicate pink of half-opened apple-blossoms.

On Christmas Eve, Rhoda Farren sat watching the hungry birds no longer. A little human life was drawing very near to immortality. The baby—Helen's wee, fragile baby —was hovering between two worlds.

And then, for the first time, all Rhoda's sleeping instincts started up, awake and strong. Anger and selfishness were alike forgotten. Let the solemn feet of death be heard upon the threshold of the house, and all the petty wranglings of its inmates are stilled. He was coming—"the angel with the amaranthine wreath"—but Rhoda held the little one in her arms, and prayed the Father to shut the door against him.

We know not what we ask when we pray for a child's life. We are pleading with the Good Shepherd that He will leave a little lamb in the wilderness instead of taking it into the fold. We are asking that it may

tread the long, toilsome way home, instead of the short, smooth path that leads straight to rest. Surely our Lord never loves us better than when He says nay to such prayers as these. When we become even as they—the little children—and enter into the kingdom, we shall understand the infinite compassion of His denial.

Christmas night closed in ; and outside the cottage, the mummers, gay in patchwork and ribbons, clashed their tin swords, and sang their foolish rhymes. John went out and entreated them to go away. A glance through the open door showed Rhoda the clear, broad moonlight, shining over the snow-waste, and she heard the subdued voices of the men as they went off to some happier house. Then the door closed again, and she saw nothing but the little child's wan face.

"If it were taken," she thought, "they should all feel something as the shepherds did when 'the angels were gone away from them into heaven.'" Even she had begun to realize that

a babe is indeed God's angel in a household. Often, like those Christmas angels, it stays just long enough to be the messenger of peace and good-will, and then returns to Him who sent it. Like them, it leaves us without an earth-stain on its vesture; without a regret for the world from which it is so soon withdrawn.

But Helen's little one was to remain. The household rejoiced, and Rhoda learnt to recognise herself in a new character. She became the baby's head-nurse and most devoted slave.

"Was there ever such a child?" she asked, as it gained strength and beauty. "It will be as pretty as Helen by-and-by."

"It has a look of Robert," said the farmer, thoughtfully.

Rhoda's smiles fled. She wanted to forget the relationship between that man and her darling. Nor was she without a fear that it might have inherited some touch of his evil nature. Her heart never softened towards him because he was the father of the child. And

yet how much richer her life had grown since she had taken the baby into it!

The snow lay long upon the ground. It was so lengthened a winter, that spring seemed to come suddenly. There was a burst of primroses on the borders of the fields. They lit up shady places with their pale yellow stars, and spread themselves out in sheets. Every puff of wind was sweet with the breath of violets; birds sang their old carols—now two or three clear notes—now a shake—then a long whistle. All God's works praised Him in the freshness of their new life. Old dry stumps, that Rhoda had thought dead and useless, began to put forth green shoots. The earth teemed with surprises; all around there was a continual assertion of vitality. And so hard is it to distinguish the barrenness of winter from the barrenness of death, that every spring has its seeming miracles. The tree that our impatient hands had well-nigh hewn down may be our sweetest shelter in the heat of summer noontide.

Not until the high winds had sent the blossoms drifting over the orchards like a second snowfall, did there come news of Helen's husband.

The tidings came through Mr. Elton. Clarris had written to him, enclosing a letter for his wife. He had also sent notes to the amount of forty pounds to his former employer. From time to time he promised money should be forwarded until the whole sum that he had taken was restored.

"I believe," wrote Mr. Elton to the farmer, "that he will keep his word. He does not, he declares, hope to wipe out his sin by this restitution. 'I am not one whit better than any other criminal,' he writes, 'but I have been more leniently dealt with than most of my brethren. God's mercy, acting through you, has done much for me.'"

Helen did not show Rhoda the letter that had been received. She was paler and sadder after reading it, but she said nothing about its contents. Rhoda took the child in her arms,

leaving its mother sitting in silence, and went out into the garden.

The wild winds had sunk to rest. A light shower had fallen in the early morning, beating out the sweetness of the new-born roses, and the long, soft grass. The old walks glittered and twinkled in the sunshine. The sky was radiantly blue, and the clouds were fair.

"After all," thought Rhoda, looking upward with a sudden lifting of the spirit, "heaven is full of forgiven sinners!"

IV.

AN INVITATION FROM SQUIRE DERRICK.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INVITATION FROM SQUIRE DERRICK.

As the summer advanced, Helen's spirits rose. She was not the pale, plaintive woman that Rhoda had found on her return from London. Her beauty brightened visibly, and more than one neighbour remarked that it was a sin and a shame for such a pretty creature to be tied up to a man who was nothing but a cross to her.

Perhaps Helen herself was of the same opinion. The baby was given up more and more to Rhoda's care, while its mother went freely to the villagers' houses. She was one of those women to whom admiration is as necessary as their daily food. Her pleasure in her own loveliness amused while it saddened her cousin. There was something in it that seemed akin to the delight of a child in its fine clothes.

Helen's mind had never grown with her body. But Rhoda and the others had got into the habit of viewing her weaknesses indulgently. And they gratified the little fancies that were, as a rule, harmless enough.

They had their first disagreement at the end of August. There was an early harvest that year. In the southern counties most of the wheat was cut and stacked before September set in. The crops were plentiful, and there was rejoicing on all sides. But it was not always the right kind of rejoicing.

"It's a strange way that some folks have got of thanking the Lord of the harvest," remarked Farmer Farren one day. "He gives them bread enough to satisfy all their wants, and they must needs show their gratitude by stupefying themselves with beer! I used to think, when I was a lad, that 'twas an odd thing for King David to go a-dancing before the Almighty with all his might. But there's more sense in dancing than in drinking for joy."

Father and daughter stood side by side, leaning against the garden wall; for it was evening, and the farmer's work was done. Just before he spoke, some drunken shouts disturbed the quiet air. Labourers were roystering in the village tavern, and many a wife's temper was sorely tried that night.

"O Uncle, I am glad you don't think it's wrong to dance!" cried Helen, coming suddenly out of the house. "Here's good news! Squire Derrick is going to give a feast in his park next Friday. I know that John can't go, because of his sprained ankle; but William Gill will drive us to the park in his chaise. There'll be room for Rhoda and me and Mrs. Gill."

"But, Helen, I don't go to merry-makings," said Rhoda, gravely. "We have never taken part in anything of that kind. And as to father's remark, King David's sort of dancing was very different from the waltzes and polkas and galops that there will be on Friday night."

Helen's face clouded like that of a disappointed child.

O Uncle, would there be any harm in my dancing?" she asked.

"No harm exactly, my girl," responded the farmer uneasily, as he picked a piece of dry moss off the wall. "But even when things are lawful, they are not always expedient. You are a married woman, you see, and your husband's under a cloud, and miles away—poor fellow!"

"Ah!" sighed Helen, "I'm always doomed to suffer for his sins! I thought that perhaps a little bit of fun would help me to forget my troubles."

Poor Helen was still grovelling at the foot of her mountain.

Large tears stood in her soft eyes. The farmer gave her a quick glance, then looked away, and busied himself with the little cushion of moss that still lay in his broad palm. At heart he was more than half a Puritan, and hated jigs and feastings as lustily

as did the Gideons and Grace-be-heres of Cromwell's day. But he was far too tender-natured a man to bear the sight of a woman's tears.

But for that unfortunate allusion which her father had made to Robert Clarris, Rhoda would have set her face as a flint against going to the fête. But his tone of pity stirred up all her old resentment. Why was this young wife, lovely and foolish, left without her lawful protector? Had she not said truly that she was doomed to suffer for his sins? After all, it was scarcely her fault, perhaps, that she was not elevated by her trial. To "erect ourselves above ourselves" is a bliss that we do not all reach. And it is a bliss which bears such a close relationship to pain, that one has no right to be hard on a fellow-mortal who chooses the lower ground.

Thoughts like these were passing through Rhoda's mind, while Helen still wept silently. But it did not occur to Miss Farren that the

truest kindness that can be done to another is to raise him. She forgot that it is better to stretch out a hand and say, "Friend, come up higher," than to step down to his level. At that moment she thought only of pacifying Helen. Of late her cousin had grown very dear to her, partly, perhaps, for the sake of her little child. Her whole soul recoiled from the harvest-feast. She hated the clownish merriment, and the dancing and drinking; and yet, to please Helen, she was willing to endure much that was distasteful.

"If you would promise not to dance, Helen," she began, hesitatingly. Her father looked up in undisguised astonishment.

"Why, Rhoda," he said, "I didn't think anything in the world would have made you go!"

"O Rhoda, how good of you to give way!" cried Helen, brightening. "Of course I'll promise. It's just like her, Uncle: she was always the most unselfish girl on earth! She doesn't despise me because I'm weak-minded,

and like a little bit of pleasure. Ah, how kind she is!"

The farmer said no more. He had a great reverence for his daughter, and would not take the matter out of her hands. But he went indoors with a grave face; and Helen followed him in a flutter of delight.

As Rhoda lingered that evening in the dewy twilight, she began to charge herself with cowardice. It would have been hard to have held out against Helen's desires. And yet—for Helen's own sake—ought she not to have been firm? Most of us suffer if we stifle our instincts; and hers had told her that this feast was no place for her cousin.

"It shall be the last time that I am weak," she thought, hoping to atone for the present by the future. "I will let her have her way this once, and then I will set myself to guide her in a better path."

The grey, transparent veil of dusk stole down, and the clear stars shone through it. A little wind came creeping up the garden

like a human sigh. One or two white moths flitted past, and a bird uttered a sleepy, smothered note. For a minute she loitered in the porch, listening to the pleasant, household stir within. Helen's laugh mingled with John's cheery tones and the clatter of supper-plates.

"Where is Rhoda?" she heard her mother say.

The jessamine, which grew all over the porch, swung its slender sprays into her face. The sweet, chill blossoms kissed her lips as she passed beneath them; but she went indoors with an unquiet mind.

V.

HELEN UNDER A NEW ASPECT.

CHAPTER V.

HELEN UNDER A NEW ASPECT.

ON Friday afternoon, Helen's chamber-door chanced to be left open, and Rhoda caught a glimpse of a delicate silk dress lying on the bed. She went straight into the room and examined it. Bodice and sleeves were trimmed profusely with costly lace; the rich lilac folds might have stood alone, so thick was the texture. It was not the sort of dress that should have belonged to the wife of a merchant's clerk. Rhoda was perplexed.

"Isn't it handsome!" asked Helen's voice behind her.

"I hope you are not thinking of wearing it this evening," said Rhoda. "It's a most unsuitable dress for a country merry-making. Do put on something plainer, Helen."

"O Rhoda," she pleaded, "I am not like

you; I can't abide browns and greys! I want to be dressed as the flowers are! You loved the lilacs when they were in bloom; why may I not copy them?"

"Their dress costs nothing," said Rhoda, "and the silk is a poor imitation of them. Even Solomon in all his glory wasn't arrayed like the lilies of the field. This gown must have been very expensive, Helen."

"It is the best I have," answered Helen, flushing slightly. "I should like to give it an airing, Rhoda. I own I am fond of fine clothes, but you are so kind that you won't be angry with a poor silly thing like me!"

Again Rhoda's strength was no match for her cousin's weakness. She went out of the room without saying another word about the lilac silk. An hour or two later William Gill's chaise stopped at the gate, and Helen came downstairs. She was enveloped in a large cloak which completely hid her dress from the eyes of her uncle and aunt. Her face was flushed; she was in high spirits. William

Gill — a prosperous young farmer — looked sheepishly pleased as she seated herself by his side.

Rhoda sat on the back seat with Mrs. Gill. It was a still, sultry evening. The languor of the waning summer seemed to have stolen upon her unawares, and the good woman found her a dull companion. Mrs. Gill was proud of her son, proud of his fine horse, a fiery young chestnut, proud of the chaise, which had been newly painted and varnished. But these subjects had little interest for Miss Farren. And the worthy matron became convinced that she was giving herself airs on the strength of her annuity. By the time they had reached the foot of Huntsdean hill, she was as silent as Rhoda could desire.

The church clock was striking seven as they turned in at the gates of Dykeley Park. Groups of people were scattered about under the trees. The hall door of Dykeley House stood open, and the sound of music swept forth into the evening air. Out of doors

there was the crimson of sunset staining the skies, reddening the faces of the countryfolk, and lighting up the west front of the old mansion, till its red bricks seemed to burn among the dark ivy and overblown white roses. Quiet pools, lying here and there about the park, glittered as if the old Cana miracle had been wrought upon them, and their waters were changed to wine. The colour was too intense, too fiery. It made Rhoda think of burning cities, or of the glare of beacons, blazing up to warn the land that the foe had crossed the border.

Squire Derrick's old banqueting hall had been cleared out for the dancers. The squire himself, a bachelor of sixty, received his guests as Sir Roger de Coverley might have done. Rhoda saw his eyes rest on beautiful Helen in the lilac silk, and his glance followed her wonderingly as she went sweeping away to a distant part of the great room. Other looks followed her too.

Nor could Rhoda keep her own gaze from

dwelling on her companion. When the long cloak had been laid aside, and Helen appeared in the lighted room, her cousin could hardly restrain an exclamation. There were jewels on her wrists and bosom, jewels on the white fingers that flashed when she took off her gloves to display them. A miserable sense of shame and confusion overwhelmed Miss Farren. Here was Helen bedizened like a Begum, and here were many of the Huntsdean folk who knew her husband's story! The air seemed full of whispers. Rhoda grew hot beneath the broad stare of eyes. Yet few glanced at her; the brown wren, reluctantly perched beside the glittering peacock, was sheltered from observation.

The musicians struck up a lively tune, and then Rhoda saw that there were several gay young officers in the room. They had come, by the squire's invitation, from the neighbouring garrison town, and were evidently prepared to enjoy themselves.

She was scarcely surprised to see two or

three of them bearing down upon Helen, bent on securing her for a partner. She heard their entreaties, and Helen's denials — very prettily uttered. But at that moment an old friend of Farmer Farren's crossed the room, and gave Rhoda a hearty greeting. Then followed a score of questions about herself and her parents, and in the midst of them Rhoda heard Helen's voice saying—

"Only one dance, Rhoda; you'll forgive me, I know."

Rhoda started, and half rose from her seat. Such a distressed and angry look crossed her face that the old farmer was astonished. Helen had gone off on her partner's arm. It was too late to call her back. She must take it as quietly as she could, and avoid making a scene.

"Who is that lovely young woman? Any relation of yours, Miss Farren?" asked the old man by her side.

"My cousin," Rhoda answered.

Several persons near were listening for her

reply. Rhoda hoped that her questioner would drop the subject, but he did not.

"Let me see; didn't I know her when she was a child in your father's house?"

"Very likely," Rhoda said. "She used to live with us when she was a little girl."

"And did I hear that she had married?" he persisted.

"She is married," said Rhoda, desperately. "Her husband is in Australia."

Obtuse as he was, the old gentleman could yet perceive that he had touched upon an awkward topic. Poor Rhoda was a bad actress. Her face always betrayed her feelings. She sat bolt upright against the wall, looking so intensely uncomfortable that her companion quitted her in dismay.

There she remained for three long hours; sometimes catching a glimpse of the lilac silk among the dancers. From fragments of talk that went on around her, she learned that Helen was the centre of attention. And at last, when a galop was over, and the groups parted

to left and right, she caught sight of her cousin surrounded by the officers.

She now saw Helen under a new aspect. Her looks and gestures were those of a practised coquette, who had spent half her life in ball-rooms. People were looking on—smiling, whispering, wondering. The squire himself was evidently amused and astonished. Even if she had been less beautiful, Helen's dress and jewellery would have attracted general notice. It was, perhaps, the most miserable evening that Rhoda had ever passed. "Am I my brother's keeper?" was the question that she asked herself a hundred times. Was she indeed to blame for suffering Helen to come to this place? The music and dancing and flattering speeches had fired Helen's blood like wine. The gaiety that would have been innocuous to many was poisonous to her.

At last a loud gong sounded the summons to supper. The repast was spread in a large tent which had been erected in the park. Out swept the crowd into the balmy August night,

Helen still clinging to the arm of her last partner, and carefully avoiding a glance in her cousin's direction. Rhoda strove in vain to get nearer to her; the press was too great. But she contrived to reach William Gill, and to say to him earnestly—

"We must go away as soon as supper is over, Mr. Gill. I promised father that we would come back early." The moon had risen, large and red, and the night was perfectly still. Chinese lanterns illuminated the great supper-tent from end to end. Flowers and evergreens, mingled with wheat ears, decorated the long tables. The light fell on rows of flushed and smiling faces. Rhoda, pale and sad, sat down on the end of a bench close to the tent entrance.

"I'm 'most worn out," said Mrs. Gill's voice beside her. "I'm downright glad that you're for going home early, Miss Farren. Old women like me are better a-bed than a-junketing at this time o' night! Mercy on us, how your cousin *has* been a-going on, my dear! And brought up so strict too!"

The words cut Rhoda like a knife. There she sat, lonely and miserable, amid a merry crowd. The golden moonshine flooded the park, and the sweet air kissed her face as she turned it wearily towards the tent-entrance. Once a sudden rush of perfume came in and overwhelmed her. It was the breath of the fast fading roses that hung in white clusters about the squire's windows, and shed their petals on the ground below.

VI.

"THE MASTER IS COME, AND CALLETH FOR THEE."

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"THE MASTER IS COME, AND CALLETH FOR THEE."

RHODA seized upon her cousin as she was passing out of the tent. She was resolved that Helen should not go back to the dancing-room. What was done could not be undone. But she would take her away before the crowd had begun to disperse.

"Come, Helen," she said, "I have your cloak and hat; you needn't go into the house again. Mr. Gill will get the chaise ready at once."

"O Rhoda, the fun is only just beginning," pleaded Helen. "And I have promised to dance——"

"Then you must break the promise. It won't be the first that you have broken to-night," added Rhoda, sharply.

She wrapped Helen in her cloak, and tied her

bonnet strings with her own hands. As they stood there, in the strange mingling of lamplight and moonlight, she could see that the lovely face looked half-frightened and half-mutinous. In an instant Rhoda repented of her momentary harshness; somehow she had never loved Helen better than she did at that instant.

"I'm sorry to spoil your pleasure, darling," she whispered; "but what will the father say if we are late?"

Helen's brow cleared. Without a word she walked straight to the place where the chaise was standing, and climbed up into her seat. William Gill, assisted by one of the squire's stable helpers, proceeded to harness the chestnut horse, and in a few moments more they had driven out of the park.

It was such a relief to Rhoda to be going homewards, that for some moments she could think of nothing else. The cool night air soothed and refreshed her. The rattle of wheels and the quick tramp of hoofs were the only

sounds that broke the silence. Cottages by the wayside were dark and still. The firs that bordered the road stood up rugged and black; not a tree-top rocked, not a branch rustled. The level highway was barred with deep shadows here and there. Overhead there was a soft, purple sky, and the moon hung like a globe of gold above the faintly outlined hills.

As they drew near the end of the three-mile drive, Rhoda's troubled thoughts came flocking back. All Huntsdean and Dykeley would be talking of Helen Clarris to-morrow. Her dress, her jewels, her levity, would give the tongues of the gossips plenty of work for months to come. The Farrens were a proud family in their way. They were over-sensitive—as such people always are—and hated to be talked about. Rhoda knew that the village chatter could not fail to reach her father's ears, and she knew, too, that it would vex him more than he would care to say. As Mrs. Gill had said, Helen had been strictly brought up. She had lived under her uncle's roof in her childhood, and had gone to

school with her cousin. All that had been done for Rhoda had been also done for her.

And then the jewels. Little as Miss Farre knew of the worth of such things, she had fel sure that they were of considerable valu Moreover, they were new and fashionable, and could not be mistaken for family heirlooms. Had Robert Clarris purchased them in his doting fondness for his wife? Were they love-gifts made soon after their marriage? Anyhow, Helen ought not to retain them. It was plainly her duty to dispose of them, and send the proceeds to Mr. Elton. Rhoda determined to speak to her about this matter on the morrow.

Just as she had formed this resolution, they turned out of the highway and entered the lane leading to Huntsdean. The road dipped suddenly; a sharp hill, overshadowed by trees, led into the village.

"Nearly home," said Mrs. Gill, rousing herself from a doze. The words had hardly passed her lips, when the chestnut horse started forward with a mad bound. It might have been

that William Gill's brain was confused with the squire's strong ale. A buckle had been carelessly fastened, and had given way. The horse's flanks were scourged and stung by the flapping strap. There was a wild plunge into the darkness of the lane, a terrible swaying from side to side, and then a jerk and a crash at the bottom of the hill.

For a few seconds Rhoda lay half stunned upon the wet grass and bracken by the wayside. She rose with a calmness that afterwards seemed the strangest part of that night's history. Mrs. Gill was sitting on the sod staring around her in a helpless way. The other two, William and Helen, were stretched motionless upon the stony road.

Still with that strange composure which never lasts long, Rhoda ran to the nearest cottage. Its windows were closed, and all was silent; but she beat hard upon the door with her clenched hands. A voice called to her from within, but she never ceased knocking until a labourer came forth.

"Hoskins," she said, as the man confronted her, "my cousin has been thrown out of Farmer Gill's chaise. You must come and carry her home."

The man came with her to the foot of the hill, and lifted Helen in his strong arms. Other help was forthcoming. The labourer's wife had roused her sons, and Mrs. Gill had collected her scattered senses.

They were but a quarter of a mile from home, but the distance seemed interminable to Rhoda as she sped on to the house. The familiar way appeared to lengthen as she ran; and when at last her hand touched the latch of the garden gate, her firmness suddenly broke down. She tottered as she reached the door, and then fell into John's arms, crying out that Helen was coming.

The farmer sat in his large arm-chair. The Bible lay open on the table before him, for he had been gathering the old strength and sweetness from its pages. He had not guessed that the strength would so soon be

needed. But it was his way to lay up stores for days of sorrow, and there was a look of quiet power in his face that helped those around him.

They carried Helen upstairs, and laid her on her bed. The lilac silk was dusty and blood-stained, the fragile lace soiled and torn. With tender hands Rhoda unclasped her glittering necklace and bracelets; the rings, too, slipped easily from the slight fingers. When those gay trinkets were out of sight, Rhoda's heart was more at ease. Helen was their own Helen without them; the jewels had done their best to make her like a stranger. There was little to do then but to wait until the doctor arrived.

As it will be with the day of the Lord, so it often is with the day of trouble. It comes "as a snare." Frequently, like the stag in the fable, we are looking for it in the very quarter from which it never proceeds. It steals upon us from another direction—suddenly, swiftly, "as a thief in the night."

But the children of the kingdom are "not in darkness, that that day should overtake them as a thief." They sleep, but their hearts wake; and there is light in their dwellings. Let the angels of death or of sorrow come when they will, they are ready to meet them. To the watchful and sober souls the Master's messengers are never messengers of wrath. Ay, though they come with dark garments and veiled faces, they bring some token of Him who sends them. The garments "smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia;" the glory of celestial love shines through the veil.

When Helen opened her eyes and looked round upon them all, they knew that there was death in her face. They knew it even before the doctor arrived, and told them the hard truth. She might linger a day or two perhaps, just long enough for a leave-taking, and then she must set forth on her lonely journey. But how were they to tell her that she must go?

"What did the doctor say?" she asked,

faintly, after a long, long silence. The day was breaking then, but they were still gathered round her bed—still waiting and watching with that new, calm patience that is born of great sorrow.

"Nelly," said the farmer, bending his head down to hers, "'The Master is come, and calleth for thee.' The call is sudden, my dear, very sudden. But it's the Master's voice that speaks."

First there was a startled, distressed look, but it passed away like a cloud. The brown eyes were full of eager inquiry.

"Must it be?" she whispered. "Ah, I see it must! Oh, I'm not ready—not nearly ready. There's so much to be forgiven; if I could only know that He forgives me, I wouldn't want to stay."

"Nelly!" answered the farmer in a clearer tone, "the Lord has got love and pardon for all those who want it. It's only from those that don't want it that He turns away. His blood has washed out the sins of that great

multitude whom no man can number, and it will cleanse you too. Do you think He ever expects to find any of His children who don't need washing? Ay, the darker they are in their own eyes, the fairer they seem in His!"

As Rhoda listened to her father's words, and to her cousin's low replies, she began to realize that poor, weak Helen had felt herself to be a sinner for many a day. She had felt it, and had tried to forget it. But this was not the first time that she had heard the Master's call, and yearned to follow Him. Yet the weakness of the flesh had prevailed again and again, and her feet had gone on stumbling on the dark mountains. They would never stumble any more. The great King had come Himself to guide them over the golden pavement to the mansion prepared in His Father's house.

All that day Rhoda's mother was by the bedside. Rhoda herself went to and fro, now ministering to the baby's wants, now hanging over her cousin's pillow. Once she stayed out

"She tarried with them until the breaking of another day." — Page 77.

of the room for nearly half-an-hour, and on entering it again, she saw her mother strangely agitated. Helen's head was on her aunt's bosom, and her pale lips were moving. But Rhoda could not hear what she said.

She tarried with them until the breaking of another day. The sun came up. Shadows of jessamine sprays were drawn sharply on the white blind; a glory of golden light fell on the chamber wall. Towards that light the dying face was turned. To Rhoda, at that moment, came a sudden impulse. Clearly and firmly she repeated the familiar lines that she and Helen had learnt years ago,—

"The wide arms of Mercy are spread to enfold thee,
And sinners may hope, for the Sinless has died."

For answer, there was a quick, bright smile, and then the half-breathed word—

"Forgiven."

Only an hour later, Rhoda was walking along the grassy garden-path with Helen's child in her arms. Was it yesterday that they

were children playing together? Had ten years or sixty minutes gone by since she died? If she had come suddenly out of the old summer-house among the beeches—a gay, smiling girl—Rhoda could scarcely have wondered. There are moments in life when we put time away from us altogether.

And yet one had to come back to the everyday world again—a very fair world on that morning. Newly-reaped fields lay bare and glistening in the sun; thistle-down drifted about in the languid air, and the baby stretched out her hands to grasp the butterflies. She looked up, wonderingly, with Helen's brown eyes, when Rhoda pressed her to her bosom and wept.

VII.

DISPOSING OF HELEN'S JEWELS.

CHAPTER VII.

DISPOSING OF HELEN'S JEWELS.

A MONTH went by. The household fell back into its old ways. The little child laughed and played, and grew dearer and dearer to them all.

Mrs. Farren had taken upon herself the task of looking over Helen's things. She performed this duty without any aid from Rhoda; and not one word did she say about the jewels. The farmer had written to Australia, breaking the sad news to Robert Clarris as gently as he could. How would he receive it? Rhoda wondered. They had left off speaking of him in her hearing. They were aware of all the bitter dislike that she cherished, but they never sought to soften her heart. They were content—as the wisest people are—to leave most things to time. We do not know

how often we wrong a friend by hotly defending him, nor how we help an enemy by running him down.

Now that Helen was gone, Rhoda was harassed by a new fear. She dreaded lest Robert should take away the child.

It was more than probable that he would marry again one day. A hard-natured, selfish man—such as she believed him to be—would need a wife to slave for him. Then he would send for Rhoda's ewe lamb, and there would be an end to her dream of future happiness. She did not realize that God seldom makes us happy in our own way. Blessings, like crosses, nearly always come from unexpected quarters. We search for honey in an empty hive, and find it at last in the carcase of a dead lion.

The Gills, mother and son, were little the worse for that night's catastrophe. Like all tragedies, Helen's death was a nine days' wonder. There was plenty of sympathy; there were condolences from all sides. And

then the excitement died out; the small topics of daily life resumed their old importance. And so the time went on.

At the end of October, the farmer received a reply to his letter. Rhoda refrained from asking any questions, and they did not tell her how the widower had borne the blow. She saw tears in her mother's eyes, and thought that a great deal of love and pity are wasted in the world. Long afterwards, her opinion changed, and she understood that money is often wasted—love and pity never. Thank God, it is only the things that "perish in the using" which we ever can waste!

On the very day after the Australian letter came, the black mare was put into the light cart. The farmer dressed himself in his best clothes, and carefully examined the harness. These were signs that he was going to drive to the town.

"Maybe it would do you no harm to come, Rhoda," he said, suddenly. "Put on your bonnet, and bring the little one."

Rhoda ran up into her room, and dressed herself in haste. Little Nelly crowed with glee when her small black pelisse was buttoned on. She was quite unconscious of the compassion that her mourning garments excited. And even when she was fairly seated in the cart, her shrill cries of delight brought a smile into the farmer's grave face.

It was one of the last, peaceful autumn days. The early morning sky had been covered with a grey curtain, whose golden fringes swept the hills from east to west. As the sun rose higher, the clouds were lifted, the bright fringes broadened, and there was light upon all the land.

Rhoda and her father did not talk much. Her instincts told her that he was disposed to be silent; and there was a great deal to occupy eyes and mind. The bindweed hung its large white flowers across the yellow hedges. The wild honeysuckle, in its second bloom, was like an old friend who comes back to comfort us in our declining fortunes. They

reached at length the brow of the great chalk hill that overlooks the harbour. There lay the sea—a waste of soft blue-grey, touched with gleams of gold and dashes of silver. There, too, lay the Isle of Wight in the tranquil sunshine. The mare trotted on, down hill all the way, till they entered the noisy streets of the busy seaport, and left peace and poetry behind.

The farmer stopped at last before a silversmith's shop. He put the reins into Rhoda's hand, took a little wooden box from under his seat, and descended from the cart. For a few seconds his daughter was utterly bewildered. The stock of family plate was limited to a cream-jug and spoons. And even if they had made up their minds to part with those treasures, the proceeds would hardly have recompensed them for the sacrifice. Yet what could be the contents of the wooden box that her father had carried into the shop? The truth flashed upon Rhoda. He was disposing of Helen's jewels. He had obtained her husband's permission to sell them.

He came out again with a sober face. The silversmith came too, rubbing his hands as if he were not ill satisfied with his bargain. He wished the farmer good day, and the mare jogged steadily back to Huntsdean.

But Rhoda learnt, long afterwards, that the money for which the jewels were sold did not go to Mr. Elton. It went towards the maintenance of Helen's child.

VIII.

THE FARM PURCHASED BY ONE RALPH CHANNELL.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FARM PURCHASED BY ONE RALPH CHANNELL.

EIGHT years passed away. In Huntsdean churchyard the grass had grown over Helen's grave, covering up the bare, brown earth, as new interests cover an old sorrow.

Little Nelly had never realized her loss. It contented her to know that her mother had been laid to rest in a sweet place, and would rise again some day when the Lord called her. She always hoped that Helen might rise in the spring, and find the primroses blooming round her pretty grave. She might have fancied that, like Keats, her mother could "feel the flowers growing over her." Children and poets often have the same fancies.

November had come again; and with it came a new anxiety.

The small farm, rented by Farmer Farren, had passed into new hands. Squire Derrick was dead, and "another king arose, who knew not Joseph." The heir was a needy, grasping man. Old tenants were nothing to him, and he was in want of ready money.

He had made up his mind to sell the little farm. It was more than likely, therefore, that the Farrens would be turned out of the old nest. For the young, it is easy to build new homes, and gather new associations around them; but for the old, it is well-nigh impossible. Their very lives are built into the ancient walls. When they leave a familiar dwelling, they long to go straight to "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

John was now bailiff to a rich landowner in Sussex. He had a wife and child; but he was not unmindful of other ties. "Come to me," he wrote, "if you are turned out of the old place." But the parents sighed and shook their heads. They had not greatly prospered

in Huntsdean, yet no other spot on earth could be so dear to them.

"Whatever the Lord means me to do, I'll strive to do it willingly," said the farmer, bravely. "Oftentimes I'm mighty vexed with myself for clinging so hard to these old bricks and mortar, and those few fields yonder. If I leave them, I shan't leave my Lord behind me; and if I stay with them, He'll soon be calling me away. But you see, an old man has his whims; and I wanted to step out of this old cottage into my Father's house."

In this time of uncertainty, a new duty suddenly called Rhoda from home. Her father's only sister—a childless widow—lay dying in Norfolk, and sent for her niece to come and nurse her.

It was decided that she must go. Her aunt had no other relatives, and could not be left alone in her need. But it was with a heavy heart that Rhoda said farewell to the three whom she loved best on earth, and set out on her long, solitary journey.

It was a keen, clear morning when she went away. A brisk wind was blowing; the brown leaves fled before it, as the hosts of the Amorites before the sword of Joshua. In dire confusion they hurried along over soft turf and stony ground. It was a day on which all things seemed to be astir. Crows were cawing, and flying from tree to tree; magpies flashed across the road; flocks of small birds assembled on the sear hedges. And far off could be heard the clamour of foxhounds and shouts of the huntsmen.

Rhoda wondered, with a pang, how it would be when she came back. Do we ever leave any beloved place without fearing that a change may fall upon it in our absence? It is at such times as these that the heart loves to rest itself upon the Immutable. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place from all generations." "Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."

It was a weary sojourn in Norfolk. The widow's illness was long and trying. But

God has a way of making hard work seem easy; and He lightened Rhoda's labour with good news from home.

Two months passed by, and her aunt still hovered between life and death. Mrs. Farren's letters had not given any definite reason for hope; and yet hopefulness pervaded every line, and clung to every sentence like a sweet perfume. Rhoda felt its influence and rejoiced. And at last, when January came to an end, the mother spoke out plainly.

The farm was purchased by one Ralph Channell. He was a prosperous man who had come from Australia, and had been settled in England about a year. He was quite alone in the world, and had proposed to take up his abode with the Farrens in the old cottage. The farmer was to manage everything as usual. No change would be made in any of their household ways. Mr. Channell had been acquainted with Robert Clarris in Australia, and it was through Clarris that he had first heard of the Farrens. What he asked of

them was a home. They might have the old house rent-free, if they would let him live in it with them.

Thus, a heavy burden was lifted from Rhoda's heart. Mrs. Farren's letter was a psalm of thanksgiving from beginning to end. "In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," she wrote, in her gladness. And Rhoda's spirit caught up the joyful strain. Yet she once found herself wishing that Mr Channell had not been one of Robert Clarris's friends. True, Clarris had long ago restored the three hundred pounds, and had regularly sent money for his child's support. But was not the old taint upon him still?

Rhoda could never get rid of the notion that he had been too leniently dealt with. Hers was a mind which always clings to an idea. Moreover, her life, from its very beginning, had been a narrow life. She had never been called upon to battle with a strong temptation. But, like all whose strength has not

been tried, she believed that she could have stood any test. It is easy for him who sits in peace to cry shame on the soldier who deserts his post. There are few of us who cannot be heroes in imagination. And most of our harsh judgments come from a narrow experience.

We can only learn something of the power of Divine Love by knowing the evil against which it contends. Those who want to see what God's grace can do must look for its light in dark places.

When February and March had gone by, Rhoda found herself free to go home. She went back to the sweet lights and shadows of April; to the glitter of fresh showers, and the scent of hyacinths and wall-flowers. Her mother's arms were opened to her. Nelly clung to her neck, half-crying for joy. Her father and Mr. Channell were out in the meadows, they told her; they would come indoors for tea. It was Nelly who had most to say about the stranger.

"You never knew anybody so kind, Rhoda," she said, earnestly. "He makes us all happy, and he's taken me to see mother's grave every Sunday while you were away."

Rhoda was standing at the back-door when she saw them coming from the fields. Nelly, with her pinafore full of kittens, still chattered by her side. Just in front of the door was the old cherry-tree, covered with silvery blossoms and spangled with rain-drops. It looked like a bridal bouquet hung with diamonds. Men were sowing barley in the acres beyond the fence. Rhoda was watching the blossoms and the sowers, and yet she saw those two figures.

The first glance told her that Mr. Channell was a strong man. In his younger days he might have been almost handsome, but he was one of those men who had lost youth early in life. It was a face with which sorrow had been very busy, and hard work had put the finishing touches to the lines that sorrow had begun. Rhoda did not know what it was

in this man that made her think of Luther. But when she looked at him she saw the same kind of peace that the reformer's features might have worn. It may be that there is a family likeness among all God's Greathearts. For all those who have fought the good fight must show "the seal of the living God" on their foreheads as well as the scars of the conflict. Even our dim eyes may see the difference between the marks that are got in the devil's service and those that have been won in the battles of the Lord.

From that very day there was a change in Rhoda's life. Some of us, in looking back on our lives, can remember the exact spot where the old straight road took a turn at last. It had run on so long in the same even line, that we thought there would never be any change at all. Other roads had always been crooked—full of twists and ups and downs; ours never varied. But at last, when it looked straightest and smoothest, the turn came.

Rhoda began to think that the world was

widening, as we all do when an expanding process is going on within ourselves.

First she found out that the old cottage was a much pleasanter place than it used to be, and that the parents seemed growing younger instead of older. Mr. Channell discovered all their little likings and dislikings and carefully studied them. Some folks think they have done wonders if they scatter flowers in a friend's path, but Ralph Channell's work was the quiet removal of the thorns. Perhaps the best labourers in the world are those who have striven to undo evil rather than to do good, but they are not those who have had the most praise.

He had brought a goodly number of books to Huntsdean, but Rhoda learnt more from the life-histories that he told her than from the printed volumes. They helped her to read the books by a new light.

In his way—and it was a very unassuming way—he had been doing missionary work in Melbourne. And in listening to him Rhoda

first understood how Christ's love follows the sinner, and hunts him into the darkest corners of the earth rather than lose him. In this universe, where wheat and tares grow together, and angels and devils strive together, mercy never rests. For the prince of darkness is not so active as He who hath said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." If the devil "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour," the Good Shepherd is seeking, too, to save them that are lost. There is only one power stronger than hate, and that is love.

In this strain did Mr. Channell talk to Rhoda. The spring passed away, summer days came and went, and still no mention had ever been made by either of them of Robert Clarris. At last, however, his name was brought up abruptly by Rhoda herself.

IX.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF BATTLE.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF BATTLE.

ON a Sunday afternoon these two, Ralph and Rhoda, had strayed out into the old orchard at the back of the house. The summer world was just then in all its glory. The meadows looked as if a flowery robe had been shaken out over them; the orchard grass was full of tall, shiny buttercups and large field-daisies, resplendent in their snowy frills. A turquoise sky smiled down through the leaf-laden boughs above their heads; bees were murmuring all around them.

"Mr. Channell," asked Rhoda, suddenly, "you know Nelly's father, don't you?"

He stooped and gathered one of the large daisies. For a moment there was no reply. The bees filled up the pause while she waited for his answer.

"Yes," he said at last," "I know him well."

"Is he really penitent?" she inquired, doubtfully. "Does he think that what he has done has blotted out the past? It's easy to whitewash a dirty wall, but the stains are underneath the whitewash still."

"There is a vast difference between the stain which is only whitewashed over, and that which Christ's blood has blotted out," replied Mr. Channell. "I don't believe that Robert Clarris can ever forget the past, or think that he has atoned for it. But he knows that the Lord has put away his sin."

"How does he know it?" Rhoda demanded.

"Until he had committed that great crime," Ralph went on, "he knew nothing at all of the love of Christ. He had been a moral man, satisfied with his morality. Then came secret sorrows—then much worldly perplexity, followed by a strong temptation—and he fell. And when he lay grovelling in the dust, the Lord's voice travelled to him along the ground.

While he had walked erect, he had never heard it."

"Wasn't Mr. Elton over-merciful to him?" asked Rhoda. "I have often thought so."

A sudden light seemed to kindle in Ralph's eyes.

"There are many," he said, "who pray Sunday after Sunday that the Lord will raise up them that fall, and yet do all they can to keep the fallen ones down. Mr. Elton was not one of those. He thought that if half the blows that were spent upon sinners were bestowed upon Satan, the Evil One would indeed be beaten down under our feet. God bless him! He saved a sinner from the consequences of one dark hour!"

Again there was a pause. This time it was broken by little Nelly, who came bounding in between them. Ralph bent down and clasped the child closely in his arms.

"Oh, my darling," he said, as he held her "may the Lord make you one of His handmaidens! May He send you forth to raise

up them that fall, and to bind up the broken in heart!"

Perhaps it was not the first time that Nelly had heard this prayer. It did not surprise her as it did Rhoda. Miss Farren watched Ralph's face earnestly, till it had regained its usual look of peace.

"Mr. Channell," she began, yielding to a sudden impulse, "I'm sure you must have suffered a great deal. Forgive me for saying so much," she added, "but I've sometimes thought that you have the look of a victor."

He turned towards the house, holding Nelly's hand in his.

"I must answer you in another's words," he replied. "They are better than any of mine. 'To me also was given, if not victory, yet the consciousness of battle, and the resolve to persevere therein while life or faculty is left.'"

"The consciousness of battle," Rhoda repeated to herself. "Perhaps that was what St. Paul felt when he found a law in his

members warring against the law in his mind. And perhaps it's a bad thing to be conscious of no warfare at all."

And then she began to wonder if she were anything like Robert Clarris before he fell. Had she ever really heard the Lord's voice? Were not her ears deafened by the clamour of self-conceit? Alas, it goes ill with us when we mistake the voice of self-congratulation for the voice of God!

But there came a time when Rhoda reached the very bottom of the Valley of Humiliation. She grew conscious that she, a strong, self-reliant woman, had silently given a love that had never been asked of her. When a man takes a woman by the hand, and lifts her above her old self, it is ten to one that she falls in love with him.

We all know what it is to wonder at the change that love makes in a woman. We have marvelled often what that clever man could have seen in this commonplace girl, but we admit that he has made her a new

creature. Perhaps, like the great sculptor, he attacked the marble block with Divine fervour, believing that an angel was imprisoned in it. And his instincts were not wrong after all. The shapeless stone was chipped away and the beautiful form revealed.

But Rhoda had no reason to think that Ralph Channell cared for her more than for others. In every respect he was above her. The rector (rectors are great persons in country villages) had found out that Mr. Channell was a thoughtful and cultivated man. The rector's family said that he was charming, and they wondered why he shut himself up with the Farrens in their dull cottage. Nobody ever intimated that he was thinking of Rhoda. All the country people had settled that she was to be an old maid. She was too good for the farmers, and not good enough for the squires' sons. And for many a year Rhoda had been very comfortably resigned to her fate.

Bit by bit, however, she had let her heart

go, and she awoke one day, suddenly and miserably, to the knowledge that she had parted with the best part of herself. There is no need to tell how or when she made the discovery. A chance word, a trivial incident, may send us to look into the casket where we kept our treasure, and we find it empty.

X.

THE STORY OF THE ONE DARK HOUR

CHAPTER X

THE STORY OF THE ONE DARK HOUR.

RHODA tried hard to conceal her loss. Now that the treasure was gone, she double-locked the casket. No one, she resolved, should know how poor she was. So well did she play her part, that those around thought her sterner and harder—that was all.

Her manner to Ralph changed visibly. She began to avoid his company; their familiar conversations were at an end. Her whole energy was now devoted to one endeavour—to keep him in ignorance of that which he had won. If she were poor, he should be none the richer. And thus, poor soul, she went about her daily duties, putting on a hard face to hide her weakness. Even Nelly found that Rhoda was not so pleasant as she used to be, and the child turned

more and more to Mr. Channell. Was he gaining her too?

"I am losing everything, and he is getting everything," said Rhoda, to herself. "Perhaps this is God's way of showing me how small my strength is. Haven't I lost the very thing that I thought myself best able to keep?"

It will always be so with those whom the Lord teaches. In one way or another the humbling process must be gone through. Sometimes it is seen of all men; sometimes it is known to Him alone. But as certainly as He loves us "shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off, for the Lord hath spoken it." In the soul that He makes his own He will not leave a single peg to hang self-confidence upon. And when our chamber walls are bare, and the tawdry rags of self-esteem are swept out, He will enter and fill the room with sweetness.

One afternoon, in the golden harvest-time, Rhoda and Nelly sauntered up into the wheat-fields. The reapers were resting under the hedges; in the largest field nearly all the corn had been gathered into sheaves. Rhoda tired quickly now; for when the heart is heavy, the limbs are apt to be weary. She stopped in the middle of the field and dropped down to rest, leaning her back against a great russet shock. A few stray ears nodded overhead, and Nelly nestled under their shadow.

She had always been an impulsive child, one of those children who will ask any question that comes into their heads, and a good many come. She had no notion of restraining her curiosity. If anything puzzled her, she must always have it explained.

"Rhoda," she said, suddenly, in her clear little voice, "what has Mr. Channell done to offend you? Don't you like him?"

The words struck Rhoda like a sharp unexpected blow. Without a moment's pause she cried out harshly and bitterly—

"I wish he'd never come here, Nelly; I wish you and I had never seen him!"

Nelly was so startled by the passionate tone that she jumped up from her seat. As she moved, somebody on the other side of the shock moved also. It was Mr. Channell. Rhoda turned her head in time to see him walking away. In an instant she realized that he had heard all, but she dared not think of the construction that would be put upon her outburst. Perhaps she had mortally offended her father's best friend; perhaps he would go away from them all for ever.

"Oh, what a wretched woman I am!" she groaned, aloud. And then she saw that Nelly had run off after Ralph Channell.

She rose slowly, and wandered back again to the cottage. The doors and windows were set wide open. Her mother sat peacefully knitting in the parlour, but Rhoda went straight upstairs to her own room. Nobody could do her any good just then. She wanted to be alone and get her senses together. Her

head ached, and she had a dazed, helpless feeling of having cut herself off from everything comforting. So she sat down for a few minutes by the bedside, then got up, and fell suddenly on her knees.

In her prayer she did not get much beyond telling God that she was miserable. It was rather an outpouring of sorrow than a plea for help. But it was her first heartfelt confession of utter weakness, and perhaps that was the best way of asking for strength. The stray sheep that falls helpless at the Shepherd's feet is sure to be folded in His arms and carried in His bosom.

She could not go down and sit at the tea-table as usual, and no one came to disturb her in her solitude. But at last, when the shadows were lengthening over the fields, and the distant church-clock struck six, she heard a footstep on the stairs. The door opened softly, and her mother's face looked in.

"May I come to you, Rhoda?" she asked, gently.

"Yes, mother," Rhoda answered. "I know how shocked and hurt you must be," she added. "But, indeed, I couldn't help it."

"O Rhoda," said Mrs. Farren, "we've all thought you seemed stern and strange lately, but we didn't know until to-day that you had found out our secret. *He* says that it has been all wrong from the beginning; he thinks you ought to have heard the truth at once."

"The truth, mother?" echoed Rhoda. "What is it that you mean?"

"He says, dear Rhoda, that he ought to have told you who he was," Mrs. Farren replied. "He sees now that it was wrong to come here under a new name."

"A new name!" her daughter repeated. "For pity's sake, mother, speak plainly. Who is he, if he is not Ralph Channell?"

"We all thought you must have found out," said Mrs. Farren, in a perplexed tone. "He is poor Helen's husband—Robert Clarris."

It was not until some minutes had passed away that Rhoda was calm enough to hear

her mother's story. The two sat hand in hand, nearer to each other in heart than they had ever been before. Perhaps Mrs. Farren had always been a little afraid of her daughter; but now that she had got a glimpse into Rhoda's inner self the reserve vanished.

"We had always felt sure that Robert was no practised sinner," she began; "but we did not know what it was that had driven him to a crime—we only guessed something like the truth. O Rhoda, it's an awful thing when vanity gets the upper hand with a woman! Poor Helen made a sad confession to me when she lay dying in this very room. It's hard to speak of the faults of the dead; but there's justice to be done to the living."

"Whatever her faults may have been, they were no worse than mine," Rhoda said, humbly; "and she has done with sinning now, while I shall be going on—perhaps for years longer."

"Helen got deeply into debt," Mrs. Farren continued; "and she used, I am afraid, to go

to balls and theatres without her husband's knowledge. He was sent away sometimes on business by Mr. Elton. But don't think her worse than she was, Rhoda—she loved gaiety and admiration passionately, but she wasn't a bad woman at heart—he always knew and believed that; yet she got him into terrible difficulties, poor child! And at last, when her debts had amounted to three hundred pounds, she flung herself at his feet and confessed the truth."

Both the women were crying. It was indeed hard to expose the faults and follies of the dead. They felt as if they had been tearing the soft turf and sweet flowers from Helen's grave; and yet it had to be done.

"Robert was not a converted man at that time," went on Mrs. Farren. "The blow knocked him down, and utterly bewildered him. He saw no means at all of paying the debts, and he knew they must be paid immediately. Helen hadn't confessed till her creditors had driven her to extremities; and

he went into the city in a state of despair, for there was 'no help for him in his God.' Perhaps he would have asked aid from his employer if Mr. Elton had been the owner of the business. But old Mrs. Elton was a close woman, and her son did nothing without her consent."

Rhoda could almost guess what was coming. She could see now that man's extremity is often the devil's opportunity. If a soul does not seek help from God, the prince of darkness steps in.

"On that very morning," said Mrs. Farren, "he found a note from Mr. Elton waiting for him in the office. His master told him that he had been suddenly called off to Ireland to look after some property there. He should be absent six weeks—perhaps longer. Clarris was to take his place and manage things, as he always did while Mr. Elton was away. And just an hour or two later a sunburnt, sailor-like man came in, and clapped Robert on the shoulder. Robert, poor fellow, didn't

recollect him at first; but when he said that he was Frank Ridley, and that he had come to pay a debt of long standing, he remembered all about him."

"Oh! mother, why did he come just then?" sighed Rhoda.

"The Lord suffered it to be so," Mrs. Farren answered. "Christ's hour was not yet come. That was the devil's hour, and a dark hour it was."

She went on with the story in her own straightforward way. Frank Ridley and Mr. Elton had been schoolfellows and dear friends. But while Elton was steady and painstaking, even in boyhood, Frank was a never-do-well. One chance after another slipped through his fingers; situations were got and lost. At last some new opening offered itself; but money was needed, and Frank was at that time almost penniless. He came to Elton in his strait, and asked for the loan of three hundred pounds.

To everybody's surprise, Mrs. Elton lent

him the sum. She had a liking for handsome young Ridley, and opened her purse with a good grace for his sake. But Frank's undertaking was, as usual, a dead failure, and the money was hopelessly lost. Ridley himself was lost too. For eight years he was neither seen nor heard of; and then he turned up again in Elton's office with a pocket-book stuffed with bank-notes.

"I've found out my vocation at last," he shouted, in his hearty tones. "I'm captain of a trading vessel, and I've traded on my own account to good purpose. Here's the three hundred, and I'm downright sorry that I must be off again without seeing your governor, Clarris."

Robert received the money—all in notes—and gave a receipt; and then the sailor went his way. After that the enemy came in like a flood, and the deep waters rushed over Robert's soul. He did not cry, "Lord, save, or I perish!" Alas! he thought of everything rather than of Him who is able to save

to the uttermost. Here was the exact sum that was needed. Frank Ridley was off on his voyages again, and would never, perhaps, return. Robert had only to put the notes in his pocket, and make no entry in the ledger. Of course there was a certain risk in doing this; but it was very unlikely that anything would be found out. And here was the sum —the very sum that was wanted—within his grasp. He would pay it all back; he would work night and day to do that. He caught at that honest resolution, and clung to it as a man clings to a frail spar when the ship goes to pieces.

This was Apollyon's hour of triumph. Robert went out and paid Helen's bills on that very night. But the burden that he had taken up was far heavier than that which he had thrown off. It was on a Monday morning that he had received Ridley's money; and the succeeding days dragged on as if each day were weighted with iron fetters, till Saturday came. Robert wrote to his master

daily, entering into all the details of business as minutely as usual. Then on the Sunday morning—that last Sunday that he ever spent with Helen—he went upstairs after breakfast, and laid down upon his bed. The sense of sin and shame was upon him; he would not mock God by going to church and looking like a respectable man. His wife did not know what ailed him. He had told her that the debts were paid—that was all.

Monday came again, the anniversary of his sin. And there, on the office-desk, lay a letter addressed to himself in his master's hand-writing. It had been written on Saturday, and was dated from Dublin.

"I find I am at liberty to come home at once," Mr. Elton wrote. "I have found a friend here who will look after the property for me. Strangely enough, I ran against Frank Ridley yesterday, and could scarcely believe my own eyes. He had come to Dublin in quest of an old sweetheart. He told me that he had called at the office, and had paid

his old debt. He showed me your receipt when I looked incredulous. I am rather surprised that you did not mention this in your letters."

Robert Clarris put on his hat and coat and went quietly into the outer office.

"Blake," he said, calling the eldest of the under clerks, "I am not well, and must go home at once. I leave the keys in your charge, for I know you may be trusted."

Blake — an honest fellow — looked into Clarris's face, and saw that he spoke the truth.

Then followed the last miserable interview with Helen, and the hurried preparations for flight. His wife entreated that she might go away to her old home, under her uncle's roof. She had brought him nothing but trouble, she owned piteously; and he would get on better without her. Alas, poor Helen! a sorry helpmeet she had been to the man who had loved her! These two had not asked the Lord to their marriage-feast, and had never drunk of the wine of His love. And so they

parted, never to meet again till they should meet at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In Melbourne there was one Ralph Channell, who had been the friend of Robert's father, and the miserable man found him out. He told Mr. Channell his whole story. Nothing was concealed. The sin, in all its hideousness, was exposed to Ralph Channell's sight. And yet he took the sinner to his heart.

But he tested the young man patiently. He let him scrape and save to pay back the money that he had stolen; he would not give him a single farthing. Every shilling of the restored sum was fairly earned in Mr. Channell's service, and paid out of a small salary. And all that time he saw that a mighty work of grace was going on in Robert's soul.

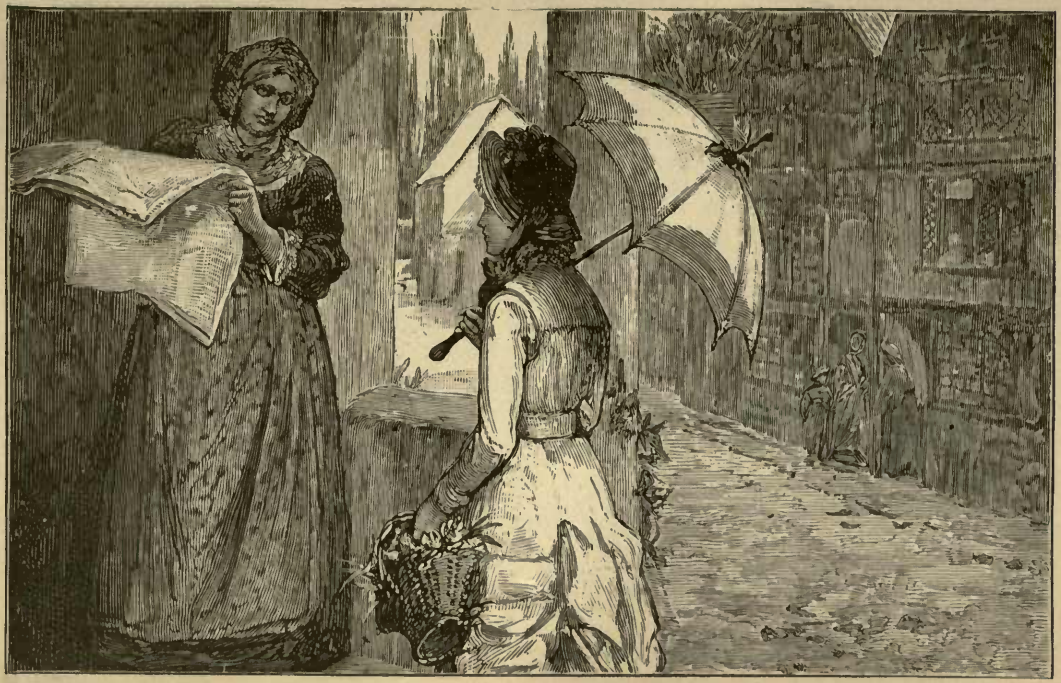
When Mr. Channell lay dying, a lonely, childless man, he called Robert to his side. "All my property is yours," he said; "you are my sole heir, and you must take my name—ay, and you must make it loved and honoured in the old country."

So Robert came to England, full of yearnings for the child whom he had never seen. From John Farren he learnt that Rhoda's heart was hardened against him. And yet, how could he help loving her for the love that she bare to Nelly? He knew all about Rhoda from her mother's letters. And he wanted, more than he ever acknowledged, to see this woman who could be so hard and yet so tender. The opportunity came. He bought the farm, and gave it to Farmer Farren; only stipulating that it should go to Rhoda at her father's death. And he came to dwell amongst the Farrens as Ralph Channell.

This was all that the mother had to tell. Rhoda got up, when the tale was ended, and went quietly out of the house.

The sun had just gone down; but there was light in the west, where rosy cloud-islands floated in a golden sea. And there was a light in Rhoda's face that gave her a new charm.

She knew, by some subtle instinct, where



On she went through the village. — Page 191.

she should find Robert Channell. She ascended the steep, winding lane, that led to the old churchyard. How did she guess that one woman's harshness would send him to the grave of another? How is it that women go straight to a conclusion which a man could only reach by a circuitous route?

He neither saw nor heard her coming. His head was bent over that flowery mound, and the grass deadened the sound of her feet. She had been very brave until she found herself by his side. And then all her strength and courage suddenly fled. She had no words to plead for forgiveness; she could only touch his arm with her trembling hand, and call him by the name that she had hated all these years,—

"Robert!"

There was very little said just then. The last glow was dying out of the skies, and the dews were falling on Helen's grave. But the Lord lifted up the light of His countenance upon them, and gave them peace.

XI.

NELLY CHANNELL.

CHAPTER XI.

NELLY CHANNELL.

THE little village seemed to lie asleep in the August sunshine. From the upland where she stood Nelly could see the columns of pale smoke going up from cottage chimneys, but nobody was astir in the gardens. It was noon. Scarcely a flake of cloud relieved the intense blue overhead; not a breath of wind fanned the thick leafage in the copse behind her.

Nelly Channell was not sorry that the morning was over. Like most people who have a great deal of time on their hands, she was often puzzled about the disposal of it. When she had diligently practised on the piano indoors, and had paid a visit to the little step-brother and sister in the nursery, there was nothing more to be done. She used sometimes to say that this part of her life was like an isthmus,

connecting the two continents of schoolgirlhood and womanhood.

On this morning she had carried a book out of doors, and had read it from beginning to end. It was a book that had been recommended to her by Mrs. Channell. Nelly had a great reverence for her stepmother's opinion ; but the story had not pleased her at all. It was directly opposed to all her notions of right and wrong. She even went so far as to say to herself that it ought never to have been written.

Nelly was a girl who generally spoke her mind ;—a little bluntly sometimes, but always with that natural earnestness which makes one forgive the bluntness. As the distant church clock struck twelve, and the stable-clock repeated the strokes, she turned and went into the house.

It was a large handsome house, which her father had built soon after his second marriage, about twelve years ago. But although they had coaxed the creepers to grow over the red bricks, and wreathe the doors and windows,

Nelly always maintained that it was not so charming a place as the little vine-covered cottage where she was born. The cottage was still standing; she could see it from her father's hall-door. And she had only to cross two fields and an orchard when she wanted to visit the dear old man and woman who had sheltered her in her childhood.

On the threshold of the house stood Mrs. Channell with a light basket on her arm.

"I am going to the cottage to see mother," she explained. "I have been making a new cap for her,—look, Nelly."

She lifted the basket-lid, and afforded Nelly a glimpse of soft lace and lilac ribbons.

"Why didn't you let me make it, mamma?" the girl asked. "I think you ought to use these idle hands of mine, if you want to keep them out of mischief."

"I gave you a book to read this morning," Mrs. Channell replied.

"Yes. I have read it, and I don't like it," said candid Nelly, stepping back to lay the

volume on the hall table. "I will go with you to the cottage, and we can talk it over."

Arm-in-arm they walked through the sweet grass, keeping under the shadow of the hedges and trees. Mrs. Channell waited for the girl to speak again.

"I don't like the book," Nelly repeated, after a pause. "The writer seems to have strange ideas. The hero—a very poor hero—is false to the heroine. After getting engaged to her, he discovers that he can never love her as he loves another girl; and of course she releases him from the engagement when she finds out the truth. But instead of representing him as the worthless fellow that he was, the author persists in showing us that he became a good husband and father. He begins his career by an act of treachery; and yet he prospers, and is wonderfully happy with the wife of his choice! It is too bad."

"Lewis Moore was not a treacherous man," said Mrs. Channell, quietly. "He made a great and terrible mistake. But sometimes it is not

easy to distinguish between a blunder and a crime. The heroine—Alice—had grace given her to make that distinction. She saved him and herself from the effects of the blunder by setting him free. She bade him go and marry Margaret, because she saw that Margaret was the only woman who could make him happy."

"He didn't deserve to be happy!" cried Nelly. "He ought to have been sure of himself before he proposed to Alice. If I had been in Alice's place I would have let him depart, but not with a blessing! She took it far too tamely. I would have let him see that I despised him."

Mrs. Channell thought within herself that the young often believe themselves a thousand times harder-hearted than they are. Those who feel the bitterest wrath when they think of an injury that has never come to them are the most patient and merciful when they actually meet it face to face. But she did not say this to Nelly.

The book was talked of no more that day;

and for many a day afterwards it stood neglected on Mrs. Channell's shelves. Nelly had forgotten it after a night's sleep, and the next morning's post brought her a surprise.

When she entered the breakfast-room her father was already seated at the table looking over his letters. He held up one addressed, in a legal-looking hand, to Miss Ellen Channell.

"Who is your new correspondent, Nelly?" he asked. "This is something different from the young-ladyish epistles you are in the habit of receiving, isn't it?"

"I don't know the writing," she said, opening it carelessly. But in the next minute she laid it hastily before him.

"Read it, father," she cried. "Old Mr. Myrtle is dead, and has left me three thousand pounds! You remember how he made a pet of me in my school-days?"

Mr. Channell read the letter in silence; and then he looked up quickly into his daughter's face, and put his hand on hers.

"I hope no one is defrauded by this legacy,"

he said, gravely. "You will have quite enough without it, Nelly. Had Mr. Myrtle any relations?"

"He used to say that he was quite alone in the world," she answered. "His house was next to our school, and the gardens joined; that was how I came to see so much of him. No one ever went to stay with him, and he seldom had even a caller."

"I wish he had left the money to a poorer girl," remarked Mr. Channell. "Well, Nelly, you will now have a hundred and fifty pounds a year to do as you like with. I hope you'll spend it wisely, my dear."

It was generally known throughout the county that Nelly was the daughter of a rich man. She was very pretty too, although not so beautiful as her mother had been; and at nineteen she was not without would-be suitors and admirers. But not one of these was a man after Robert Channell's own heart. They were hunting and sporting country gentlemen, who talked of dogs and horses all day long.

He wanted a man of another stamp for Nelly. He did not care about long pedigrees, nor did he hanker after ancestral lands. He desired for his child a husband who would guide a young wife as bravely up the hill of Sacrifice as over the plain called Ease.

It might have been that Robert Channell thought too much of what the husband should be to the wife, and too little of what the wife is to the husband. There are moments in the life of the strongest men when only the touch of a woman's hand has kept them from turning into a wrong road. But it is not easy for a father, anxious for the safety of his girl's future, to think of anything beyond her requirements. Nelly was a prize; and Mr. Channell could but daily pray that she might not be won by one who was unworthy of her.

XII.

MORGAN FOSTER, THE NEW CURATE

CHAPTER XII.

MORGAN FOSTER, THE NEW CURATE.

IN the golden harvest time, just after they had celebrated Nelly's nineteenth birthday, a new face appeared in Huntsdean, and a new influence began to work among the villagers. The rector, who had grown old and feeble, was at last induced to secure the services of a curate. And Robert Channell, having been a good friend to the people for many a day, felt almost disposed to look jealously upon the stranger.

But before a month had passed by, Mr. Channell and the curate had found out that they were of one mind. The new-comer did not want to upset any of the old plans, but he showed himself capable of improving them. He was no shallow boy, inflated with vast notions of his own self-importance, but a

thoughtful, active man, whose wisdom and experience were far beyond his years. And Robert liked Morgan Foster all the better because he was the son of poor parents, and had worked hard all his days, first as a grammar-school boy, and then as a sizar at Cambridge.

Nelly liked his sermons, which were never above her comprehension; and yet she liked him none the less, perhaps, because her instincts told her that he could have soared higher if he had chosen. She fell into the habit of comparing him with all the men she had ever known, and found that he always gained by the process.

Even in person this son of the people could hold his own against the descendants of the old county families. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man; and Nelly, whose stature was above middle height, secretly took a pleasure in feeling that she must look up to him. They were seen walking side by side along the Huntsdean lanes, and folks began to say that they were a fine couple.

Those calm autumn days were very sweet days to Nelly Channell. The summer lingered long; no wild winds suddenly stripped the trees, and so the woods kept their leafiness, and stood, in all their gorgeous apparel, under the pale blue skies. Nelly thought it must be the peace of this slow decay and tranquil sunshine that made her life so happy at this time. She did not own to herself that every bit of the old scenery had become dearer because Morgan Foster was learning to love it too. Her father and mother discovered the secret long before she had found it out; and they smiled over it together, not ill-pleased.

She had more than one offer just at this period. The neighbouring country houses were full of men who had come to Huntsdean for the shooting. They admired Nelly riding by her father's side, and looking vigorous and blooming in her habit and hat. They met her now and then at a dinner-party, and straightway fell in love with her chestnut hair and brown eyes, and were not unmindful of the

handsome dowry that would go with these charms. She was wont to say, long afterwards, that her unconscious attachment to another was a safeguard of God's providing. Many a woman speaks the fatal Yes, because her heart furnishes her with no reason for saying No.

Robert Channell encouraged the curate to come often to his house; but no one hinted that he thought of him as a possible son-in-law. It was too absurd to suppose that he would give his Nelly to a man who had only a hundred-and-fifty a year, and was encumbered with an old father and mother, living in obscurity. Some of the disappointed suitors remarked that Channell was a fool to have the parson hanging about the place;—there was no counting on the whims of a spoiled beauty, who might take it into her head to fling herself away on a curate. But this notion was not generally entertained, and the intimacy increased without exciting much notice.

Christmas had come and gone. It was the

last day of the old year; Nelly, sitting alone by the drawing-room fire, was seriously taking herself to task, and asking her own heart why the world was so very desolate that day? True, the ground was covered with snow; but the afternoon sky was bright with winter sunshine. The brown woodlands took rich tinges from the golden rays that slanted over them, and scarlet berries glistened against the garden wall. Nelly had wrapped a shawl round her shoulders, and had laid the blame of her low spirits on a cold.

"But the cold is not to blame," owned the girl to herself. "When one has a friend—such a friend as Mr. Foster—one does not like him to stay away from the house for a week; and one cannot bear to hear that he is always at the rectory when Miss White is there! And yet it ought not to matter to me!"

It mattered so much that the tears in Nelly's brown eyes began to run down her cheeks. At that very moment the drawing-room door

was thrown open, and the page announced Mr. Foster.

The curate advanced a few paces, and stopped in sudden dismay. There was something so pathetic in Nelly's pale, tearful face, that he was stricken speechless for a moment. And then he recovered himself, and began to make anxious inquiries which she scarcely knew how to answer.

"Nothing has happened, Mr. Foster," she sobbed. "I am only crying because I am in low spirits."

"Shall I go away now, and call to-morrow?" asked the bewildered young man in his embarrassment.

"No," said Nelly, suddenly looking up through her tears; "I shall be a great deal worse if you leave me to myself!"

Her face told him more than her words. In a moment the truth flashed upon him, and covered him with confusion. A vainer man, or one less occupied in earnest work, would have seen it far sooner. Morgan Foster took

a chair by her side, and felt his heart throbbing as it had seldom throbbed before. There was but one thing to be done, and he was going to do it.

There is no need to tell what he said. Perhaps it was not a very impassioned declaration; but it made a happy woman of Nelly. And only a few minutes later Mr. Channell and his wife returned from a wintry walk, and found the two young people together. There were no concealments; Morgan was too honourable, and Nelly too simple-hearted, to make a secret of what had taken place. It was all talked over quietly, but with a good deal of restrained feeling; and, then, having declined an invitation to dinner, the curate went his way.

He scarcely knew himself in the character of an engaged man. He had been working so hard all his life that marriage had been a very distant prospect to him. While there were the dear old parents to be helped, how could he think of taking a wife? And now,

here was a rich girl willing to marry him; and here was her father actually consenting to the match with evident satisfaction! But Nelly was something better than an heiress; she was a very sweet woman; such a woman as any man would have heen proud to win.

So Morgan Foster, as he walked back to his lodging over the frozen snow, began to wonder at the good gifts that Heaven had showered upon him. It was a strange fact that he was more inclined to wonder than to rejoice.

XIII.

WHAT A LITTLE POEM REVEALED

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT A LITTLE POEM REVEALED.

LOVERS, like sinners, are nearly always found out; and in a very short time everybody knew that Nelly Channell was engaged. It is not worth while to record all the remarks that this affair drew forth. They were comments of the usual kind; the curate was called a schemer, and the father was said to have cruelly neglected the interests of his child. But as none of these observations reached the ears of those whom they chiefly concerned, nobody was any the worse for them.

Meanwhile, Morgan took his good fortune in a very tranquil way. He saw Nelly nearly every day, and she did most of the talking that went on between them. Her conversation, like herself, was always simple and bright; it did not weary the listener, and yet it sometimes set

him wondering at the ease with which she opened her heart, and let out its inmost thoughts. He was conscious that he had never let her get beyond the vestibule of his inner self; but he would fain have had it otherwise. It pained him, even while it comforted him, to see that she was quite unaware of his involuntary reserve. Had she known that he kept any locked-up chambers, she would have striven to find the keys, and would most likely have succeeded. But she did not know it. She possessed no instinct keen enough to tell her that she might live with this man for years without once getting close to his soul.

"Read this, Nelly," he said, one February afternoon. He had called to take her out walking, and they were standing together at the drawing-room window. All the snow was gone, and in its stead there were clusters of snowdrops scattered over the brown mould. Here and there was a group of the golden-eyed polyanthus; a little yellow-hammer, perched on the garden-wall, piped its small, sweet song.

There was sunlight out of doors, and Nelly, looking bright and picturesque in her velvet and sable, was impatient to leave the house.

Morgan had taken a copy of the *Monthly Guest* from his pocket and was pointing to a little poem on one of its pages.

"I can read it when we have had our walk," Nelly answered. Then catching a slight shade of disappointment on his face, she gave her whole attention to the verses at once.

"How pretty!" she said, having conscientiously travelled through the thirty lines. "How strange it seems that some people should have the power of putting their ideas into rhyme! The writer has a nice name,—Eve Hazleburn."

"Perhaps it is merely a *nom-de-plume*," replied Morgan, returning the journal to his pocket.

Nelly thought within herself that she had never found her lover a pleasanter companion than he was that day. He amused her with little stories of his college life, and even went

back to his grammar-school days in search of incidents. It was a delightful walk; twilight was creeping on when they found themselves at the house-door again, but Morgan came no farther than the threshold.

"No, thank you," he said; "I cannot dine with you to-night; I must go home and write letters. Good-night, Nelly dear."

He went his way through the leafless lanes, past the cottages and gardens, to the old sexton's ivy-covered dwelling. Then he lifted the latch and went straight to the little parlour that had been given up to his use. It was a very small room, so low that the beam across the ceiling was blackened and blistered by the heat from the curate's reading lamp. Six rush-bottomed chairs stood with their backs against the wall, and a carpet-covered hassock was the sole pretension to luxury that the apartment contained. But a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate, and on a little red tray stood a homely black teapot.

"I saw you a-comin' through the lane, sir,

and I've boiled an egg for you," said his good landlady, bustling in. "It's bitter cold still. My good man hopes you'll keep your fire up."

She went back to her own quarters with a troubled look on her kindly old face. Somehow, her lodger did not seem quite so bright as he ought to have been after taking a walk with his sweetheart. She thought they must have had a lovers' quarrel; and, woman-like, was disposed to lay the blame thereof on her own sex.

"All girls is fond of worritin' men; high or low, rich or poor, they're all alike," she said, to her husband. "They don't like going on too peaceable. Nothin' pleases 'em so well as a bit of a tiff now and then. But if Miss Channell don't know when she's well off, she's a foolish body;—women are a'most as bad as the children of Israel, a-quarrelling with their blessings!"

While the sexton's wife was misjudging poor unconscious Nelly, the curate sat lingering over his tea-cup. He was thoroughly realizing, for

the first time, that he had made a mistake in asking Miss Channell to be his wife. It was a little thing that had opened his eyes to the blunder,—merely her way of reading the little poem in the *Monthly Guest.* He had been always vaguely hoping that something would bring them nearer together, and make it possible for him to give all that he ought to give; and he had thought that the poem would do it. The verses seemed to have proceeded straight from some human heart, whose feelings and aspirations were identical with his own. They expressed the same sense of failure and hope which every earnest worker for God must feel. They described the peace which always grows out of hearty effort, even if that effort be not a success.

Just one word or look of comprehension would have led him on to speak out of his interior self. But poor Nelly saw nothing in the poem beyond its rhymes. She was like one who misses the diamond in gazing at its setting.

"Thank God!" he said, half aloud, "that I

can hide my sense of disappointment from her! She shall never know that I want anything but her sweetness and goodness, poor child! What a happy man I ought to be, and yet what an ungrateful wretch I seem in my own eyes!"

He sat looking sadly into the red hollow of the neglected fire and sighed heavily.

"I am like old Bunyan's pilgrims," he continued. "I remember that they came to a place where they saw a way put itself into their way, and seemed withal to lie as straight as the way which they should go. And now I fear that I have gone out of my right path without knowing it. Well, so long as the penalty falls upon me only, I can bear it!"

But his spirit was still disquieted when he went to his little chamber that night. He lay awake for hours thinking of Nelly, and of the future which lay before them both.

Next morning came a letter, in his father's handwriting, which was full of sad tidings. His mother was dangerously ill;—could he not come to her at once?

Morgan went straightway to the rectory, and laid his case before the rector. The old man had his son, a young deacon, staying in his house, and readily consented to spare his curate. Then there was a letter to Nelly to be written, explaining the cause of his sudden departure. Before noon the train was bearing him far away from the vales and woods of Huntsdean, straight to the great world of London. And from Euston Square he travelled to the ancient Warwickshire city where his parents had made their home.

XIV.

EVE HAZLEBURN, POET AND FRIEND.

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EVE HAZLEBURN, POET AND FRIEND.

A VERY humble home it was; but his love had stinted self to obtain comforts for them. The light of the February day was fading when he entered the little house, and found his father eagerly watching for him.

"You are a good son,—a good son," said the old man, in a broken voice. "She is no worse; and Miss Hazleburn is with her."

Hazleburn! The name had a familiar sound; but Morgan was too weary and agitated to remember where he had heard it before. He took his way at once to his mother's chamber.

As he went in, a small, slight figure rose from a chair by the bedside, and quietly glided away. He scarcely looked at it in the gathering dusk; moreover he had no thoughts, just

then, for anybody but the mother who lay there yearning for a sight of him.

His coming seemed to do Mrs. Foster good, and give her a new hold upon life. It was a low nervous fever that had seized upon her, taking away her strength by slow degrees, until she had grown almost as helpless as an infant. But God had sent her a friend in Eve Hazleburn. And before he slept that night, Morgan had heard from his father's lips the story of Miss Hazleburn's unselfish kindness.

Eve was one of those friendless beings who are thrown entirely on their own resources, and often get on better than the more favoured children of fortune. She had an easy post as governess in the family of Mr. Gold, a rich Warwickshire merchant;— too easy, as she sometimes said. For the little Golds had holiday two or three times a week, and were not on any account to be burdened with long study hours. The house was in a perpetual bustle; visitors constantly coming and going. But if her employers were unjust to themselves,

they were far from ungenerous to Eve. They would fain have had her share in all their feastings and merry-makings, and laughed and wondered at her liking for retirement and peace.

There had been sickness in their household. Soon after Christmas the whole family had gone away to a sheltered watering-place, leaving Miss Hazleburn in charge of the house, and of the two servants who remained in it.

She had not made many friends in the city of C——. Her Sundays were her own, and her services in the Sunday-school had won gratitude and approval from the vicar of the parish. She went occasionally, but not often, to the vicarage.

The acquaintance between Morgan's parents and herself was nearly a year old. Their quiet street ran along at the back of the merchant's great house, and Eve had watched the pair sometimes from her chamber window. Then there was a chance meeting, a slight service rendered, and the governess became their friend and frequent visitor.

The absence of the Golds left her at liberty to nurse Mrs. Foster in her illness. The servants, being sober and trustworthy, required little watching, and Eve's time was her own. None ever knew what it cost her to give up all her leisure to the sick woman; none guessed that a cherished plan was quietly laid aside for Mrs. Foster's sake. The manuscript which Eve had hoped to complete in these holidays of hers was put by. An inner voice told her that God meant her to use her leisure in another way; and Eve's life was so still, so free from turmoil and passion, that she could always hear the voices that spoke to her soul.

Days went and came. The old rector of Huntsdean wrote kindly to his curate, bidding him stay in Warwickshire as long as his mother needed him. Nelly wrote too; such simple loving letters that every word went like a stab to Morgan's heart. She also begged him not to hasten his return for her sake. It was good for her, her father told her, to have this slight dash of bitterness in a cup that had been

over-sweet. And poor Nelly made so great a show of heroism over this little trial of hers, that those of her own household smiled.

Meanwhile Eve and Morgan met every day; and he talked to her about her poem, which was the only production of hers that had as yet found its way into print. The poem was the starting-point from whence they travelled on into each other's experiences. Ah, how easily and quickly people glide into familiar intercourse when there is a spiritual kinship between them! Poor Morgan's heart opened to Eve as naturally as a flower uncloses to the sun. Yet he never suspected that this was the beginning of love.

The curate had not told his parents of his engagement. He had been morbidly afraid that it would put a sense of distance between the old people and himself. Therefore he had said nothing about it in his letters, but had waited till he should see them face to face. But now that the time had come, he feared to make the disclosure. His mother

was in no condition to bear any startling news. And as to Miss Hazleburn—of what consequence could his affairs be to her? So the intimacy went on. He was too blind to see the injustice that he was doing Nelly and Eve herself.

"We are really not very new friends," he said to the governess one day. "I knew you through your poem. We met in the spirit before we met in the flesh."

"Nobody need be solitary nowadays," answered Eve, brightly. "I have many such spiritual friends, whom I shall probably never see with my bodily eyes. Don't you think that one of the joys of eternity will be in finding out what we have done for each other unconsciously? I am often unspeakably grateful for the printed words that have helped me on."

"Do you find many companions in Mr. Gold's house?" he asked.

"No," she said, frankly. "You know what it is to like people, and yet have no affinity

with them. The Golds' life is a perpetual pleasure-hunt. Parents and children join in the chase from morning till night; there is little rest or stillness in the house. I should be scarcely sorry to leave it."

"Are you thinking of leaving it?" Morgan inquired.

"Not yet. Indeed, I have no other home," she answered. "I had a hope, last year, that one might be provided for me; but that is over now."

They were sitting together in the Fosters' little parlour while this talk went on. It was Sunday afternoon; Mrs. Foster, now steadily making progress towards recovery, was asleep upstairs, and her husband had ventured out to church. The sun was getting low; a yellow light came stealing over the roofs of the opposite houses, and shone full upon Eve's face. Her last words had been spoken in a sad tone; her eyes looked dreamily out into the narrow street.

She was very far from realizing the inter-

pretation that Morgan had put upon her remark. Nor did she dream of the sudden turmoil that was working within him, as he sat watching her face.

She was not a pretty woman. She had the charms that belong to symmetry of form, and grace of manner and movement. But few of those who were struck at once by Nelly Channell's beauty would have noticed Eve. They would have failed to see the noble shape of that small head, and the play of light and shade on the careworn young face. Yet as Morgan sat watching her, he was stung by the sharpness of jealous agony. Had some man wooed this girl, and been an accepted lover?

He could not endure the idea that those chance words of hers had conjured up. The grand passion of his life was revealed to him in a moment. He knew what he felt towards Eve, and knew, too, that this was what he ought to have felt towards another. This was love. It was but a poor counterfeit thereof that he had given to Nelly.

"Some people think nothing of breaking a promise," she continued, still looking out into the street. "Years ago, when I was a child, and my father was a prosperous man, his friend Mr. Myrtle came to him in sore need of money. My father lent him three thousand pounds. The sum was lent without security, and it was never repaid."

Morgan breathed more freely; but he thought of Nelly's legacy.

"When my father felt himself to be dying," Eve went on, "he wrote to Mr. Myrtle, reminding him once more of the debt. It was for my sake that he did this, knowing that I should be left quite friendless, and almost penniless. And Mr. Myrtle promised to leave me three thousand pounds in his will. He died last year, Mr. Foster, but there was no legacy for me."

Morgan's words of sympathy sounded flat and commonplace. He was too much overcome with shame to be conscious of what he was saying. It was almost a relief when his

old father returned from church and broke up the *tête-à-tête.*

When Mrs. Foster was well enough to move from her bed to a couch, the curate bethought him of returning to Huntsdean. He did not dare to think much of all that awaited him there. He had lived a lifetime in the space of a few weeks, and the village and its associations looked unreal and far away. At this time shame was his dominant feeling. He forgot to pity himself for the blunder that he had made—he thought only of his involuntary treachery.

He did not dream of making any confession to Nelly; she should be no sufferer through this dreadful mistake of his. And he wrote her as lover-like a letter as he could frame, telling her that he was coming home in a few days.

XV.

A CONFESSION OVERHEARD.

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A CONFESSION OVERHEARD.

IT was the afternoon of Morgan's last day in Warwickshire. He sat by his mother's couch, holding her thin hand in his, and wishing, with all his heart, that she were the only woman in the world who had any claim upon him. She looked at him with a long earnest look; once or twice her lips opened, but some moments went by before she spoke.

They were alone. Mr. Foster had pattered off to the railway station, to seek for information about the train by which Morgan was to travel. As he sat there, with the dear old woman who had shared all his early joys and sorrows, he could not help longing to tell her of his new trouble. But he knew not how to begin. And then her gentle voice broke the silence.

"Morgan," she said, "maybe I am going to do a foolish thing. I never was a match-maker, for I've always thought that God alone ought to bring people together. But when I see two who seem to be made for each other, and one of them so near to me, how can I help saying a word?"

"Speak on, mother," he answered, drawing a long breath. He knew what was coming. Well, at any rate it would give him the opportunity of unburdening his heart.

"I should like to see you engaged to Eve Hazleburn," she continued, gaining courage. "She is as good as a daughter to me; but that isn't the reason that I want her for my son's wife. I want her, because there's a sort of likeness between you that makes me sure you ought to be made one. And I've seen your eyes follow her, Morgan, as if you thought so too."

"It cannot be, mother," said the curate, almost passionately. "It cannot be, and yet I know it ought to be! I am already engaged

to another woman ; but I love Eve Hazleburn as I shall never love again ! "

"God help us all ! " sighed Mrs. Foster, suddenly pressing his hand to enjoin silence. It was too late. His voice had been raised above its usual tone ; and there stood Eve at the open door.

He did not care—he was almost glad that she knew all. There had come upon him the recklessness that often arises out of hopelessness. If he must wear his chain, she should know what a heavy weight it was !

"Come in, Miss Hazleburn," he said, rising excitedly ; "I am not sorry that you have overheard me. Perhaps you will pity me a little. Surely you can spare a grain of compassion for the poor fool who has spoiled his own life ! I think you will, for you are a good woman. Some women would glory in a conquest of this sort, but you are not of that number. Ah, I am talking nonsense, I suppose."

Eve went straight up to him and laid her

hand upon his arm. She could not pretend to have heard nothing, and she would not have told a lie if she could. Her light touch stopped him in his impatient walk up and down the little room.

"Think of your mother, Mr. Foster," she said, softly. "She is not strong enough to bear a scene."

He sat down again by the couch, and buried his face in the cushion on which Mrs. Foster's head rested. It was a boyish action; but Eve knew that the best men in the world generally keep a touch of boyishness about them. Her heart ached for him as she stood looking down upon the bowed head. And then the mother's glance met hers, and both women began to weep silently.

"I'm a foolish old body," said poor Mrs. Foster. "It's a mistake to go knocking at the door of any heart, even if it's that of one's child. I had better have held my tongue, and left all to God."

"It is better as it is," Morgan answered

raising his head, and speaking more quietly. "I am less miserable than I was before. And Miss Hazleburn will understand," he added, with a little pride, "that although I am an unhappy man, I don't mean to be a traitor. I do not wish to recall anything I have said. Every word was true; and now that she knows all, she will pray for me."

Eve stood before him and held out her hand.

"I am going now," she said. "God bless you, Mr. Foster. You shall have all the blessings that my prayers can win for you; and the truest respect and friendship that a woman can give. Perhaps we shall never meet again. If we do, I think this scene will seem like a dream to us both."

She went her way out of the shabby little house into the narrow street. Had God nothing better to give her than this? Had He shown her the beautiful land of Might-have-been only to send her back, doubly desolate, into the wilderness? These were the

first rebellious questions that arose in Eve's heart, and it was some time before they were answered.

Early on the following morning she went to the window of her room, and looked between the slats of the Venetian blind. It was chill and grey out-of-doors. The sun had not yet fully risen, and only a faint pallor was to be seen in the eastern sky. Presently a fly stopped at the door of that shabby little house which she knew so well. Then the flyman knocked; the door opened, and he entered, soon reappearing with a portmanteau. Another figure followed, tall and black-coated. At the sight of it poor Eve uttered a low cry, and pressed her hands tightly together. A moment more, and the fly had rattled off down the street, and had turned the corner on its way to the railway station.

Was that to be the end of it all? Shivering and forlorn, she went back to her bed, and lay there for a time, mutely praying for strength and peace.

Afterwards, she knew all that Morgan's mother could tell her about his engagement. And she knew, too, that Nelly Channell was the lady to whom Mr. Myrtle had left the three thousand pounds. It seemed to her just then, poor girl, as if Nelly were taking all the things that ought to have been hers. But this mood did not last long, and she was sorry that such bitter thoughts should have found their way into her heart. The Golds came back from the seaside early in March, and the ordinary way of life began again.

Morgan, too, had gone back to his work, but it was harder for him than for Eve. She had no part to sustain—no love to simulate. And she had the consolation of his mother's friendship, and the sad delight of reading his letters. In those letters no mention was ever made of her; but they told of a life of daily struggles—a life whose best comfort was found in labour. Eve and Mrs. Foster wept over them together, and clung to each other with a new tenderness. The mother had faith, and

she believed that her son would be set free. She ventured, once or twice, to say this to Eve, but the girl shook her head.

"No," she said, "we must not look for that. We ought rather to pray that the ties may grow pleasant instead of irksome."

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Foster, thoughtfully. "I almost think it is best to pray for the freedom. It was not the right kind of feeling, Eve, that led him to propose to Miss Channell. He was startled into it, and it really seemed at first as if that were the way that God meant him to go."

"He should have stood still, and just have waited for guidance," Eve remarked, sadly.

"Yes, I know that," admitted the mother. "But do not most of our troubles come to us because we will not wait? We all find it easier to run than to stand still."

While these other hearts were throbbing with restless pain, Nelly Channell was serenely happy. She complained at times that Morgan was working too hard, and wearing himself out,

but she never thought of attributing his wan looks to any cause save that of over exertion.

But Robert Channell had a keener sight; and he began to ask himself, uneasily, if he had been right in letting this engagement come to pass? In his heart of hearts he owned that he had been secretly anxious to secure the curate for his daughter. It was the desire of his life that Nelly should marry a good man, and Morgan Foster was the best man that had as yet come in her way. Perhaps he, too, had been running when he ought to have stood still. He began to think that this was the case.

But how could he undo what was done? In his perplexity he talked the matter over with his wife. And she admitted that the curate did not seem to be quite at ease in Nelly's company. There was a shadow upon him. It might be a consciousness of failing health, or——

"Or of failing love," said Mr. Channell, finishing her sentence. "If that is it, Rhoda, it is a miserable affair indeed! We ought to

have made them wait before we sanctioned the engagement. But you know I wanted to keep her safe from those selfish, worldly men who have been seeking her."

"We are always afraid to trust God with anything dear to us," answered Mrs. Channell, sadly. "But if Morgan Foster has mistaken his own feelings, Robert, it will be hard to condemn him, and equally hard to forgive him."

Summer came. And early in July all the gossips in Huntsdean were talking of the rich family who had taken Laurel House. Mr. Gold, they said, was a retired merchant from Warwickshire, who was as wealthy as a nabob. His household consisted of a wife and six children, a governess, and menservants and maidservants. And when Nelly heard that the governess was a Miss Hazleburn, the name awoke no recollections. She had quite forgotten the little poem in the *Monthly Guest.*

The Channells called on the new-comers, and were received by Miss Hazleburn. Illness kept Mrs. Gold in her own room for some weeks

after her arrival in Huntsdean, and on Eve devolved the unwelcome task of seeing visitors. The one whom she most dreaded and most longed to see did not come. She saw him in church, and that was all. She had determined that her stay in Huntsdean should be as short as possible. Already she was answering advertisements, and doing her utmost to get away from the place. It was hard upon her, she thought, that among the earliest callers should be Nelly Channell.

Yet when she saw the girl she felt a thrill of secret satisfaction. This, then, was the woman before whom she was preferred; and Eve's eyes told her that she could no more be compared with Nelly than a daisy can be compared with a rose! But the poor daisy, growing in life's highway, unsheltered from the storms of the world, was loved better than the beautiful garden flower. She was human, and she could not help rejoicing in her unsuspected triumph.

Nelly took a girl's sudden and unreason-

able liking to the governess. She wanted Miss Hazleburn to be her friend; she talked of her to everybody, including Morgan Foster.

"Have you seen her, Morgan?" she asked.

"I have seen her in church," he answered.

"Then you haven't called on the Golds yet," said Nelly. "Why don't you go there?"

"The rector has called," Morgan replied, "and there really is no need for a curate to be thrusting himself into rich folks' houses unless they are ill."

"You didn't mind coming to our house," rejoined Nelly, "and I daresay we are as rich as the Golds. But you can't judge of Miss Hazleburn by seeing her in church, Morgan. It is in conversation that you find out how charming she is. And actually there is something in her that reminds me of you! I can't tell where the resemblance lies—it may be in the voice, or it may be in the face, but I am certain that it exists."

"It exists only in your imagination," said Morgan, bent upon changing the subject.

Before Mrs. Gold had entirely recovered, Nelly had got into a habit of running in and out of the house. It was about three-quarters of a mile from her home, and stood on the summit of the green downs which she had loved in her childhood. The garden slanted down from the back of the house to these open downs: it was raised above the slopes and terminated in a gravelled terrace; and so low was this terrace that Nelly could easily climb upon it and go straying into the shrubbery. She had done this dozens of times while Laurel House was empty, for the old garden, with its thick hedges of laurel and yew, had always been a favourite haunt of hers. Finding that the Golds were free-and-easy people, who gladly welcomed the pretty trespasser, she chose to keep up her old custom.

XVI.

HOW THE TRUTH CAME OUT.

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HOW THE TRUTH CAME OUT.

ONE August evening, when it was too sultry to stay indoors, Nelly wandered out into the lanes alone. She had told Morgan that she was going to drive into the nearest town on a shopping expedition, and should not return till dusk. But one of her ponies had fallen lame, and she had given up the plan.

On she went, saying a kind word or two to the villagers as she passed their cottages. They all loved Nelly well. Her bright face came amongst them like a sunbeam; even the smallest children had a smile for her as she went by. She was so young and healthy and beautiful that many an admiring glance followed her tall figure. She belonged to Huntsdean, and Huntsdean was proud of her.

She made straight for the downs, tripping up the green slopes, and startling the browsing sheep. She gave a friendly nod to the little shepherd-boy who lay idly stretched upon the grass. And then, as she had done often enough before, she mounted the gravelled terrace, and sat down on a rustic bench behind the hedge of laurels.

From this spot she could not see Laurel House at all. The high wall of evergreens completely shut in the view of the residence and its garden. The gravelled terrace was divided from the grounds by this thick hedge, and was only approached from the house by one long straight path of turf. The path terminated in an arch, formed by the carefully-kept shrubs, and giving access to the platform; and any one walking on the downs must go up to the middle of the terrace and look through this archway before he could get a glimpse of the house.

Nelly knew that Miss Hazleburn liked to walk up and down the turfy path when the

day's duties were done. She meant to rest herself for a few minutes before entering the garden.

The bench was at the very end of the platform. She loved the seat because it commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country. Beyond the Huntsdean downs she could see other hills lying far away, softly outlined against the summer evening sky. And nearer lay the dearer old meadows and homesteads and the long tracts of woodland, —all familiar and beloved scenes to the girl who had been born and bred among them. The air was very still; even here it was but a faint breath of wind that fanned her flushed cheeks; but the coolness on these highlands was delightful after the closeness of the vale. She sat and enjoyed it in silence.

Quite suddenly the sound of voices broke the stillness. The speakers were hidden from Nelly's gaze, for the tones came from the other side of the laurel hedge. Eve Hazleburn's accents, clear and musical, could be recognised in a moment.

"I am going away next week," she said, "going back to Warwickshire, Mr. Foster, I wrote to Mr. Lindley, the good Vicar of C——, and he has found a place for me. I am to be companion to an invalid lady whose house is close to the street where your father and mother live. They will be glad to have me near them again."

She spoke rapidly, and a little louder than usual. Nelly, overwhelmed with astonishment, sat still, without giving a thought to her position as an eavesdropper.

"I have kept away from you—I have tried not to think of you!" cried Morgan Foster, in irrepressible anguish. "God does not help me in this matter. I have prayed, worked, struggled, yet I get no relief. What shall I do, Eve—what shall I do?"

"You must endure to the end," she answered, with a little sob. "God will make it easier by-and-by. Oh, I was so sorry to come here, Mr. Foster; but I could not help it! We will never meet again, you and I. Yet I am glad

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that I know Miss Channell. I will go and tell the old people what a sweet bright girl she is; and they will soon learn to love her. It will all come right in the end."

"Ah, if I could believe that!" said the curate. "But I can't. It is madness to think that a wrong path can have a right ending. Sometimes I am persuaded it would be best to tell her everything."

"If you did," cried Eve, sternly, "you would break her heart. And don't think—pray don't think, Mr. Foster, that I would build my house on the ruins of another woman's happiness! When I am gone," and the proud voice trembled, "you will learn to submit to circumstances. We are not likely to cross each other's paths again; you will be a rich man——"

"Oh, the money makes it all the harder to bear!" interrupted Morgan, bitterly. "That three thousand pounds that Mr. Myrtle promised to leave to you has been left to her. Did you know this?"

Nelly did not wait to hear Eve's reply. Swiftly and noiselessly she sprang from the terrace on to the smooth sod beneath, her muslin dress making no rustle as she moved. Away she sped down the green slopes; the sheep parted to left and right before her flying footsteps; the shepherd-lad stared after her in amazement. She did not take the road that led through the village. In her misery and bewilderment she remembered that she could not bear the friendly good-nights of the cottagers. She struck wildly across the fields, regardless of the wet grass, and the brambles that tore her thin skirts as she dashed through the gaps in the hedges, until she came to the side of the brook, where she was alone in her grief. She was not thinking at all; she was only feeling—feeling passionately and bitterly—that she had been cruelly wronged and deceived.

"Oh those two!" she moaned aloud, as her home came in sight. "The man whom I loved—the girl whom I would have made my friend!"

Robert Channell and his wife were sitting together in the library. He had been reading aloud: Shakespeare still lay open on his knee, and Rhoda occupied a low chair by his side. They were talking, as happy married people love to talk, of the old days when God first brought them together.

While they chatted in low tones, the day was fast closing in. The French windows stood open, and the first breath of the night wind stole into the room. A dusky golden haze was settling down over the garden; the air was heavy with flower-scents and the faint odours of fallen leaves. Suddenly a great shower of petals from over-blown roses drifted through the casement, and Nelly swept in after them.

She sank down on her knees, shivering in her limp, wet dress, and hid her face in her stepmother's lap. And then the story was told from beginning to end.

An hour later, Rhoda was sitting by Nelly's pillow, talking to her in the sweet

hush of the August twilight. Already the heat of anger had passed away. The girl's thoughts had gone back, as Rhoda knew they would, to that winter afternoon when Morgan had asked her to become engaged to him.

"Mamma," she said, piteously, "he has never loved me at all. He gave me all he could give; but it was only the silver, not the gold. It is very, very humiliating, but it is the truth, and it must be faced. To-night when I heard him speaking to Eve Hazelburn, I understood the difference between love and liking. He liked me, and perhaps he saw—more than I meant him to see! O mamma, I was very young and foolish!"

It touched Rhoda to hear Nelly speak of her old self in the past tense. Yet it was a fact; the youth and the folly had had their day. Nelly would never be so young again, for sorrow takes away girlhood when it teaches wisdom.

"I heard Eve say," she went on, "that she would never build her house on the ruins

of another woman's happiness; and God forbid that I should build mine on ground that has never rightly belonged to me! But I wish he had told me the truth. He has done me a greater wrong in hiding it, than in speaking it out."

"Nelly," said her stepmother, tenderly, "we believe that Morgan has been a blunderer, but not a traitor. We have blundered terribly ourselves. We ought not to have let the engagement take place until we had tested the strength of his attachment. We wanted to guard you from unworthy suitors; and in taking you out of danger, we led you into sorrow."

"I was very foolish," repeated Nelly, with a sigh.

"Don't forget," Rhoda continued, "that God can bless those whom He puts asunder, as well as those whom He joins together. It is better to dwell apart than to live together with divided souls. He saw we were too weak and stupid to set our mistake right,

and He has done it for us. While we were gazing helplessly at the knot, He cut the thread."

It was on a Saturday evening that Nelly's love affair came to an end. She was in her place in church on Sunday morning, and during the rest of the day she kept much by her father's side. They had talked the matter over and over, and had arranged all their plans before the night closed in. And Nelly thanked God that the anger had gone away from her heart, although the sorrow remained.

XVII.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR RELEASE.

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AN UNLOOKED-FOR RELEASE.

VERY early on Monday, the Golds' governess took her departure from Huntsdean. The train bore her away through the pleasant southern counties while the dew was still shining on the meadows. On and on it went; past cottages, standing amid fruit-laden trees, and gardens where Michaelmas daisies were in bloom; past yellow fields, where the corn was falling under the sickles of the reapers. Hedges were gay with Canterbury bells and ragged robins. Here and there were dashes of gold on the deep green of the woods. Eve Hazleburn, quiet and tearless, looked out upon the smiling country, and bade it a mute farewell.

Afterwards, two carriages laden with luggage drove out of the village, taking the

road that led to the neighbouring seaport town. The first contained the two little Channells and their nurses; in the second sat Rhoda and Nelly. And before the vehicles were out of sight, Robert Channell had turned his steps in the direction of the curate's lodging.

He met the young man in the lane outside the sexton's cottage, and gave him a kindly good morning.

"I am the bearer of startling news, Morgan," he said, slipping a little note into his hand. "Let us come under the shade of the churchyard trees. And now, Morgan, before you read the note, I want to ask you to forgive my Nelly."

"Forgive Nelly!" stammered the curate, thinking that if all could be known it would be Nelly's part to forgive him.

"Yes," the father answered. "Try to think of her as a dear, foolish child who has made a grave mistake. She has sent me to break off her engagement with you,

Morgan. She begs you, through me, to forgive her for any pain that she may cause you. She wants you to remember her kindly always, but neither to write to her, nor seek to see her again."

The curate was silent for some moments. No suspicion of the truth crossed his mind. He concluded, not unnaturally, that he had been too quiet and grave a lover for the bright girl. That was all.

When he spoke, his words were very few. Perhaps Nelly's father respected him none the less because he made no pretence of great sorrow. His face was pale, and his voice trembled a little, as he said quietly,—

"If you will come into my lodging, Mr. Channell, I will give you Nelly's letters and her portrait. She may like to have them back again without delay."

They walked out of the churchyard, and down the lane to the sexton's cottage. And then Morgan left Mr. Channell sitting in the little parlour, while he went upstairs to his room.

The hour of release had come. He took out a plain gold locket, which had always been worn unseen, and detached it from its guard. He opened it, and looked long and sadly at the fair face that it contained. It was a delicately-painted photograph, true to life; and locket and portrait had been Nelly's first gift. The smile was her own smile, frank and bright; the brown eyes seemed to look straight at the gazer. "O Nelly," he said, kissing the picture, "why couldn't I love you better? Thank God for this painless parting! No wonder that you wearied of me, dear; you will be a thousand times freer and happier without me."

Presently he came downstairs, and entered the parlour with the locket and a little packet of letters. These he gave silently into Mr. Channell's hands.

"Morgan," said Robert Channell, "I am heartily sorry for this. Don't think that I shall cease to feel for you as a friend, because I cannot have you for a son-in-law."

"I shall never forget all your kindness," Morgan answered, in a low voice. "But I shall soon leave this place, Mr. Channell."

"Better so, perhaps," Robert responded. "You ought to labour in a larger sphere. You have great capacities for hard work, Morgan."

Then the two men parted with a close hand-shake. And Mr. Channell looked back to say, almost carelessly,—

"My family have migrated to Southsea for a month or two. I follow them to-morrow."

It would be too much to say that the curate "regained his freedom with a sigh." Yet certain it is that this unlooked-for release set his heart aching; it might be that his *amour propre* was slightly wounded, for was it not a little hard to find that the girl for whom he had been making a martyr of himself could do very well without him? He had climbed the height of self-sacrifice only to find deliverance. The spirit of sacrifice had been required of him, but the crowning act was not demanded.

He read Nelly's note again. It was a very commonplace little letter, written in a sloping, feminine hand. She used that stereotyped phrase which, hackneyed as it is, does as well or better than any other, "I feel we are not suited for each other." This was the sole excuse offered for breaking the engagement, and surely it was excuse enough.

How could he know that these few trite sentences had been written in the anguish of a woman's first great sorrow? We don't recognise the majesty of woe when it masquerades in every-day garments. It needs a Divine sight to find out the real heroes and heroines of life. If Morgan had been questioned about Nelly, the term "heroine" would have been the very last that he would have applied to her. And yet Nelly, quite unconsciously, had acted in the true spirit of heroism.

By-and-by the sense of relief began to make itself felt, and Morgan's heart grew wonderfully light. He went through his usual routine of

duties, and then took his way to the rectory. He must give the rector timely notice of his intention to resign his curacy.

Meanwhile Robert Channell had proceeded to Laurel House. Mrs. Gold received him in a depressed manner. Her governess, she said, had left her; and she seemed to consider that Miss Hazleburn had used her unkindly. She did not know how such a useful person could be replaced. Nobody would ever satisfy her so well as Miss Hazelburn had done. Yes, she could give the governess's address to Mr. Channell. She had chosen to go to Warwickshire, to live with an invalid lady. Mrs. Gold hoped she would find the post unbearably dull, and return to her former situation.

"There is little probability of that," thought Robert Channell, as he went his way with the address in his pocket-book. And then he thought of Nelly's face and voice when she had stated her intention of giving up Mr. Myrtle's legacy to Eve.

"I won't keep anything that isn't fairly mine," she had said; "let her have both the lover and the money."

Eve never ceased to wonder how the Channells had found out that Mr. Myrtle had owed her father three thousand pounds.

October had just set in when Eve and Morgan met again. It was Sunday morning, and she was on her way to that beautiful old church which is the chief glory of the city of C——. The bells were chiming; the ancient street was bright with autumn light; far above them rose the tall spire, rising high into the calm skies.

They said very little to each other at that moment. A great deal had already been said on paper, and they could afford to be quiet just then. Together they entered the church, a happy pair of worshippers, "singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord." "A thousand times happier," Eve remarked afterwards, "than we could ever have dared to be if another had suffered for our joy."

XVIII.

"*WHAT GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER.*"

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WHAT GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER.

ABOUT two years ago, a great crowd assembled in one of the largest churches in London to hear a popular preacher. He had, it was said, a rare power of touching men's hearts, and of lifting their thoughts out of the mire and clay of this working-day world. And often, too, his wife's name was coupled with his; for she, by her written words, was doing angels' work among the people. Fashionable society knew them only as preacher and writer; but some of the unfashionable were better acquainted with them.

In the crowd were two persons who managed to get good seats in the middle aisle. They were husband and wife; he a brave soldier, she a beautiful woman. It would not have been easy to have found a

couple better matched, or better satisfied with each other. They exchanged a quick glance of intelligence when the preacher ascended the pulpit stairs, and then composed themselves to listen.

They were not disappointed in him. As they listened, they understood how and why he won such a ready hearing; and when the sermon was over, Nelly turned to her husband again with the old bright look; and he answered her with a slight nod of satisfaction. Then, and not till then, did she perceive a familiar face at the top of the pew.

As Nelly looked once more on Eve, there was revealed to her a strange glimpse of what might have been if those two had been kept apart, and she had taken Eve's place. She saw herself a restless, unsatisfied wife, always craving for a vague something that was withheld. She saw Morgan crippled, not helped, by her riches; a good man still, but one who had, somehow, missed his footing, and failed to climb so high as had been

expected of him. And she comprehended, fully and thankfully, the great love and pity of that Being who had saved them from their mistake.

There was a quiet hand-clasp in the crowded aisle; and then these two women went their respective ways. And a voice seemed to be ringing in Nelly's ears, as she leaned upon her husband's arm.

"I am thinking," she said, "of something that was spoken long ago. It was when I was in great trouble, dear, and felt as if I couldn't be comforted. 'Don't forget,' my stepmother said to me, 'that God can bless those whom He puts asunder as well as those whom He joins together.' And I think I'm realizing the truth of those words to-night."