TWO MARRIAGES.

VOL. II.

TWO MARRIAGES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,"
"CHRISTIAN'S MISTAKE,"
"A NOBLE LIFE,"

&c. &c.

"Hearken, son,—
I'll tell thee of two fathers."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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PARSON GARLAND'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER V.

EUSTON SQUARE terminus in the dim dawn of a winter morning;—nay, before the dawn. For the gas-lamps were still burning, here and there, along the platform, where a little knot of people,—porters and passengers and passengers' friends—were assisting at the departure of the early train for Liverpool. It happened to be one of those oftenest chosen by emigrants,—of which the greatest number necessarily leave either from this station or Waterloo. You can easily detect these sad outward-bound folk from ordinary passengers; even were it not for their hetero-

geneous heaps of luggage—not common luggage—but masses of property, which plainly speak of leaving home "for good."—Ah! is it, can it ever be for good? Huge packages, of amorphous character, canvas bags, heavy sea-chests, and smaller boxes marked "Wanted on the voyage," show plainly that few of them are ever likely to return to England. And opposite the line of second and third-class carriages—sometimes first-class, but seldomer; first-class is more accustomed to keep its feelings under control—hang groups, mostly of women, some crying, loudly or quietly, as their natures may be; some silent, with bleared and swollen faces, that seem to have wept all tears dry, and settled into sheer exhaustion. They, and the men too, have a look of having been up all night—a long night of forced composure or parting anguish,—terrible as death.

But the men carry it off far the best; either with a miserable hard stolidity that has something savage in it, or else with a false jocularity;—it is chiefly the women who break down.

"You see, father, there are other folk bidding good-bye to old England as well as I," said one young passenger—a second-class passenger he was, although quite a gentleman to look at. "Other folk who look as if they had not slept much last night,—as I own I didn't."

"Nor I," said Mr. Garland.

The parson was walking slowly up and down, leaning on his son's arm. All was over and done; Keith had quitted College, and, through the father's protecting care, quitted it without any outward exposure. They had been three days in London, making final arrangements. Now the very last day—the last hour—of parting had arrived. Even the ticket was

taken, and the rugs and other impedimenta packed into the carriage; nothing was left to do or say. No need for aught but the few last words, which in such circumstances never will come, or come as the merest common-places.

"We have found our lodgings very comfortable, as I hope your hotel has been," observed Keith. "And it was very kind of you to get them for us. The landlady said she knew you long ago."

"Not me, but your mother, who once befriended the woman. She always did contrive to help everybody. Your mother, I mean."

"I know that," said Keith softly.

"Is your wife well to-day? Did you leave her tolerably composed?"

"Yes, she is a good girl,—a very good girl. She would not trouble me more than she could help. She sat up all night helping me to pack,

and would have come with me to the train, but I told her you might not like it."

Mr. Garland was silent.

"But she will be ready at the lodgings any hour you please to name, or she will meet you at the railway station, whichever you prefer. Shall you start for Immeridge to-day?"

"Possibly; I am not quite certain. Hark!—was not that the bell for departure?"

"No, the five-minutes bell."

The old man clung to his son's arm,—leaning heavier and heavier; though he still firmly planted each foot on the ground, and walked with head erect and tearless eyes. Looking at him, Keith felt, for the moment, that he would have given all his hopes in life, every prospect of worldly advantage, every indulgence in that frantic youthful passion, misnamed love, to have stayed behind and cheered and

solaced the few remaining years of his dear old father.

He was sorry he had said so much about his wife; and the few words more he had meant to say, begging that when they did meet—for Mr. Garland had not seen her yet—he would be kind to her, and put up with her many short-comings, faded entirely out of the young fellow's mind. It was one of those sad cases in which a man cannot, as the Scripture ordains,—and as, under certain exceptional circumstances, a man is bound to do—"leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife." Here, there was in truth no wife to cleave to, no vestige of the real marriage of heart and soul, which alone constitutes "one flesh;" husband and wife, sufficient each to each. Poor Keith,—if he ever looked into the future! But he did not; he dared not.

All he felt was—with a pent-up grief choking him at the throat, and a bitter remorse gnawing like a wild beast at his heart—that in a minute or two more he should have parted from his father,—his good father, who had done every thing in the world for him, who had been both father and mother to him ever since he was born; that, for all he could tell, he might never again behold those venerable white hairs, that dear familiar face, withered indeed, but pleasant and fresh to look on as that of a young girl; pleasanter and dearer far, as now seemed to Keith, than that pretty red and white face which had so taken his foolish fancy, and for which he had sacrificed and suffered—ay, and caused others to suffer—so much.

"Oh, father!" he cried, in exceeding bitterness of soul, "I wish I were not going away

from you! Tell me—at this last minute—shall I stay?"

And at that final moment the father paused. Paused to consider—not his own feelings, they could have given an easy solution of the difficulty—but his son's good. He ran over rapidly all the arguments which, during many a solitary walk and many a weary, wakeful night, he had carefully weighed; all the exigencies of the future,—the bitter, perhaps fatal future, which Keith had brought upon himself. The same reasons which held good then, did so now. No momentary outburst of emotion could set them aside. The plain common sense of the matter was that the youth and his girl-wife—so madly, so unsuitably allied—were better parted; that the safest chance to make a man of the one, and a woman fit, or at least less unfit, to be his wife, of the other, was to

part them—for a time. Of their separation little harm could come. Keith was fast bound, and would keep constant to his wife—if only from conscience and self-respect; nay, he was perhaps safer far away from her, where he could only remember her prettiness and her love, than if perpetually jarred upon and irritated by those fatal deficiencies which he already felt—and his father could see that he felt—only too keenly.

No, Keith must go. It was better for him that he went.

Of himself, and his own life to come, that short, short vista, out of which all the brightness now seemed faded, the parson did not think much. He remembered only his own seventy years, and his son's twenty—with perhaps half-a-century more yet to run. No, not a chance must be left untried of redeeming the

past and softening the future. Keith must go.

"My boy," he said, "I am glad you said that—I shall not forget it. But I do not wish you to stay. When a man has put his hand to the plough, let him not look back. Go to Canada, and do your best there, like a brave young fellow as you are—as I would wish my son to be. Go!—and I will try to keep alive and hearty till you return."

"Of course you will!" answered Keith—fiercely almost—and when he spoke, the departure-bell was heard really ringing.

Father and son turned face to face, and then grasped hands, in the tight, silent grip with which men express,—or conceal their feelings.

A minute more, and where the busy train had been was an empty space,—a few porters hurrying away to other work, or sharply calling,

"This way out," to the knot of women left weeping on the platform;—and one old man, who stood, not weeping, but leaning heavily on his stick, and gazing, in a sort of abstraction, upon the long black serpent, with its white-coiling breath, that went puffing and snorting away, first slow—then faster—faster—till it disappeared into the dim distance, carrying with it the delight of his eyes for twenty years.

Yes, Keith was gone,—quite gone now. The old man had lost his only child.

There must have been something in the parson's aspect which told his sad story; for one of the porters, roughly beginning to order him from the platform—as they did the poor sobbing women—stopped, and said civilly,—

"This is your way, sir. Shall I get you a cab?"

"Thank you."

But on trying to walk, Mr. Garland felt so feeble, that involuntarily he put out his hand for support.

"Sit you down here, sir, and I'll find you a cab in two minutes."

It might have been two—or ten; he could not say, for he felt so utterly bewildered and weary; when he was roused by a light touch on his arm, and saw a young woman standing at the end of the bench. A young woman—scarcely even a "young person," as the intermediate phrase is; and not a "young lady" by any means.

"If you please, Mr. Garland, I be here, sir."

The strong west-country accent, the humble manner, like a servant's, and the dress—a mere servant's dress also—were sufficient, even if

she had not called him by his name, to inform the parson who she was,—his "daughter," Charlotte Garland.

Exhausted as he was, all the blood seemed to rush to his heart, rousing him out of his stupor, and bringing him back at once to the bitter reality of things. He turned,—to examine sharply—he tried hard that it should not be unjustly—this girl, who had proved such a fatality to him and his.

She was like—and yet unlike—what he had remembered of her. Her face he could not see —she had a thick veil on; but her ungloved hands, not coarse now—sickness had wasted and whitened them—were shaking violently. Nevertheless the voice in which she addressed him was composed, and not unsweet—even to the parson's most sensitive ear.

He rose and gave her his seat. "I believe—I cannot be mistaken—you are Mrs. Keith Garland?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you here alone?"

"Quite alone."

She said it half inaudibly, but very quietly, without any of the torrents of tears, the noisy demonstrative grief of the women around, which was what Mr. Garland had somehow expected. And when she lifted up her veil, he saw—not the pretty, rosy girl, who had worked so much woe, but a thin, sickly-looking creature, who was evidently doing her utmost to use a woman's self-control. There was a fixed repression in the small and close-set mouth; a mute, restrained, unappealing sorrow in the heavy eyes, which touched him in spite of himself.

She waited for him to speak again, but finding he did not, she said, still in the same humble tone:—

"Beg pardon, sir, for coming up to 'ee, but I thought you might miss of I, and that would gie 'un a deal more trouble."

As she spoke Mr. Garland winced terribly. He could not help it. He, so sensitive to small refinements, how should he endure constant association with this girl, however harmless and even affectionate she might be?

"I thought you were safe at your lodgings," said he, abruptly. "What did you come here for?"

A foolish, nay, a cruel question, as he saw next minute, but the girl did not resent it; and though her features twitched and quivered she did not cry.

"I couldn't help coming, just to see the last

of him; he's my husband, sir. But he didn't see I; I took care o' that."

"Where were you then?"

"Just behind that lamp. I saw you and him a-walking together, up and down, such a long time; oh! such a long time! And then you bid him good-bye, and he got into the carriage." She faltered — broke down a little.

"Poor girl!" said Mr. Garland, taking her hand, which he had not yet done; and as he did it, he was conscious of a momentary warmth of heart towards this forlorn creature, scarcely more than a child, thus strangely left to his charge: and to whom the law, if nothing else, had given the external title of his "daughter."

Charlotte did not respond, in any equal or filial way. Her limp, pallid hand just touched his and dropped away again. She was evidently terribly afraid of him.

The civil porter came up with the information that a cab was waiting.

"We must go now," said Mr. Garland. "Come!" He paused, considering what to call her—what he ought to call her,—this young woman, who, however he felt towards her, was his son's wife, and must be treated as such. Then with an effort he said, "Come, Charlotte."

She obeyed, with the humble, deferential air which was to him so painful; and yet, perhaps, the contrary would have been worse. He tried to think so—tried to hope the best. As she sat beside him in the cab, he made several attempts at ordinary conversation, showing her the London streets they passed, and so on; but she seemed quite stupid, either with grief or shyness, and only replied in monosyllables. So he took refuge in covertly observing the pretty face; beyond question it was very pretty, with

almost a Greek profile, only less inane than those correct outlines usually are, dark eyes, and a quantity of rich blue-black hair. But there was the servant's bonnet, gown, and shawl, tawdry with violent contrasts of colour; the servant's gloveless hands; and above all the unmistakable servant's air—half awkward, half shy, in the presence of an acknowledged superior.

He could make no more out of her than this, until the two were sitting face to face—he pointed to a chair, or she would have remained standing—in the little lodging-house parlour. With both of them, the first passion of parting had subsided: the wrench was over; and let their hearts bleed inwardly how they might, outwardly they had to go back to the duties of the common work-a-day world.

The first thing that startled them into this, was the landlady's bringing up breakfast; it was scarcely nine o'clock, and yet it seemed already the middle of the day.

"We'll wait a bit," said Charlotte, hesitating; perhaps she remembered the day when she gave the parson his tea at Valley Farm. Perhaps he remembered it too; but these things must not be remembered.

"No, we'll not wait, if you please. Will you give me some breakfast?"

He pointed to her seat, assuming his own opposite; and so they sat down together, as father and daughter-in-law, and took the initiative step in their new life.

Their meal ended, and it gave to both a certain sense of ease and comfort, as if the first and worst difficulty had been got over satis-

factorily, the parson spoke to her, trying to do it gently and kindly, in the manner he used towards his parish school children.

"We must now consider our plans, my dear. You know, of course, that you are coming back with me to Immeridge?"

"Yes, he told me so."

"And are you satisfied with the arrangement?"

"Eh, sir?"

"Do speak out," said Mr. Garland, a little sharply. "I should be sorry to take you home with me if you did not approve of it. I do not wish to treat you as a child, or as—as an inferior person."

Charlotte Garland opened her great eyes—childish eyes they were, almost; there was no badness in them, and a certain appealing simplicity; a "Don't hurt me!" sort of look.

Evidently she did not half understand what was being said to her. But she looked up into the kind face of Keith's father, and understood it better than his words.

"Yes, sir, I'd like to go with you, and thank you kindly," said she.

"Very well: suppose we go home to-day?"

And then he remembered what a changed home he was returning to; changed in what it had lost, and far worse, for he had grown used to Keith's absence, in the additional burden it had gained; a burden which, to an old man of his solitary and settled ways, would be obnoxious every hour of the day. And yet it was but duty—as this Christian man read his duty —therefore it must be done.

Nevertheless, the more he pondered over it the more perplexing it grew. Not merely in its larger aspect, but in the minutiæ of things. He had

written to his housekeeper, saying merely "that Mr. Keith was married, and was going to Canada, leaving his wife at the Parsonage till his return." This intelligence, in all its naked brevity, would, he knew, soon speed all round the parish, perhaps even to Valley Farm, where the truth would be at once guessed. How it would finally come out at Immeridge, or whether the whole story was not already public, Mr. Garland could not tell, and took no means of learning.

He was a thoroughly honest man, this Parson Garland. His candid soul, clear as daylight itself, had no fear of coming to the light. Those poor shams—so common that they cease to be thought mean, and are called by pretty names—such as "keeping up appearances," "wearing a good face before the world," or even that last and saddest sham of all, euphu-

istically translated as "*laver son linge sale chez lui:*" all these forms of elegant hypocrisy were to him unknown and impossible. He never did, consciously, what he was ashamed of doing: and therefere never dreaded the world's knowing that he did it. If he himself thought it right to take home to Immeridge Parsonage his son's wife, what business had the world to meddle with the matter?

He did not feel it necessary to advertise to all his neighbours who and what Mrs. Keith Garland had been,—to bruit publicly his own private griefs and his son's errors. But his silence was not deceit—he never tried to deceive anybody; he was resolved, whatever happened, he never would. That morbid dread of public opinion, which shrinks, not so much from the thing itself, whether misfortune, disgrace, or even crime, as from society's knowing it, was not

the form in which temptation came to Mr. Garland. It might have done once, for he was naturally very sensitive to love and hatred, praise and blame; but time and his long solitary life had taught him better wisdom. To him — accustomed to live alone, face to face with the All-seeing Eye—the stare, whether kindly or malign, of mere fellow-creatures, seemed comparatively a very little thing.

Still he was conscious of many perplexities that would arise from bringing Charlotte home as his daughter-in-law. The first one—a trivial and yet annoying thing—dawned upon him as she sat opposite to him, huddled up in the arm-chair which he had made her take, for she looked very pale and wan, though she made no complaint.

It was years,—twenty years, since the parson had noticed women's dress; but he had an

artistic eye, and remembering what used to please him once, in the only woman he ever admired — and yet she was not pretty — he saw at once that something was amiss in the undoubtedly pretty Charlotte Garland. He could not exactly tell what it was, except that the flimsy cotton gown and gaudy-patterned shawl were very different from the unity of harmonious colour, the decorous simplicity of shape, to which he had been accustomed, and by which an ordinary or even a plain woman can make herself lovesome, not to say lovely, if she chooses.

Also, there was that unmistakable something, or lack of something, which convinced him that when she came under the sharp eyes of Jane, the old servant — who had been servant to his wife — would discover at once that Mrs. Keith Garland was "not a lady."

This, alas! was in degree inevitable; still, some external amendment might be made, only he did not like to hurt Charlotte's feelings by doing it.

"Excuse me," he said, at last, "but have you any other gown than this? It is scarcely warm enough for travelling."

"So *he* said," she always referred to Keith as "he;" "and that it wasn't fit for me to wear now; and he left me some of his money to buy clothes, and told me he would send me more by-and-by. I wasn't to be a burden upon you, sir."

"Poor fellow!" said the father, softly.

"I was always handy at my fingers, though I had no book-learning, please, sir," pursued Charlotte, timidly. "If I might go out and buy some stuff, I could make a Sunday gown for myself when I get home—I mean—I beg

your pardon if I've said anything wrong," added she, in great confusion.

"No, my dear. Immeridge is your home."

"Thank'ee, sir," with a return to the humble servant-girl manner so terribly annoying to Mr. Garland. He struggled to conquer himself, however, and suggested that they should take the landlady into council, and before leaving London should spend Keith's money, perhaps a little more, but he did not hint this, in supplying a suitable wardrobe for Keith's wife.

Charlotte caught at the idea, and whether for love's sake, or vanity's sake — the not wonderful vanity of sixteen — she took, during three whole days, a world of labour, and no little enjoyment, over her new clothes She also accommodated herself to them so well, that when she was dressed in them, a fellow-traveller who resigned his place to her in the rail-

way carriage, spoke of her as "that young lady."

Fortunately she talked little during the journey: indeed the parson had been relieved to find, during their three days' association together, that familiarity with him did not make her grow more voluble, but rather more silent. Also, that when he talked to her, which he forced himself to do as much as possible, she sometimes seemed to notice the difference in their speech, and try, blunderingly, but eagerly, to correct her own. Seeing this, he once or twice corrected her himself in some glaring error of grammar or pronunciation, which reproof she took meekly enough and did not make the mistake again.

Still the *ci-devant* Charlotte Dean could by no possibility be exalted into a heroine of romance. She was just a common servant-girl, or seemed so, to the parson; who, in criticising

her, had to contend not only with personal pain, but with all the prejudices of his class, and the sensitiveness of a nature peculiarly alive to all that was graceful and delicate, or the contrary. His only hope was, that in these three days he saw nothing wrong about Charlotte, nothing actually coarse, or wicked, or unwomanly; and then she was so very young. She must have been a mere child—too childish to have learned anything very bad—when she came under the strict guardianship of Mrs. Love, of whom, however, she seldom spoke, or in any way reverted to her former life.

Nor did Mr. Garland. He covered it over, and left it with the Judge of all.

Nevertheless, as with this young woman sitting by his side, he travelled through the fair southern counties, along the very same

route which he had once taken—(it seemed sometimes only a day, and sometimes a lifetime ago)—with another, and oh, what a different woman! whom he was also bringing home to the same home; it might well be forgiven the old man, if, through all his compassion, he felt a sensation of indescribable, hopeless pain.

But, happily, ere they reached their journey's end, Charlotte's small strength broke down. He had not looked at her for a good while, and then he saw that she had quietly leaned her head in the corner of the fly, and fainted. And when the carriage stopped at the Parsonage gate, and he tried to help her out, she, equally quietly, dropped down on the damp doorsteps, and had to be carried off at once upstairs, and put to bed by Jane like a baby.

It was a strange, sad coming home of Keith's wife, but it was the best thing that could have happened. And after an hour of great uneasiness, spent in wandering up and down the house, and lingering outside the long-vacant "guest-chamber," where the sick girl lay, Mr. Garland was astonished to find how entirely he had forgotten everything,—except anxiety and compassion for her.

"Well?" said he eagerly to Jane, as she came out of the room.

Jane cast down her eyes, determined not to meet her master's.

"She's better, sir; she's only tired like; she'll be all right to-morrow."

"I am glad to hear it. She has had a long journey; and it was hard parting with her husband, of course."

neighbours. Of course Jane knew—everybody knew—the whole story by this time. But when he met this cruel fact, blank and plain; when his old servant looked him in the face, not with disrespect, certainly, but with a sort of half-pitying, half-angry amazement, without one word of sympathy or regret for Keith's departure, or of curiosity over Keith's young wife,—the parson felt it hard.

He said nothing,—what was there to say? He had borne much sorrow, but the first shame of his life was come upon him now.

"Be the young woman to stop here, sir?"

"My son's wife will certainly stop here," replied Mr. Garland, with a dignity that silenced Jane. And then feeling that—cruel as the explanation was—it was his duty both as a man and a clergyman to explain himself sufficiently, even to his own servant, so that

neither she nor any one would mistake him, or suppose that he glossed over wickedness, or paltered between right and wrong, he said, "Jane, you must never again speak in that tone of Mr. Keith's wife. It was a marriage without my knowledge or consent, but it was the right and best thing under the circumstances. They are both very sorry; and God may have forgiven them,—I have. — Jane," he added, almost entreatingly, for he felt how critical the position was, "don't judge her, only be kind to her."

Jane looked as if she doubted the evidence of eyes and ears,—looked at her master until big tears gathered, and fell. She wiped them off with her apron, and said in a husky voice,—

"Well, I never seed such a man as you, —never! Yes; I'll do it, sir. I'll be kind to

her, but it's only for your sake, mind that, master. May the good Lord reward you, Mr. Garland!"

And Jane went hastily away, more overcome than she had ever been seen since the day when she stood with Keith, a newborn baby, in her arms, weeping her heart out beside her dear mistress's coffin.

Mr. Garland went slowly up-stairs, not into his study, but his own bed-room. He was very weary, and yet composed. The worst was over; there was nobody else to be spoken to, or to speak to him, on this subject. And Keith was gone. He had suffered as much as he could suffer, and felt strangely at rest.

If any eyes had watched him,—but there were none to watch, at least none visible to mortal ken,—they might have seen the old man shut his door, seat himself in his arm-

chair by the window, and undrawing the curtain gaze out upon the church and churchyard, where, cradled in moonlight, the white gravestones slept. He sat a long time, and then went quietly to bed, his last conscious thought being, with a sense of repugnance tinged with involuntary tenderness, that now, for the first time in so many years, there slept under the parsonage roof another Mrs. Garland.

CHAPTER VI.

IN spite of Jane's confident assertion that her patient would be all right to-morrow, it was several weeks before the expectant village, or indeed anybody except Jane and her master, saw Mrs. Keith Garland.

Though only a servant, poor Charlotte had a heart in her bosom; her power of self-control was very great for one so young, but after the need for calmness was over, she "fretted above a bit," as Jane expressed it, for her husband. Instead of rising from her bed, and parading before all Immeridge her honours and glories as Parson Garland's daughter, the poor thing

turned her face to the wall; did nothing but weep all day long, and fell into a sort of low fever, or "waste," which, had it been done out of policy, was the wisest thing she could have done at that crisis. For old Jane's kindly nature was touched by the mere act of tending her; she forgot all that Master Keith's wife was, or had been, and thought of her only as a poor, sick child, who depended upon her,—Jane, for everything. So that between these two women, who otherwise might have become naturally antagonistic, the one obtruding and the other resenting, their painfully false position, there grew up a true and not unnatural bond, which contributed very much to the peace of the Parsonage household.

The parson, too, in the daily half-hour visit which he compelled himself to pay to his daughter-in-law's room, talking to her about

trivial things, or perhaps, as was his habit in sick rooms, reading to her a few verses out of the Bible, became familiarised to the pale face that he found lying on the pillow, or propped upright in the easy-chair by the fire. Its prettiness pleased his eye; its silent smile as he entered moved his heart; he felt glad this poor young creature had not been left a cast-away upon the cruel world.

By degrees his duty-visit ceased to be a trouble and a task; he found himself looking forward to it with some slight interest, wondering what he should talk to her about that day, and what she would say in return. Not that she ever said much; she seemed to have an instinct that it was safer to be silent, or perhaps in the long confidential hours which she and Jane necessarily spent together, she got to know more of her father-in-law than he

suspected, or than she ever would have done, had they been thrown together very much at first. So, either from prudence or timidity, she rarely did more than smile her welcome, and pay to the old man the tender flattery of a mute listener. Still, she supplied him with an interest, an object of thought and care; he scarcely knew how it was, but the parsonage felt less empty; and even the small domestic fact of having to send up to the invalid her portion from his daily meals, made them seem a little less selfishly solitary.

For his life outside,—it went on just in its ordinary round. His parishioners were none of them of that rank who could take upon themselves the liberty of intimacy; nobody questioned him even about his son, and not a soul in the smallest way adverted to his son's wife. Sometimes he was glad of this,

and then again he involuntarily resented it, and it inclined him the more compassionately to the poor pale girl, who lay so quiet in the little room up-stairs, harming nobody, and of scarcely more importance to anybody than if she already lay "under the mools."

Thus things went on,—and seemed as if they might go on for ever,—until the quiet of the parsonage was stirred by an event,—a momentous event always,—the first letter from over the seas.

Keith wrote to his father at some length, very explicitly and satisfactorily; but to his wife was only a small note, enclosed in the other. Mr. Garland sent it up-stairs at once, and followed it himself half-an-hour after, with his own letter in his hand. For amidst all his pleasure in the long loving letter, which had a tone of thoughtfulness and manliness

quite new, the old man was touched with slight compunction that Keith's confidences were all to his father. The thing was inevitable, and yet it was not as things should be. As he walked up-stairs to his daughter-in-law's room, Mr. Garland could not help sighing.

Charlotte turned towards him with her customary smile; but this time it was not quite natural; she had evidently been in tears.

"Is not this good news?" said the old man, cheerily, and gave her his letter. Hers was lying open on her lap; it seemed to consist only of half-a-dozen lines, written in large copper-plate hand, as you would write to a child. The parson felt almost sorry when he looked at his own long letter. "You see, Charlotte, all the business facts come to me; but would you care to read them? Perhaps you do not feel strong enough?"

"Oh, yes; but—I can't. Please, sir, I haven't learnt to read written hand."

Mr. Garland might have felt, for the hundredth time, that bitter sense of incongruity in this wife with whom unfortunate Keith had burdened himself for life, had it not been for Charlotte's burning blush, which showed her own painful consciousness of the same.

"Never mind," he said kindly, "I will read it to you. But—your own letter."

"I couldn't read it; and I thought you might not like my asking Jane to. Oh, sir, is he quite well? Has nothing happened to him? Is he glad he went?"—added she eagerly, while her lips quivered, and despite all her efforts to prevent it, the tears came streaming down.

"My dear," said the parson, deeply touched, "keep quiet, or we shall have you as ill as ever again. Keep quiet, and you shall hear

every word he says—you have a right; he is your husband."

"Yes, yes!" And for a minute the poor girl's eyes brightened with love; the rare unbought treasure which heaven can light up in a beggar's heart or in a queen's; but which, once kindled, nothing earthly will ever quench, —and Mr. Garland saw it.

He silently extended his hand and held hers, while he read aloud Keith's letter. When he had done so, and talked it over a little, explaining anything that he thought she was not likely to understand, he asked, hesitatingly, if he should read the other one.

"Mine! Oh, yes—if you would be so kind." She had sat folding and fingering it, and now she gave it up with a sad, lingering look,— poor Charlotte!

"You must not mind my seeing it—even if

it is a love-letter," said the parson, half-apologetically. But there was no need; all the world might have read every line of Keith's first letter to his young wife:—

"Dear Charlotte,

"You will be glad to hear I am safe landed at Halifax, and shall shortly be on my way to the backwoods of Canada. My father will tell you where they are, and all about them, if you care to hear. I shall have to work hard—chiefly at farming work, which you know all about; though I hear farming is rather different there from what it is in Old England. Still I can learn,—and you will learn too; when I can fetch you or send for you. I hope you will be a good girl till then, and take care of your health, so as to get thoroughly strong, for health is very much

wanted out here. I hope to have mine,—perhaps better than in England: for other things it is of course a very great change.

"I write this large, hoping you may contrive to read it. Perhaps by-and-by you might manage to learn to write. Be as cheerful as you can, and be always dutiful and obedient to my dear father.

"Your affectionate Husband,

"M. K. GARLAND."

Nothing more than this,—and there scarcely could have been less; yet Charlotte seemed satisfied with the letter, and asked Mr. Garland to read it over again to her.

"Then I shall learn it by heart," said she simply; and the old man felt it hard to meet the touching patience of her eyes. Sinful as she was, she had been sinned against

likewise. The wrong, for which no man can ever fully atone, had been done, and done by his son, to this poor servant-girl.

He stayed with her much beyond his customary half-hour; sometimes talking, sometimes sitting silent; pondering—not the question of sin and forgiveness; he left that to Heaven alone:—but wondering whether, contrary to all his theories and habits, he was being taught how, in Heaven's sight, nothing is "common or unclean." Whether, by rare chance, Nature might not have put sense and intelligence under that broad, low forehead; sensitiveness and refinement in the always sweet-tempered, flexile mouth;—whether, in short, though she was not born one, it might not be possible in time to make something like "a lady" out of Charlotte Garland.

At last he said, "Charlotte, when you are

stronger, you and I must have a word or two of serious talk. No,—don't look frightened! it is not to scold you,—the only fault I mean to find, is that you will not get well fast enough."

"Would you like me to get well, sir? I have sometimes thought,—well, it has been put into my mind, that—that——"

"Speak out. Always speak out."

"That you would rather—I know it would be better—Oh, sir, you know—you can't help knowing—that it would be a deal easier for him if I died."

This outburst—and alas! it was not altogether without foundation—quite overwhelmed Mr. Garland. Its very truth made it more difficult to answer. Nor had he expected it,— though he had before noticed, with some surprise, that in this coarse, unlettered girl, lurked the true principle of feminine

devotedness,—the faculty of seeing all things as they affected "him," and not herself at all.

"My dear," said he, gently, "you must not talk thus. Everything that is past, is past —we must make the best of it. Instead of dying, suppose you were to come down-stairs and make tea for me to-night?"

Charlotte looked amazed. "Do you really want me? Would you really like me to come?"

For once in his life the parson told an untruth—or half a truth, disguising the rest—and answered briefly, "Yes, my dear." But he forgave himself when he saw how Charlotte's whole countenance brightened up.

"Then I'll do it at once—this very night, sir. I can. I felt quite strong enough to come down-stairs,—only there was nothing to come down for."

"How so?"

Charlotte hung her head. "Jane said I was not to help her in the kitchen—and there is no other work I am fit to do. Besides, I should only have been in your way—I know that."

Mr. Garland avoided answering the last half of her sentence. "You seem to have a grand notion of work, Charlotte," said he.

"I was brought up to it,—it comes natural to the likes o' we;" and then recognising her provincialisms, out of which she had struggled very much of late, at least whenever she talked with her father-in-law—the girl suddenly blushed — Charlotte's vivid, scarlet blush.

"By 'us' you mean the people you were among before my son married you," said the parson, determined to shirk nothing, though he

spoke both kindly and familiarly. "No doubt as Mrs. Love's servant you worked hard enough; but there is no reason why an emigrant's wife, and"—he paused—"a clergyman's daughter, should not work too, though in rather a different way. And that is what I wanted to speak to you about. Shall I?"

"Yes, please, sir."

"Would you not like to learn something? Learn to write,—that you may answer Keith's letters; to read books, that you may be a companion to him when he comes home. The Bible speaks—I read it to you only yesterday —of the wife being 'a help-meet' for the husband."

"What does that mean?" asked Charlotte, humbly.

The parson thought a minute, and then

trying to put his thoughts into as simple language as possible, re-translating himself as if it were for a child, he explained to her his own beliefs about marriage,—his faith, and also his experience; how, though the man was the head of the woman, the woman ought to be the heart and right hand of the man; able to help him in his difficulties, to sympathize with him in all his aims, to comfort him in all his troubles. That outward differences or incongruities might exist—or might be got over in time; but that this inner union must be, else the marriage was a total failure from beginning to end. And whether from the excessively simple way in which he put it —all divinest truths are the most simple and most clear—or from a tender earnestness of manner which supplied what his words failed

in; but he saw that, somehow or other, Charlotte understood him. When he ended, she looked up wistfully in his face.

"I know it's all true, sir. I knew I wasn't a fit wife for him—but, do you think I might grow to be?"

That doctrine of growth is one of the saving truths of life. When we reject it,—when we judge people harshly by what they were once, or hopelessly, in looking forward to what they may be, we often make terrible mistakes. We are far harder upon one another than God ever is upon us. We forget that in His divine plan—so far as we can see it—all existence appears to be an eternal progress, an ever-advancing development. Unless, as sometimes happens, the tide runs backward, and then the only future is infinite retrogression. Looking at our life—or lives—to come, after

what seems to be the system of this one, we can imagine a just and merciful Being, making possible to His creatures not only eternal life, but eternal death; — never eternal punishment.

But this is too solemn a sermon to come from such a very simple text as Charlotte Garland.

If any one had seen her three months— well, say six, for they slipped away so fast that nobody counted them—from the day when she was brought home to Immeridge, she would scarcely have been recognised. It is true, she was at the most impressible season of a woman's life,—when new habits are formed and old ones effaced with a rapidity incredible to those who have not seen such things. Besides,—and the more her father-in-law perceived this, the more patient he grew with her

—she was, in addition to his own, under the teaching of the great master, Love.

Without a doubt Charlotte was deeply attached to her husband. Perhaps, something naturally refined in her had made her fancy a gentleman rather than a plough-boy; and sorrow developed this fancy into the real love, which nothing can imitate, and nothing destroy. Cold as Keith was, and neglectful—for after the first letter he rarely wrote again, but contented himself with sending messages to his wife through his father—unquestionably the poor wife loved him. Love guided the pen in her clumsy fingers over dozens of blurred copy-books: Love wakened her with the lark, to pore over old Spelling-books and Reading-made-easy's—relics of the last Mrs. Garland's governess days—for hours before any one in the Parsonage was stirring. Love—and perhaps affection also

—as for two hours daily she "said her lessons" in the study like a child—softened her rough provincial tones, and made her try to speak good English, and to move about not in her old floundering way, but with the subdued quiet which she knew the parson liked. And he knew that she knew he liked it, and why he did so; for once, when the kitchen-door was left open, he overheard her saying, in a deprecatory, grieved way, "Please, Jane, I wish you would always tell me when I do these sort of things. I must be so unlike anything he has ever been used to. And, oh! couldn't you tell me something more about poor Mrs. Garland?"

Nevertheless, human nature is human nature; and many a time the old leaven of servanthood would reappear. It was evidently a sore restraint to her to sit still in the parlour, instead

of being busy with Jane in the kitchen. At her lessons, though she learnt easily and fast—as quick brains, left fallow till quite past childhood, very often do learn, which was a great mercy to the parson—still she was often stupid through sheer awe and timidity, and her manner, when frightened, assumed that painful subserviency which annoyed Mr. Garland more than anything.

Their life together was not easy; but things were less dreadful than the good man expected them to be; and sometimes he thought —when he had time to think about it at all —that he was scarcely so unhappy as his son's miserable marriage ought to have made him.

It had pleased God to take away his life's hope —to end all his dreams for his boy's future—

to put endurance for happiness, and a burden for a delight — and yet—and yet — he was conscious of many pleasures left. He could still enjoy the spring sunshine, and watch the cliff swallows return to their old nests from over unknown seas, and the primroses people in multitudes the little dell below Immeridge village, with scarcely less interest than he had done, season after season, when the seasons' change formed the only epochs in his monotonous days.

Then, too, during their Sunday walks, begun through a painful sense of duty to the solitary girl, and also to lessen the weariness of their sitting looking at one another in the Parsonage parlour throughout the whole blank Sabbath evening—he gradually took pleasure in showing her all these country things, and

talking about them, and in watching their effect in the pretty face, which, though healthy enough now, never again offended his taste with the coarse Blowsabella beauty of Valley Farm. That mysterious impress which the mind makes upon the body, altering, refining, and sometimes altogether transforming, began to be very perceptible in Charlotte. Her features deepened in expression; her slender figure acquired that grace of motion which is as important as grace of form, and her gentle, even temper lent to her voice, even though it did speak bad English,—a certain musical tone (*timbre*, as the French call it, and no other word is quite equivalent) which made grammatical errors pardonable. Not that she was in any way like Moore's low-born heroine, of whom he wrote so enthusiastically:—

"Has the pearl less whiteness
Because of its birth?
Hath the violet less brightness
For growing near earth?"

Thomas Dean's child was neither a pearl nor a violet, but merely a very pretty young woman, whom Nature had accidentally gifted with qualities, physical and mental, which would have made her noticeable in any rank of life, and which, being cultivated, bade fair to lift her out of her own. One occasionally sees such persons—ladies'-maids, who have more of "the lady" in them than their mistresses; and graceful gentlewomen, whom meeting in society, one hears with astonishment were once barefooted mill-girls, whom some honest, romantic master educated and married. And though such cases are but remarkable exceptions to a most wise and righteous law; and the truth yet remains that the most insane act a young man

can commit is an unequal marriage, still there is another truth behind it,—that in this, as in every phase of human experience, exceptional cases will arise sometimes, upon which we dare not sit in judgment, if only because they are exceptional.

Nobody sat in judgment upon this case. At least, not openly; probably because there was nobody to do it. Except Valley Farm, where with a certain instinctive hesitation, Mrs. Keith Garland did not attempt to go, nor did her father-in-law desire it at present—there was not a house in the parish likely to criticise the parson or the parson's daughter, so loudly as to reach their ears; for Immeridge village had the true English respect for its betters. And the Hall—which might have been found a difficulty, and indeed Mr. Garland looked forward with a vague dread to

the Squire's return,—was shut up this year, since, instead of returning, Mr. Crux died, and the family property devolved to a cousin —a barrister in London.

So after the first hard stares in Church; some finger-pointings as she left it; and when she casually walked abroad in the village, visible hesitations between a broad laugh in the face of "Lotty Dean," or a decent curtsey to Parson Garland's daughter,—after all these things, which Charlotte herself did not seem to perceive, and the parson shut his eyes to, while Jane, that faithful servant, fulfilled a servant's true duty of holding her tongue entirely on her master's affairs—gossip ceased to trouble itself about Mrs. Keith Garland. Time went on, and it was already a year since that dreary day when Mrs. Love had come into Mr. Garland's study, and — as he

thought — destroyed his peace for ever with her terrible tale. Only a little year, and all things had smoothed down, as they do so wonderfully, when we cease to fight against Providence, but simply do our best, and let Providence fight for us.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was early spring,—Easter week, indeed—and Mr. Garland sat writing his Easter sermon with his study window open, inhaling the odour of bursting sweet-briar leaves and of double Russian violets,—there was a bed of these just underneath, sprung from a single root which Mrs. Garland had planted; and in this sheltered nook, under the mild southern climate, they had flourished so as to overspread the whole border. The parson could generally pick one or two every week, all winter through: he put them in a wine-glass on the desk, when, however

faded they looked, Jane never ventured to touch them; nobody did. Even in spring, when the violets became plentiful, nobody quite liked to gather them from this bed; so they bloomed and withered in peace, pouring their scent in at the study window like a fragrant cloud of invisible love.

The old man often stopped in his writing to drink it in; delighting himself in it, as he did in all delightsome things. Perhaps if Heaven had made him very rich, or very prosperous, or very happy, in this world's happiness, he might have been something of a Sybarite; and therefore it was better that things were as they were, at least he often thought so. Still he felt, and thanked God for it, that even to old age he had kept the keen sense of enjoyment, especially in Nature's luxuries. Thus spring was just as delicious to him now as

the spring-days of his youth; perhaps affecting him with a higher and more chastened delight. For then it had brought visions of things never to be, and now it stirred up in him no earthly longings at all, but a peaceful looking forward to what the return of spring mysteriously fore-shadows,—"the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

He was alone, for, Charlotte's daily lessons being over, she had gone as usual into the garden, where she was very fond of working, and where her labours had of late almost superseded his own. It was good for her, since it gave her plenty of active, open-air occupation, occupation with her hands. For Charlotte had one great deficiency in the making of a lady, or, at least, a fine lady,— she hated being idle. And it was very difficult to find her enough to do. She could not study all

He did not love his daughter-in-law; love with him was a plant of very slow growth, but he liked her; with the tender liking that a good man cannot but feel towards a creature wholly dependent on him, and who never consciously offends him in word or deed. There was no romantic affection shown on either side, but she was a good girl, and he had the strongest sense of pity for her and responsibility towards her. He did not now feel his work done and wish to die. He prayed rather to be kept sound in body and vigorous in mind for a few years longer, that he might work on; or live to see the dark future unfold itself.

He said nothing to his son of either his angers or misgivings: he knew that compelled love is more fatal than hate; but he wearied himself with plans to keep Charlotte from fretting; she did look sad and grave sometimes when

Keith's letters came; and, above all, he tried to keep her fully employed.

"I wonder," he thought, "how young women in general employ their time—those three Misses Crux, for instance." For the new Squire and his family had appeared at church the Sunday previous, and the parson had called at the Hall, as in duty bound, on the Monday morning.

He compared Charlotte, as she moved about the lilac-bushes in her grey merino gown and straw hat, with these stylish London damsels; in good looks, and in a certain simplicity of costume, which after considerable struggles, she had attained to, he fancied Keith's wife had rather the advantage. But he sighed when he thought of the nameless graces of ladyhood, to his delicate perceptions so indispensable; the quiet dignity of speech and mien, the repose

of perfect self-possession, the noble simplicity which, however perfect it may appear to others, always sees for itself an ideal beyond anything it now is, or can ever attain to. Alas! all these things would, he feared, be hopelessly wanting in Mrs. Keith Garland.

But this Monday morning, while his perplexed mind was turning over all ways and means for her improvement, he was summoned to the parlour; where was the overwhelming apparition of the very ladies he had been uneasily meditating upon, as forming such a contrast to his daughter-in-law.

Their personality did not improve upon nearer view, for Mr. Garland was a gentleman of the old school, completely unused to the lively, not to say fast style of modern young ladies. The three Misses Crux, with their voluminous draperies, their masculine jackets, and tiny

hats, upon which a whole bird with glass eyes sat and stared at beholders, were no nearer his ideal woman than Charlotte was. Very incongruous they looked in the old-fashioned room, its decorations unaltered for twenty years: where they poked about, admired the old china, the fading embroidery, the valuable antique engravings, seeming determined, with their mother, a mild and unimpressive person, to make themselves as much at home as if they had been Mr. Garland's neighbours all their lives.

"What a charming house!"

"The very picture of a country parsonage!"

"And you live alone here, Mr. Garland? A charming old bachelor life. Oh, no! I remember now; you are not a bachelor. But what a sweet, quiet life it must be!"

"It is very quiet," said he, answering all the three girls at once, for they all spoke at

once, and wondering what he should say to them next; but they soon saved him that trouble.

"We shall find the Hall quiet too, after London; for papa means to live here all the year round."

"Oh, indeed!" replied the parson, with a slight shiver of apprehension, he hardly knew of what, or why.

"And we hope, Mr. Garland, that the Parsonage and the Hall will prove the best of neighbours—for all other neighbours are so far off. You must dine with us—mustn't he, mamma?—at least once a-week, if only out of charity."

"You are very kind." For under the rough demonstrativeness, he could perceive a certain frank kindliness for which he was not ungrateful.

"Come then, what day will you give us? Next Sunday?"

"I have never in my life dined out on Sunday. Not that I condemn others for doing so, but still it is not my liking nor my habit," said the parson gently.

"I beg pardon, I forgot; Sunday is so usual a visiting day with us in London; but perhaps in the country it is different. What week-day then? Fix your own day, and we will send the carriage for you at seven."

Mr. Garland's hesitating reply was stopped by an exclamation from the youngest and manliest Miss Crux, who had placed herself at the window, with her hands in her jacket pockets, and her mouth looking as if it would excessively like to whistle.

"Bless me! if there isn't the prettiest girl I

either forcing her upon his friends with all her antecedents openly acknowledged, or bringing her in surreptitiously, with her previous history concealed; as for Keith's sake he felt bound to conceal it if possible; this was a position which had never before suggested itself to his simple mind. A most critical position too: full either way of great difficulties; and yet he must decide instantly, and his decision might affect the poor girl's whole future life.

He trembled; he felt himself visibly tremble before all these inquisitive women—who might know, how much or how little he could not possibly divine; but no! their manner showed that they knew nothing. Ought he to tell them?

While he asked himself this question, his difficulty was summarily solved.

Charlotte, who had been at the other end of the garden, gathering flowers to replenish the

beau-pot in the grate, came in, ignorant of visitors, and suddenly opened the parlour door. Bare-headed, her hat hanging down behind, her hands full of daffodils and flowering currant blossoms, yellow and red, her cheeks and lips rosy with health, her eyes smiling over the one delight of her simple life—her successful horticulture—

"She stood—a sight to make an old man young."

Seeing the room full of ladies, she drew back in the extremest confusion.

There was no alternative now. "Come in, my dear," said the parson rising. "Mrs. Crux, this is my daughter-in-law—Mrs. Keith Garland."

Involuntarily Charlotte began her curtsey, but stopped and turned it into a bend, as Jane had tutored her—a gesture not exactly awkward, but so painfully shy and uncomfortable, that Mr. Garland out of pure pity bade her

"take her flowers away, and come back again presently." So, without her having once opened her lips, the door closed again upon that charming vision.

"Really, Mr. Garland," said the youngest Miss Crux, "your daughter-in-law is the very prettiest person I ever saw—a regular country belle. I say, girls, it's lucky for us that she's off the course."

"Eh?" said the puzzled parson.

"Lucky, I mean, that her name's scratched off the books of the matrimonial race—that she's already Mrs. Keith Garland."

The parson made no answer; indeed he was sore perplexed. Like many another man, large of heart and yet very sensitive, he could meet nobly and grapple bravely with a grand moral difficulty; but the petty puzzles of daily and social life were quite too much for him. He

needed a woman to save him from them, or help him through them—such a woman as the wife he had lost, or the imaginary daughter who never came. For this daughter—well seeing he could do nothing he attempted nothing; but waited in trepidation for her reappearance, determined to let things take their course, and act on the spur of the moment as best he could. However, Charlotte never reappeared.

The Crux party, after prolonging their visit to the utmost limit that politeness allowed, let fall some suggestions about hoping to see her again; but no effort being made by the host to gratify their curiosity, they departed, merely leaving "kind compliments to young Mrs. Garland." However, the same evening, before the parson and his daughter had met or spoken together, there strode up the Parsonage garden a tall

footman in livery, bearing an elegant missive—nay, two missives, from the Hall, addressed respectively to "Rev. Mr." and "Mrs. Keith Garland."

Charlotte took them herself to the study; she was in the habit of waiting upon him there, with letters or messages, and presented both to Mr. Garland.

"Open yours, my dear," said he; and watched her while she read: which she did slowly and carefully, first looking surprised and then exceedingly delighted. For it was an invitation to dinner at Cruxham Hall.

"Is the man waiting? Tell him we will send an answer presently, or to-morrow morning. And then give me my tea, if you please, Charlotte."

For he wanted to fortify himself and gain time before he decided.

Charlotte went away without speaking—she rarely did speak first to her father-in-law on any subject: and sat silent all the while he drank his tea, and read, or pretended to read, his three-days-old "Times."

Poor man! he was making up his mind, and it was to him a very troublesome business. He wished, as ever, to see the right honestly and plainly, and then do it. By the sudden gleam of pleasure in Charlotte's eyes, he perceived—what had not struck him before, that this lonely life, shut up in a country parsonage with only an old man for company, and lessons for recreation, debarred from the amusements of the class she sprang from, and not joining, nor capable of joining, in those of that to which she now belonged, was not the best sort of life for a young girl of seventeen—active, energetic, lively, pretty; and looking at her, more and

more he perceived how excessively pretty she was.

Nor, as she presided at the tea-table, did Mr. Garland notice anything in her, either as to appearance or behaviour, so very different from ordinary young ladies of her age. In truth, though the old man would never have thought of this, it was impossible for any one, with common instincts or observation, to sit at the board and share the daily society of such a thorough gentleman as Parson Garland, without acquiring in degree the outward manners of a lady. He noticed, as he had never done before, the great change in her; nor was his hesitation caused by the fear that as a companion she would be any personal annoyance to him, or would commit solecisms of good-breeding at the Hall dining-table any more than in the Parsonage parlour.

Still, the question remained,—the vital question. Had he any right to inflict upon the Cruxes, who were probably acting in the dark, or upon other neighbours who might not be in the dark, association with one from whom they were sure to shrink, although they might endure her awhile, out of respect to his cloth and to him? She was his daughter-in-law; but still she was once a common servant girl, and—alas, alas! if that had been all!

"Charlotte," said he, after watching her from behind his newspaper, trying to criticise her with the equal eye of a stranger; the result of which criticism was an amazement, mingled with solemn thankfulness, that so little of her antecedent history was written in her face. A face—was it looking into his face that it had grown so?—gentle, modest, simple, and sweet.

"Charlotte, my dear, what do you think about this invitation to Cruxham?"

"Me, sir?"

"I think we ought to decline it."

"Very well, sir. You know best."

She spoke meekly, but a shadow of disappointment crept over the pretty face. It was natural. She was only seventeen.

"I really do not see how we can go. You have no proper dress." And then ashamed of the flimsy excuse, the good man added, "Besides, to speak truth, Charlotte, as I always do, and I speak it not to hurt you, because you have too much good sense not to see the thing as plain as I do—you have never been used to that kind of society, and I doubt whether you would enjoy it, or feel at home in it."

"Perhaps not," with a little sigh, which

prevented Mr. Garland from putting more harshly the other side of the matter, that the Hall society might not welcome her.

"But what do you wish yourself? Tell me plainly."

"I hardly know. Yes I do," continued Charlotte, plucking up courage. "I hope it isn't wrong, but I should rather like to go. I have sometimes thought how nice it would be to meet people like the people in the books I read—real ladies and gentlemen, who are so good, and so beautiful, and so kind. I dearly like to read about them. How delicious it must be to live always among them!"

"Poor little girl!" said the parson to himself. Simple as he was, he was not quite so simple as she.

"But Charlotte, grand people are not always 'real ladies and gentlemen;' and they some-

times do very unkind things. They might be unkind to you. I am afraid they would be. Would you feel hurt by that?"

"I don't know. But if I could still admire them, would it much matter what they thought of me?"

The parson heard, and marvelled at poor Charlotte's instinctive leaping at that truth, the foundation of all hero-worship, all human devotedness, ay, even of religious faith—"I love, I admire, I adore," without reference to self at all. Equally he felt surprised at what a year had effected in this girl—this mind once blank almost as white paper, simply by keeping it white, removing from it all bad influences, and letting the unconscious influence of daily companionship with nature, and books that were pure and true as nature, do the rest.

While roused out of her ordinary silence, she

thus spoke, there was such longing in Charlotte's eyes, such an eager stretching out into "fresh fields and pastures new;" not the girlish craving for excitement, but the aspiration of a mind that was slowly opening, like the petals of a rose, to the mysteries of life, about which she was still as ignorant as a baby. Ay, in spite of all that had been, he was certain she was ignorant—and innocent too, in a very great degree. Such things, though rare, are possible.

Another idea occurred to him. What if his Quixotic education of his son's wife, shutting her out from all chance of harm, and filling her with ideal views of life, had lasted long enough, and it would be wiser to let her come into contact with human beings, more real and tangible than the heroes and heroines of h[illegible] story-books? And she had been so good ever since she came to Immeridge; so patient under

Keith's neglect, so obedient to Keith's father. It was hard to deprive her of a little pleasure, the first for which she had ever seemed to crave.

"But, my dear, if we did go — what dress have you?"

"I could manage that," interrupted she eagerly. "In every book I read, the young girls always go to their first party in white muslin, and I could make myself a white muslin dress in two days. And I have still a whole pound and more of the money he last sent me — that would buy it, and ribbons too. Oh, it would be so delicious!"

The parson smiled. His judgment slumbered—he had not the heart to say her no. So he took that first step which always costs so much; took it unwillingly, but without much calculation of consequences, saying to himself

that it was "only once in a way;" and that no harm could come.

The same evening, two responsive notes, one written to dictation and in Charlotte's very best hand, which now was at least as good as that of most school-girls, were sent up to the Hall by Jane's small assistant in the kitchen: who also posted a written order to the nearest market town for white muslin and pink riband. Then the parson put the matter from his mind. The die was cast.

When, on the appointed day and hour, he handed his daughter from the Parsonage door into the Hall carriage, it must be owned he was not ashamed of her. Her fresh and simple dress was very neatly made; up to the throat and down to the wrists, for Charlotte did not seem to know that while women of the lower classes like their best gowns to be an extra

covering, women of higher rank do just the contrary. She went, like Tennyson's Lady Clare, perhaps copied from that original, for Mr. Garland had often seen her reading the book.

"With a single rose in her hair,"

gathered from the rose-tree which, by greatest care, she had made to bloom in the parlour as if in a hothouse. And though she had no gloves on, having apparently no idea that they were ever worn indoors, her hands had grown white and shapely, not unlike a lady's hand; even though quite unadorned — except by the one plain gold ring. She fingered it nervously. Poor Charlotte! was she thinking of her husband?

Mr. Garland did not ask. In truth he dared not reason about that or anything else. He only told her "she looked very nice;" at which she blushed into brighter beauty, and relapsed

into silence. His mind misgave him, as it had done more than once that day; but it was too late to draw back.

Besides, why should he? He was doing nothing wrong. If Charlotte were good enough for the Parsonage, she certainly was for the Hall. At worst, in taking her there, he was only going counter to social prejudices; but he infringed no moral law, or sense of right. The Cruxes probably knew everything about her by this time: or if they did not, would soon learn; and then it would be at their own option to continue the acquaintance.

Thus he argued with himself, and palliated one of the few weak things, and the only uncandid thing he had ever done in his life; determined that, if done at all, it should be done without shrinking. Yet even while doing it, a sharp pain came across him; a sense of the

inevitable price that all sin must pay—to be paid, alas! not only by the sinner, but by those belonging to him. Oh, if Keith had ever thought of that!

When, mustering his courage, Mr. Garland walked into the splendid drawing-room with Charlotte on his arm, he could not help a certain relief at finding only strangers there—the Crux family, and some guests staying at the Hall.

"We asked several of your neighbours—I suppose everybody is one's neighbour here within ten miles,—asked them specially to meet you and your daughter," said Mrs. Crux apologetically. "But unfortunately they were all engaged."

"Well, it's their loss," added Miss Beatrice, as she took hold of Charlotte with both hands, stared hard and admiringly into her blushing face, then gave her a resonant kiss, remarking,

"I beg your pardon, my dear, but I really couldn't help it."

Mrs. Keith Garland was then introduced to old Mr. Crux, a stout and bland gentleman; to young Mr. Crux, a thin, small, fashionable youth, drawling in voice and lazy in manner, and to various other people, the family or the visitors. They all talked so much, and so fast, that she could easily hold her tongue. She retreated behind her usual shelter of sweet, smiling looks, and almost total silence, even when she was paid the compliment of being taken down to dinner by the host himself, probably under some misty notion that she was still a bride.

The Cruxes had brought their easy London manners to their country dinner-table, in the dazzle of which it would have been easy for a more awkward person than Keith's wife to

have passed muster, and been only commented upon as "very quiet." Quiet she was, her voice being rarely heard save in monosyllables; but her sweet looks spoke for her, and her excessive modesty and gentleness disarmed criticism, even if criticism had been attempted by these gay, metropolitan pleasure-seekers, who were accustomed to take people as they saw them, without inquiring much into their antecedents. Charlotte was treated with great civility by both ladies and gentlemen; and it never seemed to occur to either that she was other than she seemed—an unobtrusive, pretty, silent girl, very shy, and very oddly dressed; but then that was not surprising, considering that, as she herself said in answer to Miss Bea's question, she had spent all her life in these parts. Probably she was the daughter of some other country parson, who

might not have been nearly as "nice" as the old parson of Immeridge.

Nevertheless, for lack of other entertainment, the youngest Miss Crux seemed determined to patronise the country damsel in the most alarming manner. She kept her under her wing all the evening, treating her much as an admiring young man treats a charming young lady; that is, in these modern days, when young men deport themselves not as humble knights and devoted swains, but as if they thought they did the young lady great honour by falling in love with her. She planned rides, walks, pic-nics on the sea-shore, and other amusements, with the bewildered Charlotte, finally parting from her with every demonstration of the most ardent friendship.

Of all this the parson noticed very little. Having seen his daughter-in-law fairly afloat,

treated kindly, and looking happy, he devoted himself with his usual courtesy to spend the evening as pleasantly as might be, though wishing in his heart that he was safe beside his own study-fire. He had lost the habit of society, as people do when they grow old in long seclusion.

And as they drove home—still in the Hall carriage, for undoubtedly these Cruxes were very good-natured—he was so thoroughly wearied that instead of talking to his daughter he fell fast asleep. All he did was on bidding her good-night to hope she had enjoyed herself, and her looks answered the question at once.

"So," thought the old man, still very sleepy, "the evening is safe over, and no harm has come of it. I have been civil to my neighbours, I have pleased poor Charlotte, and there is an end of it all."

CHAPTER VII.

THE good parson was mistaken in his reckoning. That dinner of Cruxham Hall turned to be not an end, but a beginning; which, like the beginning of strife, was "as the letting out of water." For, henceforward, the Crux family, headed by Miss Beatrice, who governed them all, bore down in a torrent upon the peaceful Parsonage, and swept away Charlotte with them in a flood of friendship.

This state of things came about so imperceptibly, that Mr. Garland had no chance of

taking any preventive measures against it, even had he been so inclined. Before a week was over, it was too late. That easy, and almost inevitable intimacy, which comes about in the country, when people live close enough to be meeting daily, and cannot choose but meet, was fairly established between the Hall and the Parsonage.

Charlotte seemed to like it; passively, if not actively. She submitted to be led about by the ardent Miss Beatrice, as sweetly and silently as any pet lamb. For now, as always, her silence was her safeguard. And, to tell the truth, the fashionable Misses Crux were not gentlewomen enough to discover that she was none. They patronised her,—and she was the meekest possible person to patronise;—they fell into a *furore* about her, and showed her off to their guests as "the parson's pretty

daughter;" they laughed at her *gaucheries* and mispronunciations, which they set down merely to "country ways." In short, being used in their wide London experiences to catch strange creatures, and amuse themselves with them while the novelty lasted, they caught Charlotte, and tried to tame her and play with her, and make entertainment out of her, very much as if she had been a squirrel, a bird, a guinea-pig, or any other temporary pet, which could serve to wile away a dull hour, especially in the winter.

They were for ever sending for, or fetching her to the Hall; taking her drives, walks, picnics on the shore, and sketching parties inland; all of which enjoyments they made her believe would be incomplete without the pretty face of the parson's daughter. Also, because, except herself, they had no other companions;

the old families of the neighbourhood seeming rather to ignore, or at least taking time to investigate, the new Cruxes of Cruxham Hall.

So two or three weeks rolled by; and this vehement friendship, though carried on under Mr. Garland's very eyes, was scarcely noticed by him,—or noticed only because he saw Charlotte looked especially bright and happy whenever she told him,—as, if questioned, she invariably did,—that she had been with the young people of the Hall.

"You seem to like those Cruxes?" said he, one afternoon, when he left her, waiting in the garden with her bonnet on, for an appointed walk with Miss Beatrice.

"Yes," she answered, in her usual gentle and undemonstrative way; certainly Charlotte was not a passionate person. Which was perhaps all the better for Keith, or would be

one day. "Yes; I like them; they are very kind to me."

So the parson thought he would let matters drift on. It might have been wrong, or at least foolish, but it was a weakness belonging to his character not to take decisive steps unless absolutely driven to them.

Besides, this soft spring weather made him feel feeble, and conscious of his feebleness; gave him a solemn sense of how his years were narrowing down to months and weeks; which could not be very many, and might be very few. As he looked at the green leaves budding, all his longing was, that by the time they fell Keith, taking advantage of the long holiday of a Canadian winter, might come over, as was his duty, to see his wife, and finding her so changed might fall in love over again with a new Charlotte. In which case their perma-

nent residence in America, which, as his father saw with pain, Keith now drearily planned as the only future open to a young man whose wife was no better than a farm-servant,— might never come about. They might settle in England,— perhaps even near Immeridge,— Keith finding work of some sort to help them, or help to keep them, till by-and-by he succeeded to his mother's little income, a safe certainty which could not, in the course of nature, be very distant now.

But as the old man thought of these things, calmly planning for and providing against the time when he too should be numbered among the innumerable multitude

"Who have passed through the body and gone,"

leaving their place free for a new generation; he felt no regret, rather a deep content, the purest content of all, the divine unselfishness of

parenthood. If he could only see his child,—nay, his children—for those whom marriage had joined together he did not dare even in thought put asunder,—see them safe and happy together, how cheerfully would he say *Nunc dimittis* and go home! Thankful, above all, for one thing, that neither Keith nor Charlotte would ever have to remember of their father one word, one act, of harshness or unkindness.

He strolled leisurely back to the Parsonage and went into his study; tired, indeed, but so peaceful that he was half annoyed when Jane came abruptly in to tell him there was a visitor in the parlour.

"One of the Cruxes, I suppose?"

"Young Mr. Crux; and he's been a-sitting there with Mrs. Keith for the last half-hour." Jane said this with an air which implied that she was not entirely pleased at the circumstance.

Neither was Jane's master. Unworldly and unsuspicious as the parson was, he had a certain amount of common sense. He had reconciled himself to the Crux avalanche, seeing it was of a purely feminine character, the male members of the family spending most of their time in London. But he saw at once that it would never do for a young man like Mr. Charles Crux to be hanging about the Parsonage, and holding *tête-à-têtes* with Keith's wife. Weary as he was, he went immediately into the parlour.

Nobody was there. The visitor had disappeared, and he heard his daughter-in-law's steps overhead in her own room. There must have been some mistake, he thought; and waited till he could ask Charlotte about it.

When she came down to tea, he observed her sharply. She was pale,—a little

paler than ordinary, he thought,—but she was her usual gentle, composed self; and when he questioned her, she answered without the slightest hesitation or confusedness of manner.

"Yes, sir; I had a visitor, Mr. Charles Crux."

"What did he come for?"

"He said, to bring an apology for his sister."

"She did not come then?"

"No."

"And how long did the young man stay?"

"Half-an-hour."

It was cruel to suspect her; besides, from the depth of his soul Mr. Garland hated suspicion. Very often, it is the dormant evil in our own hearts which we are most ready to attribute to others. To continue his catechism would be, he felt, almost an insult, so he passed the matter over, merely saying,—

"Another time, my dear, send word by Jane that I am not at home. Gentlemen's visits should always be paid to the gentleman of the family."

Charlotte was silent.

Their tea-hour went by peacefully as usual, she sitting half hidden behind the urn, and Mr. Garland occupied with his book, when Jane came in with two letters, one for each of them.

"From the Hall, of course! They make a great fuss over you, Charlotte," said the parson, smiling. But when he opened his own note, the smile vanished.

Mrs. Crux, who was used to write him the most cordial and long-winded of notes on every conceivable parish matter, "presented her compliments, and requested the honour of half-

an-hour's private conversation with the Reverend William Garland."

The parson dropped the letter on his lap. A tremor ran through him; Mrs. Crux must have discovered all.

Jane was waiting; with her sharp eyes fixed first on one and then on the other; but Charlotte sat immovable with her letter lying unopened beside her.

"Say to Mrs. Crux—no, stop!—I will write my message."

And he wrote slowly, that it might look like his steadiest handwriting, though still it had the pathetic feebleness of his seventy years:—

"The Reverend William Garland will not fail to wait upon Mrs. Crux immediately."

And then he turned his attention to his daughter-in-law.

She still sat in her place at the tea-table; but her colour had quite faded out, and she was trembling perceptibly.

"Have you read your letter, Charlotte?"

"No, sir."

"Will you do so, then?"

For he felt it must be penetrated at once, —faced at once,—this something which had surely happened; doubtless that which he ought to have foreseen would sooner or later inevitably happen,—the discovery of all particulars concerning his son's unfortunate marriage.

"It is my fault—oh, that I had been wiser!" thought he, with a pang of bitter humiliation, even dread.

But the next minute he felt himself blush, not for the shame, but the cowardice. What could the Cruxes accuse him of? He had

done what he thought was right; in a most sore emergency he had acted as he believed a parent should act, before God and man, in taking under the shelter of his roof his son's wife, who had led there for more than a year and a half a life as blameless and harmless as that of a child.

He watched her reading her letter. It was not a pleasant letter, evidently; for her cheeks were burning and her eyes glowed with a flash,— an actual flame, which he had never seen lighted in them before.

"Who writes to you, my dear?"

"Miss Beatrice."

"What does she say? may I read?"

Charlotte passed the letter across without a word.

The parson, accustomed to ladies' letters—

precise, elegant, feminine, formal—of half a century ago, was altogether puzzled by this one, with its scrawling, masculine hand and its eccentric phraseology: —

"Dear Little Fellow,

"I can't come to you to-day; the maternal parent forbids. Not that I mind *her*, but she'd tell the governor, and there'd be a row. Indeed, there has been a precious row at home. Some county people called, and talked a heap of nonsense about you. But you were really married,—weren't you, my dear? Anyhow,—never mind,—you're a jolly little soul, and I'm a fellow that thinks for myself on this and all subjects. So I told the maternal parent, and said I meant to stick by you. And Charley backed me up, which wasn't much good, as he's rather a loose

fish, is Charley.—Don't you stand any of his nonsense, by-the-by.

"I can't get out to-day, but I'll meet you to-morrow, by hook or by crook. Hang it! this grand blow-up is rather fun than otherwise. Nearly as good as having an elopement for myself. Never you care, there's a dear little soul, I'll stand by you.

"Yours ever,

"B. Crux."

Mr. Garland read the letter,—twice over indeed, before he could properly take it in,—then laid it on the table beside him, and pressed his hand over his eyes, trying to realise the position in which he stood, what he had done, and what he ought to do. Above all, what he should say, and how he should say it—to Charlotte.

Pleasant and kindly as their intercourse had grown, there had never been between the parson and his daughter-in-law the least approach towards intimacy. She was far too much afraid of him still; and on his side he shrank with a repugnance, even yet unconquered, from the occasional coarseness, though more of habit than of innate nature, which he could not fail to see in her, and which in his ultra refinement, he perhaps saw plainer than most people. Except in the necessary civilities of domestic life, and the daily lessons, they rarely talked much, for he did not exactly know what to say; and her replies, though sensible and to the point, were always as brief as possible.

But now he felt that the ice must be broken; that, somehow or other, confidence must be established between them before they

met and breasted mutually the impending storm.

For, in whatever shape it might come, he never thought of leaving her to breast it alone, —this poor defenceless girl, left with the mere name of a husband to protect her,—the mere memory of his love, and that a selfish love, —to keep her heart faithful and warm. However Keith might act, it never once occurred to Keith's father to cast her off; not even to preserve untarnished his own good name, though well he knew that it was in peril. He could easily imagine all that might be said about him and of his conduct,—for there is hardly any conduct which will not bear two interpretations; and no story that cannot be told in two different, often totally different ways. Besides, his own conscience told him that in one point he had been weak to a fault.

He had no right without telling Mrs. Crux the whole story, to allow his daughter-in-law to visit at Cruxham Hall.

Still, whatever she was, or had been, she was now his daughter-in-law, his son's lawful wife; sheltered by the sanctity and irrevocableness of marriage ties,— ay, even such a marriage as this had been. As he looked at her, so young, so helpless, and with an air of innocence difficult to believe in, and yet not impossible, for the facts of daily life sometimes show it possible for a girl, even with Charlotte's antecedent history, to have instincts of virtue strong enough afterwards to retrieve herself, and become an honest wife, — as he looked, every chivalrous feeling in the old man's nature rose up to defend her. He felt thankful that there was even an old man left to stand between the poor girl and harm.

He opened the conversation at once.

"Thank you, my dear, for permitting me to read your letter. It is not a pretty letter for a young lady to write. Do you understand to what Miss Beatrice refers?"

"I think I do. *He* told me."

"He? Who?"

"That—that *villain!*"

The fierce emphasis of her words, accompanied by such a glare in the soft eyes, such a clench of the hand, told Mr. Garland all, —perhaps more than the truth. He rose in much agitation.

"Do you mean Mr. Charles Crux? for it cannot be anybody else. Has he dared —— Tell me what has he been saying to you."

Still she was silent. The hot blood flooded her face; she seemed bursting with indignation, grief, and even a sort of terror; but she did not reply.

"Charlotte, you *must* tell me. Remember, I am your father."

Then Charlotte broke down. She hid her face in her hands, and her whole frame shook with the wildness of her weeping.

Mr. Garland stood by; attempting to do nothing; in truth, because he did not know what to do. At last he laid his hand on her shoulder, and she looked up.

"Let me hear everything. I ought to hear it, Charlotte."

"I didn't mean to tell you,—for it would only vex you, sir; besides, I knew I could take care of myself. But he is a villain! You must never let him inside these doors again. And I will never go to the Hall—never! And when you go out you will take me with you—oh, please do sir! for he has met me once or twice and said silly things to me,—though he never insulted me till to-day."

"Did he insult you?" asked the parson between his teeth.

Charlotte hesitated. She had spoken rapidly and vehemently,—but now she hesitated.

"What did he say? Speak out! Don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid, sir. He told me just what his sister hints at in this letter;—that after thinking I was a young lady born, they found out I was only a servant—and—and other things: that his mother was very angry, and his sisters would never be allowed to see me again."

"I expected it. Any more?"

"Then he spoke—as I thought nobody would dare to speak to a married woman. He said my husband didn't care for me, and would never come back to me—and I had better go away with him—*him!*"

"And what did you answer?"

Charlotte sprang from her seat. If the parson had still doubts concerning her, he could have none now.

"Answer? What was I likely to answer but one thing—that I hated him! Besides, I was married. If I had not hated him, still I was married."

"And then?" said Mr. Garland — astonished, almost awed at the passion she showed.

"He laughed at me,—such a horrid laugh, and I sprang to the door; he tried to hold it, but I pushed him away,—I could have killed him almost,—and I ran away up to my room, locked myself in, and—I don't remember anything more, sir."

"My poor girl!"

The parson held out his hand,—his steadfast, blameless, right hand, which had never failed

a friend, nor injured an enemy,—held it out to the forlorn creature, who, her momentary excitement gone, had sunk down shame-stricken beside him. And, as soon as she had courage to lift her eyes, Charlotte saw him looking at her, with the only look that has power to draw sinners up out of hell and into heaven,—the true father's look, full of infinite pity, infinite forgiveness.

"Oh, I'll be good, I'll be good!" she cried, in the accent and the very words of a child. "Only take care of me, please, sir! Nobody ever did take care of me, or teach me. I didn't even know how wicked I had been: not then, but I do now. It's no wonder people should treat me thus; and yet they shouldn't,— they shouldn't — for they were taught better, and I never was!"

"Ay, that's true!" said Mr. Garland. And

thinking of the young man, the cowardly libertine, who had stolen into the Parsonage that day,—of the young girl, no older than Charlotte, who had written such a flippant, worse than flippant, letter,—his heart burned with anger, and the poor sinner who still knelt weeping at his feet showed like a saint beside them.

Still he made no attempt to justify her, either to his own mind, or to herself. No pity, however deep, led him to palliate her sin, or to allow that it might be softened by extenuating circumstances till it came to be no sin at all.

It was sin. Its very consequences proved it to be. Who could doubt this, looking at that pretty creature, who might have been almost like Wordsworth's *Lucy* —

> "The sweetest thing that ever grew
> Beside a cottage door."

—who had already a marriage-ring on her finger, and was awaiting a settled married home; with all outward circumstances combining to make her happy? Yet there she crouched, hiding her face like the unhappiest, guiltiest woman living. "Conviction of sin" (to use that phrase so awfully true, but which canting religionists often twist into a hypocritical lie) had come upon her,—whether gradually or suddenly, who could tell?—and the secret shame, the hidden pollution, was worse to bear than any outward contumely.

Nor could he help her,—this good man, this minister of God, who knew what God's Word says. He knew, too, what the hard world would say, and that it has reason in its hardness: for without the strict law of purity to bind society together, families and communities

would all fall to pieces, drifting into wild anarchy and hopeless confusion.

"Charlotte," he said, very kindly, but firmly, "try and calm yourself if you can. It is a very serious position of affairs. We must look at all things quietly."

"Yes, sir."

She rose and resumed her seat. As he, and Jane too, had long since found out, Mrs. Keith Garland was no weak girl, to lay all her burdens upon other people. She could bear them herself, silently, too, if need be; and in this instance, perhaps, the very sharpness of her anguish made her strong. Her sobbing ceased, and she sat in patient expectation.

"Here is Mrs. Crux's letter to me," said Mr. Garland. "There can be no doubt she had heard what I supposed she knew already; but which, had I been wiser, I should have

told her myself before I took you with me to the Hall."

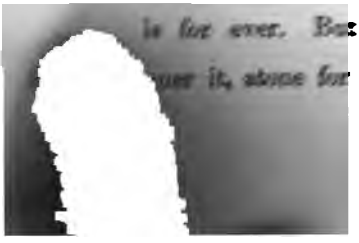
"Did it disgrace you, taking me? If I had known it, I would never have wished to go."

"I believe that. It was my fault. I ought to have seen things clearer, and met them—as we must endeavour to meet them now. Can you, Charlotte?"

She looked at him, inquiringly.

"I mean—can you bear me to speak to you plainly, as a father may speak — about things that hitherto I have left between you and that Father who knows you much better than I ever can."

Charlotte bent her head. "Thank you. Please speak." Yet still Mr. Garland hesitated. It seemed so like trampling on a poor half-fledged, or broken-winged bird.



which depends the future, lies wholly in our own hands. My poor girl, don't despair. If I can forgive you, be sure God will, and then it matters little whether the world forgives you or not."

Thus talked he, arguing less with her than with his own mind the strait in which he found himself,—this upright, pure-hearted old man,—against whom not a breath of reproach had been raised till now.

"What does it matter?" he repeated, as he thought of all that would be said to him and of him,—many falsehoods, no doubt, but still grounded on the bitter truth that could not be denied, which he never should attempt to deny. "God is my Judge, not man. I will not be afraid. What harm can my neighbours do me?"

"Harm to you?" said Charlotte, anxiously.

"Will people blame you? What for? Because you were good to me?"

"I am afraid they will, my dear! But, as I said, it does not matter. Give me my hat and stick, it is time I should be going to the Hall."

"Stop a minute, please; just tell me. What do you think will happen through their finding out this?"

"Nothing very terrible," replied the parson, with a faint smile. "Only you and I are likely to be left alone together. Nobody will come to the Parsonage, and nobody will ask us anywhere. We shall be 'sent to Coventry,' in short."

"And why? Because of me?"

The parson was silent.

"Tell me, oh, please do!" and Charlotte's voice was hoarse and trembling: "when my husband comes home, shall I be a disgrace

also to him? Will his friends take no notice of him because of me?"

Mr. Garland was sorely troubled. It was such a cruel truth to tell, and yet it was the truth, and she might have to learn it some day, perhaps from far unkinder lips than his own. Would it not be better to make her understand it now,—the inevitable punishment that all sin brings—which in degree they both must bear all their life long—she and Keith—but especially she? Would it not be safer to make her recognise it, and be brave under it?

"Charlotte, I will not tell you what is untrue. It would have been far better for my son, and I myself should have been far happier, if he had married a girl in his own station,—married with my consent, openly, honourably, as an honest man and gentleman ought to

marry. But we cannot alter what is past. I accepted his wife, simply because she was his wife. Since then I have learned—yes," holding out his hand,—"I have learned to — to like her; she is a very good and dear girl to me. And if the world should look down upon Keith on account of his wife, never mind! Let his wife love him all the more; nobly, faithfully, patiently; let her prove herself such a good wife to him that the world will be ashamed of its harsh judgment. And whether it is or not, there is only one Judge she need tremble before, and He is a Father likewise."

Charlotte leaned forward eagerly, but scarcely seemed to comprehend his words.

"Yes, that is all good and all right, but it will never be. I shall not have strength to do it. I had much better do the other thing that I was thinking of."

"What other thing?"

"To run away and hide myself,—die if I could,—because if I died he would be free to marry again. He would soon forget me—everybody would forget me,—and I should cease to do anybody any harm! Oh! I wish —I wish I could die!" cried she, breaking, for the first time, into a cry of actual despair.

"Charlotte!" She started, recalled to herself by the stern reproof of his tone. "To die, or to wish to die, before the Father calls us, is unchristian cowardice. And it is our own fault always if we do our fellow-creatures harm. It will be your own fault if, from this time, you are anything but a blessing both to me and to your husband. We will talk no more now. I am going up to the Hall. Sit quiet here till I come back."

She obeyed, without resistance; waiting upon him silently, in her usual humble and mindful way, to which he had grown so accustomed that he scarcely noticed how much she did for him. But now, while she was mechanically brushing his coat and smoothing out his gloves, it suddenly came into Mr. Garland's mind,—what if she should carry out her intention and do something desperate,—as from former experience, and from the expression of the dull, heavy, stony eyes, and the little resolute mouth, he knew she was quite capable of doing.

"Charlotte," he said, looking back ere he closed the door, "mind, I shall want you when I come back. Remember, whether anybody else wants you or not, I do."

Charlotte turned away and burst into tears.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. GARLAND walked slowly from his own gate up to the Hall, which was not more than half a mile from the Parsonage. It was a clear, starry night; light enough for him easily to find his way; so he hid his lantern under a bush and went on without it, to give himself more freedom for meditation. As he did so, he thought how often we purblind mortal creatures set up our petty lanterns, carry them so carefully and hug them so close that they make us believe all the rest of the world, within a yard of our own feet, lies in blackest darkness; and obscure for

us altogether the broad light of God's heaven, which, whether in daylight or darkness, seen or unseen, arches immovably above us all.

The night sky, in its clear darkness, so thickly sown with stars, comforted the parson more than words can tell. For it showed him the large Infinite in contradistinction to his little finite woes, and it reminded him of that other life in the prospect of which he daily walked, and which made all perplexing things in this life grow level, simple, and plain.

Before reaching the Hall — for though it was so short a distance he had proceeded slowly and with unusual feebleness — Mr. Garland made up his mind, that is, his conscience, as to how he ought to act. For the exact words he should say to Mrs. Crux, not knowing what she would say to him, nor what tone she meant to take towards him, he left them undecided:

believing with a child-like simplicity of faith, that now as in the apostles' time, when a man has the right and the truth in his heart, there is, under every emergency, a Divine Spirit not far from him, which tells him what to say.

The light from the drawing-room windows shone in a broad stream a long way across the park; but it did not look so cheerful as usual in the eyes of the old man, who was entering, for the first time in his life, this house—nay, any house—where he had the slightest doubt of his welcome,—a welcome combined of the reverence due to his cloth, the respect won by his personal character, and the warm regard which even strangers soon came to feel for one so gentle, unobtrusive, large-minded, and sincere. He had been so long accustomed to this universal respect, that the possibility of the contrary affected him with a new and very painful

feeling. He had need to look up more than once to that quiet heaven which soothed all mortal troubles, and dwarfed all mortal cares, before he could nerve his hand to pull the resonant door-bell at Cruxham Hall.

"Dinner is over, I conclude?" he said to the footman on entering. "Is your mistress in the drawing-room? Can I see her?"

And he was mechanically walking forward when the man opened the door of the study —a small room close at hand, where everybody was shown; that is, everybody who came on business, and was not considered fit to be admitted into the family circle.

"Mrs. Crux said, sir, that when you came you was to be asked in here."

"Very well; tell her I am waiting."

It was a trivial thing, but it vexed Mr. Garland more than he liked to own. It was the

feather which showed which way the wind blew,—a bitter, biting wind it might prove to be, and he was an old man. Why could he not have gone down to his grave in peace?

Many fathers bring discredit on their sons; that is, externally, though in righteous judgment no child ought ever to be contemned for the misdeeds of a parent; but the reverse scarcely holds. It is a much sadder thing for a father to suffer for the ill-doings of a son, especially as he himself is seldom held quite guiltless of the same. For the second time Mr. Garland asked himself bitterly, as he knew the world at large would ask (and in many cases justifiably too), whether he had not himself been somewhat to blame, in this dark shadow which had fallen upon his old age?

He sat down wearily in the great arm-chair

whence for so many years the old Squire Crux had administered justice, and Mr. Garland, who was also a county magistrate, had sometimes been called upon to assist him in difficult poaching or affiliation cases—the usual rural offences, and almost the only ones that ever occurred at Immeridge. He remembered the very last one, and how he had judged it; not harshly, thank God! How little he then thought that in a few months the same kind of sin might have been laid by his neighbours at, or at least near to, his own stainless door.

After keeping him waiting many minutes,—this, too, was something new, and he noted it with sensitive pain,—Mrs. Crux appeared.

She was in her dinner-dress, the richness of which gave her a kind of adventitious dignity, as it often did; the fat, weak, good-natured woman was one of those who take great courage

from their clothes. As she closed the door behind her, and stood in the centre of the floor, all in a rustle of silk, she tried hard to look stately, distant, and commanding, but signally failed. The parson in his shabby coat, for he had forgotten to change it, was decidedly the more self-possessed of the two. He rose, bowed, but did not offer to shake hands, nor did she. Nevertheless, it was he who had to open the matter.

"You sent for me, madam, that we might have a little conversation on a subject which you did not name, but which I can easily guess, from a letter written by your daughter to my daughter-in-law."

"Beatrice has written? Oh, dear me, what shall I do with her?" cried the mother nervously; but Mr. Garland took no notice of the exclamation.

"It is about my daughter-in-law, is it not, that you wish to speak to me?"

"It is—it is! Oh, Mr. Garland, how could you do it—you, a clergyman of the Church of England, and a gentleman of such credit in the county? I declare, I was so shocked, so scandalised, I could hardly believe my ears when Lady Jones told me."

"What did she tell? Will you repeat the story exactly, and I will tell you if it is true, or how much of it is true?"

But neither accuracy nor directness were special qualities of Mrs. Crux, especially when, as now, she was obviously puzzled and distressed.

"Such a pretty girl,—such a sweet, modest-looking girl. I could not have believed it possible. And you to have her residing with

you, and even to bring her here to associate with my daughters! Mr. Garland, I am astonished at you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Madam," he answered, with a touching sad humility, "I am ashamed of myself; but it is not for the reason you suppose. It is because I had not the courage to state to you all the sad circumstances of my son's marriage, and then leave it to yourself to judge how far the acquaintance you so wished was either suitable or desirable. Not that I had any doubt of my daughter-in-law; or of your daughters taking any harm from association with her; but that, in her sad position, all acquaintanceships or friendships ought to be begun with open eyes on both sides. Mrs. Crux, I was to blame. I beg your pardon."

The lady was disarmed; she could not but be, at such gentle dignity. She looked sorry, and answered half apologetically,—

"Well, on that principle, Mr. Garland, it's little enough you know about us; though at least our position in society is unquestionable. But it is quite different with Mrs. Keith Garland, who I hear was a common servant-girl, at some farm near here where your son used to visit, and where, like all those sort of persons, she made a bait of her pretty face, and cunningly entrapped the poor boy to marry her."

"Stop a minute," said Mr. Garland. "She did not entrap him. The error was my son's as much as hers. He felt bound in honour to marry her."

"Why?—Goodness gracious, Mr. Garland, you don't mean to tell me—" She stopped aghast.

The old man blushed painfully, agonisingly, all over his face. He saw at once that in his roused sense of justice he had betrayed more than even Mrs. Crux had heard,—the worst, the saddest thing of all, compared to which Charlotte's being a servant-girl had seemed to him a light evil,—so light that he had naturally concluded Mrs. Crux knew the whole story, and that the violent, almost insulting, measures she had taken, were on this account. For the moment he paused, repenting, but it was too late now. Besides, had he not come, determined to explain, and to face the whole truth; why should he dread it now?

"Mrs. Crux, I do not in the least wish to deceive you: as a mother of daughters you have a right to every explanation, and I came here to give it. I should have done so long ago, only I thought Immeridge gossip must

already have told you, what is so painful for me to tell to a stranger. Still, I ought not to feel pained, for my daughter-in-law's daily life speaks for itself as to what she is now; so simple and humble, so good and true, that I have almost forgotten she was ever ——"

The sentence died on the parson's lips, for the cruel truth had never been put into words before. Still, he must utter it.

"She was, I grieve to say, not only a poor illiterate servant girl; but—my son seduced her before he married her."

"What!" cried the lady, starting back in undisguised horror. "And you were so misguided, so insane, as to let him marry her?"

"Madam," said the parson, as he too drew back a step, "I am not accountable for the marriage, since I was unaware of it till it was over. But the one thing which inclined me

to forgive my son, was that he did marry her."

Mrs. Crux regarded him with the blankest astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing. That is,—of course, such things happen every day; we mothers of sons know that they must happen. It's a sad, sad matter, but we can't help it; we can only shut our eyes to it, and hope the poor lads will learn better by-and-by. But to view the case in this way, to act as you have done,—I protest, Mr. Garland; it appears to me actual madness. What would the world say of you?"

"I have never once asked myself that question."

And then, as they stood together—the old man and the elderly woman,—for Mrs. Crux was over sixty, though she dressed like a girl in her teens—they mutually investi-

gated one another,—with as much success as if they were gazing out of two different worlds. As in truth they were,—the world of shams, and the world of realities.

"I am very tired,—will you excuse my sitting down?" said the parson, gently:—she had never yet asked him to be seated. "But I shall not detain you long; and after to-night the Parsonage will intrude upon the Hall no more. It never would have done so, save for the persistent attentions of your family, which I wish I had prevented earlier, for more reasons than this."

Mr. Garland suddenly paused, for again he had been led on to say too much. After mature deliberation, he had resolved—out of his dislike to any dis-peace, and because no good could come from the revelation—to be silent respecting Mr. Charles Crux and his insolence.

But the poor mother, made sadly wise, was also quickly suspicious—for she said uneasily:—

"Please explain; I insist on your explaining any other reason."

"I would rather not, for it is one of those things which are best not even named. And it can never occur again—for by my daughter-in-law's express wish, I shall keep my door closed henceforward to every member of your family."

"Mr. Garland, surely—I saw Charley was a little smitten—but surely he has not been such a fool as to——"

"I do not know what you call a fool," replied Mr. Garland, indignantly, "but I should give your son a much harder name."

"Oh,—you mistake," said the mother, a little frightened. "Young men are always taken by a pretty face. Charley likes flirting

—especially with married women. He means no harm—and everybody does it."

"Which makes it no harm, I suppose," said the parson bitterly. "But I, and happily my daughter-in-law, think otherwise. Since you have mentioned the subject, which it appears you were not quite ignorant of, will you say to Mr. Charles Crux, that if he ever dares to cross my threshold again—though I am an old man, I have a strong right hand yet—and—there might be a horsewhip in it! I beg your pardon, madam," added he, suddenly stopping, and reining in the passion which shook him, old as he was. "In truth, I forbear to speak, because I am more sorry for you, as being mother to your son, than I am for myself, as the father of mine."

"Why, what difference is there between them? Or between your conduct and mine?"

"All the difference between plastering over a foul ulcer, and opening it boldly to the light; ugly indeed, and a grievous wound; but a wound that by God's mercy may be cleansed and healed. All the difference between the sinner who hides and hugs his sin, thinking nothing of it, if only it can escape punishment; and the sinner who repents and forsakes his sin, and so becomes clean again, and fit to enter the kingdom of heaven — always so near at hand to all of us. Where, please God, I hope yet to see my poor boy, and that poor girl Charlotte too — ay, madam, even in this world."

Mr. Garland spoke, as he had never meant to speak — but the words were forced into him, and from him. They fell on deaf ears — and a heart too narrow to understand them.

Nevertheless, the lady moved uneasily, and

regarded Mr. Garland with a puzzled air. "You talk in a very odd way; but I suppose, you being a clergyman, it is all right. Only please do not confound Mr. Keith Garland with Mr. Charles Crux. What your son may be, I cannot tell, but my son is quite correct in conduct always. He goes to church with his family — you might have seen him — every Sunday. He visits where his sisters visit,—and I can assure you we are exceedingly particular in our society. Beatrice is the only one who takes up with doubtful people; she laughed at this dreadful business —I mean at Mrs. Keith Garland's having been a servant. And even if she were told everything, very likely she would not care for that either; young people are getting such very queer notions now-a-days. Oh, you don't know what a mother's anxieties are, Mr. Gar-

land," cried the poor woman, appealingly; and glancing at the door, as if she expected every minute to have their interview burst in upon.

"Pray give yourself no anxiety on our account," said Mr. Garland, rising. "I have said all you wished to hear, and all that I had to say; now let me assure you that this visit of mine will be the last communication between the Hall and the Parsonage."

Mrs. Crux looked infinitely relieved. "It is best, a great deal the best; thank you, Mr. Garland. And yet"—her good-nature overcoming her; or else being touched in spite of herself by the picture of the solitary, feeble old man, going out into the dark to meet the obloquy which Mrs. Crux felt certain must inevitably rest on everybody who was "dropped" by Cruxham Hall. "I don't wish

to do an unkind thing. Perhaps, since nobody knows, you might still come here—coming by yourself, of course."

"Thank you, but it is quite impossible. You felt it necessary to protect and to uphold the dignity of your daughters—excuse me if I feel the same regarding mine. All acquaintance must henceforth cease between our two households."

"But as to Beatrice," said Mrs. Crux; who, like most weak women, when she saw a thing absolutely done, usually began to wish it undone. "What am I to say to Beatrice? She has taken such a fancy to young Mrs. Garland."

"Let her find another *protégée*, and she will soon forget my Charlotte."

"*My* Charlotte!" The word slipped out unawares—he was startled at it himself—

but he did not retract it. And all the way home he thought of her tenderly—as good men do think, even of those that have caused them woe, when they themselves have had the strength not to requite pang for pang, and evil for evil. It is a true saying, that those against whom our hearts harden most, are not those who have wronged us, but those whom we have wronged.

Steadily and bravely, though without an atom of love in his heart, Mr. Garland had done his duty to his daughter-in-law; steadily and bravely he had fought for her now,—the poor girl—simply because she was a poor, defenceless girl. Now when she was wholly thrown upon his pity and care; when not a door but his own was likely to be open to her; when even her husband neglected her, and shrank from coming back to England because it was coming

back to her; the old man, who had in him that knightly nature, which instinctively takes the weaker side,—the good old man felt almost an affection for Charlotte.

When he saw by the glimmer from his study-window that she was still waiting there, and heard the front-door open almost before he had fastened the clinking latch of the garden gate, a sensation approaching pleasure came over him.

"Well, my dear, I have returned safe, you see," said he cheerily. "It is all well over. We shall see no more of the Cruxes. You and I must be content with one another's company. I can! Can you?"

Charlotte looked up and smiled. A smile the brightness of which was soon accounted for, as well as the indifference with which she omitted all questions concerning the interview

that had just before seemed so momentous to them both.

"Look here, sir," said she, drawing a letter from her apron-pocket. "This came directly after you had gone. What can it mean? For, do you see, it is not by the ordinary Canadian mail; the postmark is London, and there is an English stamp upon it."

"Poor little soul! how well she loves him!" thought Mr. Garland, as Charlotte came hovering about his chair with a trembling eagerness of manner, and a brightness of expectation in her look. "You thought, my dear, that Keith might be in England, but it is not so. He dates as usual you see; this is merely sent by private hand, and posted in London."

"Yes, I understand." And Charlotte sat down patiently, the light in her eyes quite gone. Patiently too, without a word of in-

terruption or comment, she listened while, as was customary, her father-in-law read aloud her husband's letter.

It was chiefly to say—what Keith had hinted by the last mail, that he should find it impossible to come home this next winter—when his two years of absence would expire. Equally impracticable—as he explained with greater length than perspicuity of argument—was it for him to send for his wife to Canada. Not that he was too poor to have her,—indeed he enclosed a very handsome sum of money to defray her maintenance and her own personal wants; but his very prosperity seemed to make a barrier between them.

"We enjoy some little civilization, even out here," he wrote, "the few people I have as neighbours are tolerably well educated. And besides, in the lonely life of a Canadian farm,

a man wants not only a wife but a companion. I think, father, it would not be a twelvemonth wasted, either for her sake or mine, if for a year at least you would send Charlotte to some good boarding-school—or hire a governess to live in the village,—you might not like a strange lady living at the Parsonage. I must say, I should like my wife to get a little education. It would be very valuable out here; and if I ever should return and settle in England——But we will leave that an open question for time to decide."

Thus summarily, with a briefness that showed how indifferent he was to it, Keith dismissed the subject, and went on to other things.

The father's heart was very sad,—more than sad, angry. And yet Keith's conduct was hardly unnatural; the more so as with a feeling that it was best to leave Time's workings

to work themselves out without any interference on his part, Mr. Garland had carefully abstained from writing much about Charlotte. He wished now he had done a little differently; he determined by the next mail to speak his mind out plainly and clearly; but in the mean time there Keith's will was—given with a hard determination which seemed to have grown upon him of late—and his young wife must obey.

She never seemed to have any thought of disobeying. She sat passively, with her eyes cast down, and a dull, hopeless shadow creeping over the face, that ten minutes before had almost startled the old man with its exceeding brightness. She listened to the letter's end—the part about herself being a very small portion of it; the rest being filled up with statements of Keith's affairs—which seemed

very flourishing—and long essays on American politics, into which he seemed to have thrown himself with the ardour of one who has set aside, conscientiously perhaps, a young man's temptations to pleasure and amusement, and plunged desperately into the pursuits of middle age. In short, he seemed even at this early age, to have substituted ambition for love, and exchanged his heart for his brains. Throughout all the reading of his son's letter, Mr. Garland saw, and felt when he did not see, the poor little face of his son's wife, so quiet, so uncomplaining, that how much she thought he could not tell—he was half afraid to conjecture. But she spoke not a single word.

"My dear," he said at last, "should you like to have a governess?"

"Oh, yes. Anything you please. Anything he pleases."

"Charlotte," the parson spoke almost apologetically, "your husband does not quite know, but I shall explain to him next mail, how well you and I have got on together, in studies and everything; how greatly you are improving,—as a girl of your age has infinite capacities for doing. Above all, what a good, dear girl you invariably are to me."

"Am I?" She looked up with those great, dark eyes of hers, and in them he saw, as he had never seen it revealed before, the real womanly soul; quick to feel, yet strong to endure; long-suffering to almost the last limit of patience; yet having its pride too—its own righteous, feminine pride, which on occasion could assert itself—not aggressively, but with a certain dignified reticence, more pathetic than the loudest complaints.

Though she was not his ideal of womanhood,

and was wholly unlike the wife he had adored, the daughter he had imagined,—quite a different type of character, indeed; still the parson was forced to acknowledge that it was not an unbeautiful character. As it developed itself, he did more than merely like—he began, in degree, actually to respect Charlotte.

He attempted neither to question her, nor to draw out her feelings—so closely, so bravely restrained; but simply giving her the letter to read over again at her leisure, asked her to light his candle for him, and he would go to bed—he felt very weary to-night.

"So the boy will not be back for another year at least," thought he sighing; "and my years are growing so few."

Though he did not put the thought into words, Charlotte heard the sigh, and saw the expression of the sad old face.

"It is as I expected, you see," said she, in a low voice. "He will not come home because of me. O sir,"—and humbly, very humbly and tenderly, she laid her hand upon Mr. Garland's—"please forgive me. I am so sorry —for *you*."

"Never mind, never mind, my daughter."

And the desolate old man did what he had never in his life done to any woman—except one; he took her in his arms and kissed her.

CHAPTER X.

MUCH is said and written upon the mournfulness of broken friendships—a subject almost too sad to write about; for such are like the hewing down of a tree,—a sharp axe and a rash hand will destroy in an hour a whole life's growth, and what no second lifetime can ever make grow again. And thinking thus, of all shattered things, how easy it is to destroy and how difficult to retrieve, there is a certain sadness in contemplating even a broken acquaintanceship.

It was not likely that a sensitive man like

Mr. Garland could see with indifference the Crux family sitting beneath him in the Hall pew Sunday after Sunday; listening with civil attention to his sermons, but regarding him as no longer their friend—only their clergyman; and the service over, sweeping silently out of the narrow church, where everybody knew everybody and noticed everybody, to their carriage,—omitting entirely the customary greeting at the church-door, or the churchyard gate. It was painful, too, to meet them in his walks, which he never took alone now; and for him and Charlotte to have to pass without recognition, or tacitly to alter their path, so as to escape meeting at all. At last these chance rencontres began to be looked forward to with such a sense of dread and discomfort, that all the pleasure of the parson's walks was taken away. He gradually seceded

from the places he best liked—the shore, the cliff, and the downs: restricting his rambles daily; till after a few weeks he rarely stirred beyond the boundary of his own garden.

His daughter-in-law, too, seemed to have no wish to go further. Since the day on which these two momentous events had happened—the interview with Mrs. Crux, and Keith's unexpected letter—a great change had come over poor Charlotte. Not in any tangible shape; she complained of nothing; she went about her daily avocations as usual; and betrayed neither by word nor act anything that was passing in her mind; but the whole expression of her countenance altered. It grew sad, wistful, wan, and pale; there was a dreary hopelessness, at times even a sort of despair in it; the remorse of the roused conscience; the agony of the blank, lost future;

the cruel awakening to a knowledge of happiness that might have been. At least, so Mr. Garland read her looks,—nor marvelled; for he knew that all this must come; he could hardly have wished it not to come.

Every man's sin *will* find him out; and he must pay its penalty in a certain amount of inevitable suffering, from which the utmost pity cannot, and should not, save him. Doubtless the Cruxes were very hard, when they drew their own not spotless robes round them, and would not so much as look at poor Charlotte; but their stained garments did not make Charlotte clean. And when, as they passed her by, the parson saw her face flush up, then settle into its customary sad patience, however much he grieved for her, still he dared not speak. He could say with his Divine Master, "Go, and sin no more." He could even be-

lieve, from the bottom of his thankful heart, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" but he could not say that the sin was no sin, or that the ultimate result would be the same as if it had never happened. He could not look at that poor little face — so young still; she was only nineteen even now—with all its lines sharpened by mental pain; with its sweet smile darkened, and its sad eyes drooping; no longer able to face the world with the bright, clear gaze of conscious innocence; he could not see all this without acknowledging the just, righteous, inevitable law of God, which can never be broken with impunity.

And what of the other sinner — still closer to the old man's heart—who ought to have borne equally with Charlotte the burden that they had laid upon themselves?

How Keith felt, or how much he suffered,

neither his wife nor his father had any means of knowing. The one letter in which the parson had told about the Cruxes, and spoken his mind on many painful things; which had cost him much, for it is hard to write such sad, reproachful letters across the seas, in the long ignorance of how they may reach, and whether happier letters may ever follow them—this letter Keith never received. It went down to the bottom of the Atlantic, with a wrecked mail-steamer.

"I must write it over again," said Mr. Garland when he found out this. But he delayed and delayed; and meantime Keith went further West, on a trapping expedition, and for several weeks it was useless to write, as no letters would find him. And then came one—the restlessness, bitterness, and hopelessness of which, grieved his father to the heart.

In it, he only referred to his wife so far as

to take for granted that his commands had been obeyed; that she was now at school, or busy with her education under a governess. But it was not so. At first Mr. Garland had tried to fulfil his son's wishes; but no lady could be found willing to bury herself at Immeridge, except at a salary higher than even Keith's liberal remittances made possible. Besides—and Mr. Garland, when he showed her the letters, felt how bitter they must be to Charlotte—more than one governess made painfully pertinacious and rather suspicious inquiries, as to the "curious circumstance" of an adult pupil being a married lady, living apart from her husband. It was one of the sharp inevitables of the position; but not the less hard to bear.

Then Mr. Garland suggested a boarding-school; but here, for the first time in her life, Charlotte evinced a decided will of her own;

and offered steady, though not violent, resistance. The reason she gave for this was brief and simple, but quite unanswerable: —

"I am a married woman now; I could not possibly become a school-girl, or go among school-girls."

It was only too true—true in a deeper sense than she put forward; and her father-in-law acknowledged this. The poor thing could never be a girl any more; the door of girlhood was shut behind her; and for the happy pride, the contented dignity, which comes to any one, be she ever so young, when she finds herself a married woman, taken quite out of herself and made to live for another, perhaps for many others, in the sweet self-abnegation of matronhood—alas, this blessedness had not come, and in one sense, never could come, to poor Charlotte!

Not since the day when she first came to him had Mr. Garland pitied her so ntensely, or mourned over her with such a hopeless regret, as he did now. And yet he could not do anything to make her happier or brighter, or take out of her heart the sting that he saw was there; piercing daily deeper and deeper the more as her nature developed. He knew it must be so. She, like himself, like every mortal soul, must be taught to accept and endure the inevitable.

So the days passed on; the long, bright, weary summer days; the heat of which made the parson feel how feeble and old he was growing; too feeble to struggle against the hard present, or to fight his way out of it into a better future; a future not for himself,—he had long ceased to think of himself,—but for these, his children.

"My working days are done, I think," said he sadly, one day when he and Charlotte had been busy together in the garden. For he now kept her about him as much as he could, from pure compassion, and to prevent her from falling into those long reveries in which he had sometimes found her; when the dull expression of her eyes, and the heavy, listless drop of her once active hands, made his heart bleed. "Come here, my dear; do help me. I never had so much trouble in training this creeper. I cannot lift up my right arm at all."

He spoke almost in a querulous tone, for he felt ill and unlike himself. Charlotte came quickly. The only brightness that ever dawned in her sad face was when she was doing something for Mr. Garland.

"Don't work at all—I'll do it," she said. "Pray, sir, give me the hammer and nails, and

be idle awhile. Let me fetch you your garden-chair."

This was a rough but comfortably-constructed piece of workmanship, the joint invention of Charlotte and the Immeridge carpenter; in the days when her simple daily occupations had been enough to fill her life, before the bitterness that came with the awakening soul had entered into it. Some of her old cheerfulness returned, as she brought the chair and settled the old man tenderly in his favourite seat.

"There, now, I am sure you will be comfortable. What is wrong with your arm, sir? May I rub it? Jane lets me rub her rheumatic shoulder sometimes."

"But this is not pain, it is numbness. I felt it when I woke this morning."

"Perhaps you had been lying upon it, and your arm had gone to sleep, as children call it."

"Perhaps. And yet if so it ought to have been quite well by now."

"It will be well presently," was the soothing answer, as Charlotte, now fairly roused out of herself, knelt down beside Mr. Garland and began chafing the delicately-shaped right hand,—he had once been conceited about the beauty of his hand, or his wife had been for him. It was still delicate, still unwithered; but the fingers seemed dropping together in a helpless way, and when Charlotte laid it on the chair-arm, it remained there passive and motionless.

The old man shook his head. "It is of no use rubbing, my dear. I cannot feel your fingers."

Charlotte redoubled her energies. "Oh, but you must feel them—you will feel them. My rubbing always does Jane good, she says. You are sure to be better by-and-by."

"But suppose," Mr. Garland replied, after a long pause, and in a low tone, which had a certain concealed dread beneath its quietness,—"suppose, Charlotte, that this should not be rheumatism. There is another complaint, which old people have sometimes."

"What is that?"

"It is in our family too," said Mr. Garland, musing. "I know my grandfather died of paralysis."

Charlotte looked up.

"What is that? At least, I half know, but not quite. Please tell me."

"It is no pain—don't look so frightened, my poor girl—no pain at all. And it does not kill people—not suddenly. But sometimes it makes them helpless,—totally helpless, for years before they die. O my God, my God!" and the old man lost all his courage and groaned aloud—

"save me from that! Take me, take me at once! but oh, save me from being a trouble and a burden to anybody."

"A trouble? a burthen? Oh, Mr. Garland!" And Charlotte seized the poor numb right hand, pressed it to her bosom like a baby, kissed it, fondled it, sobbed over it, and expended on it such a passion of emotion, that the parson's thoughts were turned from his own uneasy apprehensions into watching her, and wondering at the wealth of love that lay buried in that poor heart.

"Do not, my child, do not cry so bitterly. I should not have said this. I had no idea you cared for me so much."

"I have nobody else to care for—nobody that cares for my caring—in the wide world."

He could not contradict her—he knew she

spoke the truth. But he said, what was also the truth, and every day when he saw the depths of sweetness, and patience, and womanly wisdom, that sorrow was drawing out of her, and expressing visibly in her face, he himself believed it more and more. "No one but me to care for? It may not be always so, Charlotte. God's mercy is as infinite as our need. Wait and hope."

Whether it was that this sudden and unwonted emotion stirred up the old man's vital forces into strength enough to shake off the impending ill, or whether this had been only a slight forewarning, he certainly grew better under his daughter's care, and for some days was even brighter than ordinary. But it was only a temporary wave of the gradually ebbing tide, which left the sands barer than before.

Very soon there fell upon Mr. Garland's

green old age that most trying phase of life's decline — often only a phase, and not necessarily implying life's close, in which the body begins to fail faster than the still youthful and active mind: producing an irritable restlessness most painful both to the sufferer and to the standers-by. The more he needed care, the less he seemed to like being taken care of. He felt it hard to resign one by one his independent ways, and sink into not an elderly but a really old man; becoming, as he said, like Saint Peter, who when he was young "girded himself," but when old was to have "another to gird him, and lead him in the way he would not." If at this crisis he had been left only to Jane, and had not had about him a younger woman, gentle, sweet-tempered, and gifted naturally with that infinite patience which is, or ought to be, at once the duty and delight of all youth to

show to all old age, things would have gone rather hard with Parson Garland.

Perhaps he was aware of this, perhaps not; for the narrowing powers of fading life dim the perceptions of even the best of people; but he was conscious of feeling great comfort in Charlotte. A change, sudden and bright, had come upon her ever since the day that he had told her of his fear of paralysis. She lost her listless, solitary ways, and began to devote herself daily and hourly to him, and him alone. Not that she troubled him with unnecessary watching, or too patent anxiety, but she was always at hand when wanted; she never thwarted him; she bore with all his little crotchets, even when, as he acknowledged to himself, they were very unreasonable. And sometimes, in the long, sleepless night that succeeded many a restless day, the old man used to lie thinking, with a

wondering gratefulness both to her and towards heaven, of the sweet temper that was never ruffled, the young face that tried so hard to be always pleasant and sunshiny when in his sight, the attentive hands that were ever ready to do enough, and never too much, for the innumerable wants of his selfish, or he thought it selfish, old age.

"God is very good to me, more than I deserve," he ofttimes said in his heart. "And if I wait, surely in His own time He will be good to these my children."

But although the tie between him and his daughter-in-law grew closer every day, Mr. Garland, with the shrinking delicacy which was a part of his nature, never attempted to lift the veil which Charlotte still persistently drew over the relations between herself and her husband, and her own feeling towards him. The old man

would have been ashamed to pry into what she evidently desired to conceal. All his life he had borne his own burdens, troubling no one; he could understand and respect another's doing the same. Charlotte's total reticence and silent endurance touched him deeper than the most pathetic complaints or most unreserved confidence.

So they lived together, these strangely-assorted companions, who yet in their deepest hearts were so curiously assimilated, as to become better company to each other every day. Contentedly they spent the life of almost total solitude, which circumstances had forced upon them. For the Crux influence had leavened the neighbourhood, which indeed without much malice aforethought on their part it was sure to do; and those few county families who were in the habit of driving over to Immeridge at

intervals, just to acknowledge the existence of, and pay a passing respect to, the Reverend William Garland, gradually ceased their visits to the Parsonage. He had not wanted them when they came, but he noticed their absence; and was sure that Charlotte noticed it too, for she often looked at him in a strange, wistful way, as if she wished to say something to him, and could not. Heaven had punished her, as Heaven does sometimes, not directly but vicariously. In a heart so full of love as hers (often did the parson recall Keith's almost complaining words, "She is so very fond of me"), that others should suffer through her fault, was of all retributions the sharpest, and likely to work out the most lasting result on her character.

It did so presently in a manner unforeseen. Seeing Mr. Garland had no one left him but herself, Charlotte shook off her depression,

and learned to be cheerful for his sake. She tried to make herself everything that pleased him, and his being the sole influence that ever approached her, it was almost omnipotent of its kind. When two people of opposite dispositions are thus thrown constantly together, they either end by absolute dislike and disunion, or they grow into the most touching likeness in unlikeness, which often harmonizes better than absolute similarity.

Ere many months, the parson's daughter-in-law had become to his failing age almost more than a daughter of his own; for, as he said sometimes, his own daughter would certainly have gone away and left him, to marry some strange youth, while his son's wife was safely bound to him for ever. And he to her was not only as dear as a natural born father, but was also—what, alas! all fathers in the flesh

are not—her ideal of everything that a man should be. She became to him a perfect slave; as women like to be; though in that happiest bondage where affection is the only forger of the chains. But the title he himself gave her was his "right hand!"

Ere long this became only too true a name.

One day, as he was writing his sermon, Charlotte sitting sewing at the study-window, for he was so constantly needing her help in little things, that he liked to have her within call—the pen dropped from Mr. Garland's fingers. The same numbness which he had once complained of, came on again; his right hand fell helplessly by his side,—and he never used it more.

This was not discovered immediately; as before, the affection was at first considered temporary, and all remedies were tried. Simple

household remedies only; for Mr. Garland did not feel ill; he suffered no pain; and it was only on Charlotte's earnest entreaty that he allowed medical help to be sent for.

But when this was done, and the doctor looked grave, and said, on being questioned, that it was really "a stroke,"—as the country people call it—and that the natural use would in all human probability never return to that poor, nerveless right hand, the blow fell lighter than might have been expected. Most likely because the parson himself bore it so well. Now that his secret dread for months —and he owned now how heavy it had been— had come upon him, the reality seemed less dreadful than the fear. He met his misfortune with a wonderful calmness and fortitude. His irritability ceased; he faced courageously the local bodily infirmity — thanking God

that it was only local, and did not affect either his faculties or his speech. He made his arrangements for future helplessness with a touching patience; reminding Charlotte—who hovered about him in pale silence—and Jane, who broke into loud outbursts of lamentation at every word—how the doctor had said that he might yet live to be ninety, and die of some other disease after all.

"And if not," added he, "if the burden that I myself feel heaviest, is to be the especial burden that God will have me bear,—(you will often find it so in life, Charlotte),—still, I will take it up and bear it. I have received good from His hands all my days, and He will help me in what seems like evil."

"You speak like a saint almost," said Charlotte softly.

"She was a saint who taught me."

"Some day—if you should ever think I deserve to hear—will you tell me about her?"

It was said so humbly, with such a world of reverence and tenderness in the imploring eyes, that the parson was startled. Never before had he even mentioned to his daughter-in-law this one woman whom he had so adored; a woman and wife like herself; yet who always seemed a being of another creation from poor Charlotte. But now, in the strange changes that time had made, through the mysterious influence by which his memory of the wife he had lost, had guided his conduct towards the daughter he had so unexpectedly and regretfully found, Mr. Garland recognised, amidst all differences, the common womanhood of these two—Mary and Charlotte Garland. Ay, though one had lived and died white as snow, and the other was smirched with sin; though

one was all that was charming in ladyhood, and the other—— Well, things had gone hard with poor Charlotte! Still, still, there was in both of them the root and centre of all loveableness in woman—the strong self-abnegation, the divine humility, of Love.

"Charlotte," said the parson—and he tried to see her with the eyes with which his Mary would have regarded this girl, her son's wife — eyes searching as a mother's should be, yet withal unfailingly tender, pitiful, generous, and just: "Charlotte, would you really like to hear about your husband's mother — the noblest woman that ever breathed?"

"Should I?" Charlotte's face answered the question.

So, forgetting everything else,—forgetting even that this was the first sad night when he was made fully conscious of his infirmity,

and of the fact that it would last during the remainder of his life, Mr. Garland sat down by his study fire, and began talking with his daughter-in-law, quietly and cheerfully, and with an open confidence that he had never shown her before. And she listened with all her heart in her eyes, and yet with a touch of sadness, like one who was hearing of a far-off paradise, of which, for her, the door was for ever closed,—about the days of his youth, studious and solitary; his long but never weary courtship-years; of his one happy twelvemonth of married life, and his dear dead wife, Mary Garland.

CHAPTER XI.

BY the next Sunday all Immeridge had learnt the heavy affliction—as many would have said, till his placid face forbade them to call it so—which had befallen the parson. There was scarcely one of his flock present who did not follow him with compassionate eyes as he walked slowly up the pulpit stairs, his right arm hidden under the sleeve of his gown, and began to turn over the leaves of the Prayer-book—with his left hand. And when, giving out the hymn, in his nervousness and slight awkwardness, he dropped the book, and it

narrowly escaped the clerk's head, and was solemnly picked up and handed back to him by the beadle, not even a mischievous child smiled; the congregation were all far more inclined to weep.

After service was over, many hung about the churchyard, as if they wished to see or speak to the parson .But Mr. Garland remained in the vestry for a considerable time, no one being admitted but his daughter-in-law. Then, taking her arm, and walking feebly, he was seen to cross the churchyard, the accustomed way, and re-enter his garden-gate.

If any of his neighbours had ever said a word against him, they were all silent now; silent and sorry. They gathered in knots round the church-door, and the lane leading to it; everybody talking with sympathy and respect of "poor Mr. Garland."

Next morning, to the extreme amazement of the little household, once more the tall footman from the Hall appeared at the Parsonage, with a message: kind inquiries after Mr. Garland's health, and begging his acceptance of a basket of hot-house grapes and a brace of partridges.

"What shall we do, Charlotte?" said the parson, who looked pleased: it was not in human nature that he should not be somewhat pleased. "It is unneighbourly and un-christian to refuse their peace-offering, and yet I cannot bear to take it. I never wish to have anything more to do with the people at the Hall."

"No," replied Charlotte, with the sad gravity which always came over her when the Cruxes were named—of her own accord she never named them at all.

"What would you like done, my dear? You shall decide."

She thought a minute and then said, "Send a friendly message back, but do not accept their present. Say, the grapes would be welcome to old Molly Carr, or to some other sick person down the village, whom Mrs. Crux used so often to send things to."

"Yes, that will do. You have a wise little head, child," said the parson, affectionately.

He went himself and delivered the message to the servant; making it as kindly and courteous as possible; then he and his daughter-in-law sat together for a good while in silence, he reading and she working,—as was their habit after breakfast.

"And now, my dear, let us put aside all unpleasant things, and make ourselves busy,—usefully busy, this sunshiny morning. I like the

sunshine. Oh, thank God that He has left me the sight of my eyes!" said the parson, sighing. "But come, we'll have no sadness and no complaining; for I might be much worse off. Charlotte, you will have to be really my right hand now. How does your writing progress? it is long since you showed me your copy-book. What if I were to begin and dictate to you my next Sunday's sermon?"

"Only try me, and you will see how I will do it," answered Charlotte brightly.

"Very well. But first there are all my letters to write. Look how many lie in the box marked 'unanswered.'"

There was an accumulation of four or five, which he turned over uneasily. "Ah! I neglected them, and now it is too late."

"Could not I ——"

"No, you couldn't, child," with some slight

irritability. "They are business letters; a woman's writing would look odd, especially—Oh, if I had but my son beside me! If Keith would only come home." He once more sighed bitterly, then saw Charlotte's face, and stopped.

"My dear, you must not mind me if I say sharp or foolish things sometimes. I do not mean it. You will bear with an old man, I know."

"O Mr. Garland!"

She came to his side and began caressing, in her own tender way, the powerless hand, which by an ingenious arrangement of his coat-sleeve, she had tied up so that its helplessness might inconvenience him as little as possible. A slight caress, not much; he was not used to affectionate demonstrations; but these touched him. He put his other hand on her head.

"You are very good to me, Charlotte. I think you must be fond of me—a little."

She laughed—the loving little laugh which supplies all words—and then placed herself beside him, with pen and paper all arranged.

"I am quite ready now, sir. But"—with a slight hesitation—"there is one letter which, perhaps, to make quite sure, had best be written first. Do you remember to-morrow is the Canadian mail?"

"Ah, true, true! Poor Keith! He will never again see his old father's hand-writing."

It was a small thing; but one of those small things which, causing us fully to realize any loss, cut very deep sometimes. The parson leaned back in his chair; and the rare tears of old age stole through his shut eyelids.

"Never mind,—never mind!" said he at last, drawing his fingers across his eyes. It must

be so, some time or other. We go on taking care of our children, and fancying no one can do it but ourselves,—till God removes them from us, or us from them, as if just to show us that He is sufficient to take care of them. And in this matter—why, Keith will hardly miss my letters. You can so easily put down all I want to say, Charlotte my dear. So begin at once."

"What shall I write?"

"Let us see. 'My dear Keith.' But that will puzzle him. Put at the top 'Dictated.' No, stop! — My dear, why should not you yourself write to your husband?"

"He has never asked me."

That was true, though the omission had grown so familiar that the parson had of late not even remarked it. Since the first few illiterate scrawls, which with almost an ex-

aggerated dread of their effect on a young man educated and scholarly, Mr. Garland had forwarded, Keith had never asked his wife to write to him; nor — carefully regular as were his messages to her — had he taken the slightest notice of her continued silence. In truth, in this and in all other things, except mere surface matters, he had sheathed himself up in such an armour of reserve, that of the real Keith Garland, the man who now was, they knew absolutely nothing. Though they felt — most certainly his father did — that he was a person very different from the boy who went out to Canada two years and a half ago.

"Supposing he has not asked you to write; still, why should you not do it?"

"I cannot tell; only I think it would be better not." And Charlotte's firm-set mouth showed that she did not wish to say any

more. Nor did her father-in-law attempt to urge her. It was with him both principle and practice that no third hand—not even a parent's—can safely touch, under almost any circumstances, the bond between husband and wife.

"Well," said he, sighing, "do as you think best, Charlotte. And now let me write my letter,—that is, dictate it. Put at the top that it is dictated, and then he will understand."

So they sat together; a long two hours; for Mr. Garland was restless and awkward; unaccustomed to any pen but his own, and nervously anxious over the wording of the letter. His patient secretary tore up more than one sheet to please him, and began again; he seemed so fearful of saying either too much or too little.

"You see, my dear, I wish to be careful. If we alarm Keith too much about me, he

may come home at once, and I would not have him do that against his will, or to the injury of his future prospects. Yet if we left him quite in ignorance, and anything did happen to me——"

Charlotte looked up alarmed. "But the doctor said——"

"He said what was quite true, that I may live ten years and never have another attack. But if one did come—there was no need to tell me this, for I knew it—things might prove very serious."

"What would happen? How would the stroke affect you? Do not be afraid to tell me all you know."

Charlotte spoke with composure, fixing her eyes steadily on the old man's face as she did so, though she had turned very pale.

"I will tell you, my dear, for you are not

a coward; and it is right you should know; it is right I should have somebody about me who does know. If I were to have another 'stroke,' as people call it, I might lose my speech, the use of my limbs, my mind even. O Charlotte," as with a touching appeal he took hold of her hand, "it is great weakness in me,—great want of faith and trust; but sometimes I feel frightened at the future, and I wish my dear boy would come home."

"What hinders his coming home? Is it—is it me?"

The old man was sorely perplexed. It was one of those questions so hard plainly to answer,—so impossible wholly to deny. He met it, as alone this good man could meet anything,—by the plain truth.

"Yes, my child," he said, keeping her hand, and speaking tenderly, for he felt so exceed-

ingly sorry for her, "it may be, in some degree, on account of you. This is the penalty that people must pay who make hasty or ill-assorted marriages, or, indeed, do anything that is wrong; they must go through a certain term of probation, and bear a certain amount of suffering. You have suffered, my poor Charlotte?"

"Oh, I have—I have!"

"And I doubt not so has Keith. He may dread coming home, and finding you only what he left you,—which was very different from himself, and equally different from what you now are. Still, not knowing this, he may shrink,—most men do—after the first impulse of passion is over, from spending his whole life with a woman who was not his deliberate choice."

"Yes, I understand."

"Ah, my dear! I did not mean to hurt you. It was as hard for you as it was for him. We may learn from our mistakes, and make the best of them, and they may come right in time; but we must suffer for them. Marriage is an awful thing; and its very irrevocableness,—the 'till death us do part,' which to some is the dearest comfort—to others becomes the most galling bondage."

The parson had gone on speaking, more in his moralising, absent way than with any special reference to her—but his words struck home.

Charlotte drew her hands softly away from him and folded them together with a determination—desperate in its very gentleness.

"Mr. Garland, will you tell me one thing,—can married people be parted—legally—except by death?"

"It ought not to be, my dear; but I believe it is done sometimes. I have heard of a Court in London where people can get separated from one another, so as even to be free to marry again. But we old-fashioned people do not like such divorces. We will not speak about them, Charlotte. We were speaking about you and your husband. He may dislike the thought of coming home now; but if he once came, I hope, I feel sure, things would be quite different! Still, let us neither compel him nor urge him—it is best not. Forgive me if, just for my own selfish sake, I can't help wishing my boy would come home."

"He will come home. Do not be uneasy; he is sure to come home."

And then, recurring to the letter, Charlotte kept the old man's wandering attention fixed upon it till it was finished. Afterwards she

said, to her father-in-law's great but carefully concealed surprise,—

"And now, if you could spare me for an hour, I should like to go and write myself to my husband."

"That is well, that is excellent," cried Mr. Garland, much delighted. "Do write to him! as long a letter as ever you can. He will be very glad of it!"

"Will he?"

"Only, Charlotte, please tell him no more about me than we have said already. You will promise that? You comprehend my reasons?"

"Yes," said Charlotte, as she rose, slowly and dreamily, and gathered up the ink and paper.

"But why go away? Why not write here? I would not interrupt you; and my good

little scholar writes so well now, that I have not the slightest intention of looking over or correcting her letters,—never again, I assure you."

"Oh, no!" and Charlotte smiled, not one of her old childish smiles, but the exceedingly sad one which had come in their stead. "But, indeed, I had rather be alone. I am very stupid, you know, sir. You forget, it is not easy for me to write a letter, and it ought to be a pretty letter,—ought it not?—when it is written to my husband?"

"Certainly, certainly. Off with you, and do your very best. Ah, my dear, you'll be such a clever girl by the time your husband comes home!"

Charlotte smiled again, but this time the smile was not merely sad, it was broken-hearted.

After she was gone, Mr. Garland sat in

anxious meditation; at least, as anxious as his failing age, upon which all cares now began to fall slightly deadened, allowed him to feel. Much he regretted that with the weak putting off of a painful thing, which was the peculiarity of his character,—he had so long delayed re-writing that missing epistle about the Cruxes and Charlotte. How could it be done now? Never, at first he feared. For it was impossible Keith's wife could write it; and no other hand could he use to indite so private a letter.

"If I could but do it myself. I have heard of people who learned to write with their left hand," thought the parson, and taking up a pen he began to try,—a proceeding which needs trying in order to discover how very difficult it is. Discomfited entirely by pen and ink, he attempted a lead-pencil, and with much

effort, and many an ache of the feeble old hand and wrist, succeeded, after an hour's hard practice, in legibly signing his name. Then quite worn out, he stretched himself in his arm-chair, and wished for Charlotte.

"What a long time she has been away! Far more than an hour." And then he smiled, with an amused wonder, to think how much he missed her.

"If I find her so necessary, surely her husband will, when he has learned all her usefulness, all her goodness. Oh, yes, it will be all right by-and-by, when Keith comes home."

And so it was with a cheerful countenance that he met his daughter; showed her how he had been amusing himself in her absence, and exacted her approbation of his left-handed performances.

"I am so clever, I shall be able to write

with my own hand next mail, I think. But we will not tell Keith now. We will just give him a surprise."

And the idea of this, and the relief to his mind that it brought, pleased Mr. Garland so much, that he went on talking quite gaily; all the time Charlotte was enclosing, addressing, and sealing her letter, which she made no attempt to offer for his perusal. Nor did he desire it.

He never noticed, also, that all the time she scarcely spoke; and that, after she had given Jane the letter to post,— Canadian letters were not trusted to anybody but themselves or Jane,— she came and knelt beside him — ostensibly to warm her hands at the fire. She was shaking like a person in an ague.

"How very cold you are! How could you stay up so long in that chilly room, you

foolish girl! you never think of yourself at all."

"Oh, no. It isn't worth while."

Mr. Garland regarded her uneasily, as she crouched on the rug, her face to the fire-light, which seemed to cheer her no more than the moon upon a snow-field. But he thought of his letter, which he would certainly be able to write by next mail—ay, he would! if he accomplished it at the rate of a line a day; and became comforted concerning Charlotte.

After the mail had gone, the parson's mind was so relieved that his bodily health began to recruit itself a little. His helpless hand was at least no worse, and he began to get accustomed to the loss of it, and to do without it, awkwardly and drearily at first, but soon very uncomplainingly. The trouble it gave him to do the most ordinary things, and the time they took

in doing, occupied the hours, and prevented his feeling so bitterly the lack of his daily writing. He dictated to Charlotte whatever was absolutely necessary; and he set himself to work, with the diligence of a school-boy, to learn to write with his left hand. In short, Providence was tempering the wind to him, poor old man! in many ways, so as to make him slip easily and painlessly into that world where he would awake and be young again; or be—whatsoever God would have him to be, in the unknown country, where he had but two desires, to find Him—and his wife Mary.

Still, he had much enjoyment of his present existence. It happened to be an especially lovely spring, and he and his daughter-in-law spent hours daily in wandering about the cliffs and downs, looking at the sunshiny sea which

was settling itself down in peace after its winter storms; or else penetrating inland, and hunting for wild flowers in those woody nooks which make this part of the country, so near the coast, a perfect treasure-house for all who love nature. And he tried, not vainly, to put into Charlotte that simple but intense delight which he himself took in all natural things, thereby giving her an education, both of mind and heart, which is worth much book-learning, especially to a woman.

Their walks were made pleasanter by the lifting off of the Crux incubus. With the extraordinary infatuation of the "fashionable" world, this gay metropolitan family had discovered that living anywhere out of London in spring-time was absolutely unendurable. So they migrated back to their old haunts, leaving the Hall, for the time being, deserted, and the

roads about Immeridge safe and free. They had never again called at the Parsonage, but they had sent at least twice a-week to inquire for Mr. Garland; and once, in passing him and Charlotte, they driving in their handsomest barouche down a hilly road where to stop and speak was conveniently impossible, Mrs. Crux had bowed, whether to one or both remained questionable, but it was a most undoubted and condescending bow.

"Our friends certainly mean to take us up again, by slow degrees," said the parson, a little amused. He had returned the salutation distantly, but courteously, as a parson should, whose duty, more even than most men, is to live in charity with all; but he did not wish to have his motives or intentions mistaken. "I have no desire," he continued, "to have any intimacy with the Cruxes. You will find,

Charlotte, throughout life, which is not long enough for any needless pain, that 'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' is as true of friendship as it is of love. We should be quite sure our friends suit us, before we join hands. Otherwise they either cumber us or drop from us, like ill-fitting clothes, or they cling to us and destroy us, like the poisoned shirt of Dejanira: —did you ever hear of Dejanira?"

And then he told her the story,—as he did many another story, out of his endless learning, —partly to amuse himself, and partly from the feeling that every sort of knowledge might one day be valuable to her.

"But to return to the Cruxes," continued he; "I do not regret their civilities, though more than civility is neither possible nor desirable. Still if they are polite, we will be polite too, if only on Keith's account. It is bad for a

man not to be on good terms with his neighbours."

And then the parson began to talk,—as he never could help talking,—more and more every day, of the chances pro and con of Keith's return, and what would happen when he did return; whether he would go out again to Canada; or whether, since he had been so successful, and shown such remarkable capabilities for success in farming, he would not turn his attention to it in England, and perhaps settle near Immeridge, to the infinite comfort of his father's declining days.

"And, if he has a real pleasant home,—if his wife makes it as pleasant as she has made mine,—why then—"

He turned and saw Charlotte's face—it was deathly white.

"Please don't!" she gasped. "Oh, please don't, Mr. Garland."

He said no more, for he saw she could not bear it, but he thought with deep thankfulness, how devotedly Keith's poor little wife must love him still.

And the love might be not unneeded. For several times, when in his weary want of something to do, he had amused himself by re-reading, in regular succession, his son's letters, Mr. Garland was struck by an undefined and yet clearly perceptible change in them. There seemed a harshness, a hardness growing over Keith; mingled with a reckless indifference, a complete avoidance of all reference to the future—which, the more he pondered it over, the more alarmed his father. But there was nothing to be done; nothing but to write that letter,

which he penned painfully, a few lines every day, telling his son the whole history of himself and Charlotte; how he had grown week by week, and month by month, to pity her, to like her, to esteem her, to love her.

Yes, he did really love her. He had long suspected this, now he felt sure of it. Into the lonely, self-contained, but infinitely tender heart, where no woman, save one, had ever dwelt, crept this new relationship, full of all the delicacy and chivalry which such a man was sure to have towards any woman, by whatever tie connected with him; uniting at once the grave protection of fatherhood with the clinging dependence that his now feeble age made natural to him. Ay, in this strange and mysteriously bitter way, the last way he had ever contemplated or expected, the parson had found his "daughter." Found her, simply by

doing a father's duty, in the inevitable circumstances under which he had been called upon to act.

He felt great peace, as he sat in his garden-chair with Charlotte busy near him, or sitting sewing at his side; she was one of those women who without any obnoxiously demonstrative industry, are never seen idle. Day by day he admired her more and more, and was convinced that Keith would do the same, until the true tender love, ay, and reverence, which every husband should bear to his wife, would surely come. He felt so certain that all would be right soon, very soon—perhaps even during his lifetime. He spent hours in planning out and dreaming over the future; and so absorbed was he in these fancies and speculations, that he forgot to take much present notice of Charlotte.

When Jane suggested, as she did once, that Mrs. Keith Garland was looking excessively thin and worn, he still scarcely heeded it, or set it down to the hot weather, or to a natural suspense concerning her husband's return. But as she never opened the subject of her own accord, he did not like to question her. And she being always so very unobtrusive and uncommunicative regarding herself and her feelings, doing all her duties, and especially those which concerned Mr. Garland, with the most affectionate and sedulous care; he did not discover, as perhaps indeed only a woman would, that this poor woman, so young still, went about like a person stunned; who does everything in a sort of dream, waiting with terror for the moment of awakening.

Only once or twice, when unable to resist talking of his hopes, and longing for some

confirmation of them from another's heart than his own, Mr. Garland asked her seriously what she thought of the probabilities of Keith's return, Charlotte answered decidedly,—

"Oh, yes; he will come. Be quite sure your son will come home."

And in the delight of this expectation the old man forgot to notice that she said, as she always did now, "your son," never "my husband."

CHAPTER XII.

THE following mail brought Keith's never-failing letter, written, of course, in ignorance of the sad tidings now speeding to him across the seas. Nor would they probably reach him in time to be answered by the return mail, for he spoke of an intended business journey down South, which would occupy the few days between the receiving and answering of letters; so he prepared his father for having none at all this time.

"The first time he will ever have missed writing," said the parson, trying to shake off a certain dreary feeling which Keith's letter left behind,—the letter, written with that un-

consciousness of all that was happening at home, and read, unknowing what might have happened to the writer since,—two things which throw such an indefinite but insurmountable sadness over even the cheeriest and pleasantest "foreign correspondence."

This was not an especially cheerful letter, as to its tone, though its contents were good news; Keith explained to his father, who tried to explain to Charlotte—and the old man and the girl were about equally obtuse in comprehending it—some business transaction by which he hoped to realise a considerable sum. "Perhaps, I may turn out a rich man yet," wrote he, with a slight tone of triumph. "I have certainly done very well so far; in a worldly point of view, that forced march to Canada was the best thing that ever happened to me. Besides, I like the climate; I have no

dislike to the country, in truth, nothing should induce me to leave it. I would not care ever to see Old England again, if coming over (he did not say "coming home") were not my only means of getting a sight of my dear old father."

Always his father; never his wife. Charlotte listened; a little paler, a little stiller than before, if that were possible; but she neither questioned nor complained of anything. Once only, as she was hanging over her father-in-law's chair, arranging his cushions for his afternoon nap, he talking the while of Keith—for indeed, the subject never failed him, she said gently, when he asked what she thought about the matter,—

"Oh, yes, your son will come home. Make yourself quite easy; he is sure to come home. Not immediately, perhaps; but by-and-by."

The old man looked up with a touching eagerness. "Do you really think so, Charlotte? Before winter?"

"Yes; before winter," said Charlotte, as she turned away.

The following mail brought no letter, for which, however, they were prepared. Nevertheless, the blank seemed to make the parson rather restless for some hours, till he consoled himself by reflecting that the journey down South, while it hindered Keith's receiving his letters, saved him temporarily from the pain of the news they brought, and lessened by a few days his suspense till the next mail came in. And that next mail would bring him the all-important letter, so long delayed, but which the father had duly finished, left-handed, accomplishing it line by line, with a tender persistency, in spite of all sorts of remonstrances

from Charlotte, who would not see why he should be so earnest about it.

"Suppose it should never reach him," said she, when in compliance with Mr. Garland's desire, she enclosed and forwarded it, declining to write herself this time. "Suppose," and she watched her father-in-law stealthily but eagerly, —"suppose he should even now be on his way home?"

"Oh, no! that is quite impossible," replied the parson, sighing. How impossible, he did not like to say. For, judging his son by himself, by most men, he felt that nothing except the strongest sense of duty could conquer the repugnance a man would feel to coming home under Keith's circumstances: to a wife whom he neither respected nor loved, but only pitied. But that momentous letter would set everything right. He had written it with the

utmost tact and tenderness of which he was capable; placing everything before his son in the plainest light, and yet doing it delicately, as should be done by the father of a grown-up son, who has no longer any right to interfere in that son's affairs further than to suggest and advise. Yes, this letter would surely make all right. So he had sent it off, in spite of Charlotte, and with an amused resistance to her arguments; and his heart followed it with prayers.

Thus, after the first few hours, he ceased to be disappointed at the absence of Keith's letter, and after waiting another half-day, and hearing accidentally that other American letters had come all safe,—the housekeeper at Cruxham Hall had also a son in Canada,—the parson and his daughter settled their minds calmly to wait on until the next mail.

It was a bright summer morning, and Mr. Garland sat enjoying it in his garden. Alone, too; a thing which rarely happened. But fancying he saw a certain restlessness and trouble in Charlotte's look, he had made occupation for her by sending her away on a long expedition, to visit a sick person at the other end of the parish.

For since his increasing feebleness, this duty also — so natural under most circumstances to a parson's daughter — visiting the sick, had gradually slipped into Charlotte's hands. He hardly knew how it had come about, whether it was his suggestion or her own that she should undertake it, but she had undertaken it; and she fulfilled it well. Nor had there come any of the difficulties which he had once anticipated; for the whole parish was so anxious about him, and so touched with

tenderness concerning him, that they would have received gladly and gratefully anybody who came from the parson. The ice once broken by mutual sympathy, Charlotte,—the new Charlotte, who was so strangely different from Lotty Dean,—slowly made her way into the folks' hearts,—especially by the exceeding kindness which she showed towards old people and children. Soon, though she said nothing about it herself, others said—and it reached the parson's ears with a strange thrill, half pleasure, half pain,—that Immeridge parish had never been so well looked after since the days of the first Mrs. Garland.

Mr. Garland watched his son's wife as she walked across the garden with her basket in hand; stepping lightly, in her brown holland morning dress and jacket, and simple straw hat, under which her abundant hair no longer

curled; the parson, with his classic taste, had made her twist it smoothly up, in Greek grace and matronly decorousness, round the well-shaped head. She was a pretty sight; to one who loved physical beauty a perpetual daily pleasure; but he hardly knew whether it made him most sad or most glad to see—and he had seen it especially this morning—in her face that without which all faces, and all characters, are imperfect, the beauty of suffering.

The old man's gaze followed her with great tenderness, and when she was out of sight, he involuntarily took out his watch, to reckon how many hours she was likely to be away from him. If any one had told him this two years and a half ago! if he could have believed that this brief time would have made so great a change; not only in his feelings towards her, but in herself! And yet at her impressionable

time of life, it was not impossible; least of all, considering the many strong influences at work within her and around her; not the least of which, though he was the last person to suspect it, was Mr. Garland's own.

Still he acknowledged to himself that whatever she had been, she was a sweet, good woman now; that he dearly loved her, and had rational grounds for loving her, all of which her husband might find out soon.

"And it is a melancholy fact," thought the parson, smiling to himself; "but if that boy comes back and falls in love with his wife over again, and wants to carry her away with him, as of course he must, I wonder what in the wide world I shall do without Charlotte!"

But he left that, as he had long since learned to leave all difficulties that concerned his own lot, and tried to leave those that concerned

others, in wiser hands than his own, and occupied himself, as old age will when its decline is sweet and calm, unselfish and pure, in the trivial pleasures about him. Trivial, and yet not so, for they all came to him like messages from the Giver of every good thing—the sunshine and soft airs, the scent of the flowers, the humming of bees and flutterings of white butterflies, and, above all, the songs of innumerable birds, so tame that they came hopping and picking up food almost at the parson's feet. He loved them all, he enjoyed them all, as he felt he should do to the very last. In spite of sorrow he had had a happy life, and he trusted in God to give him a happy and a peaceful death; blessed it was sure to be, since it took him home to Mary.

And so, in this sleepy warmth of sunshine, and lulled by the buzz of insects and the in-

cessant warble of birds, the old man's senses became confused; his head dropped upon his bosom, and he fell into a sound slumber. In his sleep he had a curious dream, which he did not fully recall till some hours after his waking; but when he did, it made upon him the impression of being less a dream than a vision, so clear and distinct was it; so like reality.

He thought he was sitting, exactly where he did sit, and in his own garden-chair, thinking much the same thoughts, and conscious of much the same things around him, as really was the case, that morning. When, suddenly, and as naturally and as little to his surprise as if he had seen her but yesterday, his wife, Mary, crossed the lawn towards him. He noticed her very dress, which was white,—one of her favourite spotted muslin gowns, such

as were still laid up in lavender in the old chest of drawers; and her own garden basket was in her hand, full of flowers. She came and stood right in front of him, gazing at him steadily with those pure, limpid, candid eyes of hers,—eyes which looked as young as ever, though he had grown quite old. But he never considered that, nor anything else, except the mere delight of seeing her. He forgot even Keith, for she looked exactly as she used to do before Keith was born or thought of,—before her days of weakness and weariness came upon her:—until she said in a soft, tender voice, "William, where is my son?"

After that the dream fell into confusion. He had a troubled sense of seeking everywhere for Keith, and not being able to find him, of seeing him by glimpses, at different ages, and in

various well-remembered forms, till at last there came a great fellow, with heavy footsteps and a bearded face, whom his father could scarcely recognise; but Mary did at once, and welcomed smiling. And then again her husband saw her standing still on the Parsonage lawn, but not alone; surrounded by a little troop of children, in whose faces he beheld, mysteriously reproduced, both her face and his own. "Oh, yes," she said, as if in answer to his dumb questionings, for he struggled vainly to speak,—"yes, all these are mine. I never saw them, never had them in my arms, but I did not die childless—and all these are my children!" When Mr. Garland stretched out his arms to clasp her and them, the dream melted away; and it was no longer that bright picture of Mary and the little ones, but his son Keith, standing

gloomy and alone, and looking as sad as he had done that hazy winter morning at Euston Square terminus, when the father's heart had felt well-nigh broken, and it seemed as if the hopes of both their lives were for ever gone.

"Keith! Keith!" he cried, trying to burst through the dumbness of the dream, and speak to his son; with the effort he woke, and recognised where he was,— alone in the sunshiny garden. He called Jane, who in Charlotte's rare absences never kept far out of reach; but she was some time in coming to him.

"Jane," said the parson, rubbing his eyes, "I must have been asleep very long. Is she come back yet,—my daughter, I mean?"

"No, sir. But—but——"

Jane's voice was abrupt and husky, and she kept glancing at the open front door.

"Won't you come in, sir? I've got a piece of good news for you. You'll take it quietly, though, I knows you will, for it's a bit of very good news." Nevertheless, Jane sobbed a little.

The parson turned round slowly, calmly, with the preternatural instinct of what has happened, or is about to happen, which sick people sometimes show.

"Jane," he said, looking her full in the face, "I know what it is. My son is come home!"

* * * *

Keith and his father sat together under the verandah. The first half-hour of their meeting had passed safely over, and they had settled down side by side, talking of ordinary things with a quietness and self-restraint which both purposely maintained as much as possible.

But there was no fear. People seldom die of joy; as seldom, thank God! of sorrow.

Already Mr. Garland was listening, cheerfully and naturally, as though his son had been at home a long time, to Keith's account,—given briefly and succinctly—of how, on receiving his letters, he found he had still two days' time to catch the return mail, and come home. How some accidental delays had prevented his starting for Immeridge till the night before; how he had left his luggage at the nearest station, and walked ten miles across country to the Parsonage gate, where looking in, he saw his father asleep, and would not disturb him till he waked of his own accord.

He did not tell, nor did Jane, till long after, how Keith had appeared before her in her kitchen, looking "like a ghost from the grave," and "took on terrible bad:" till finding things

less dreadful than he had at first supposed, he suffered himself to be comforted, and soothed, and fed, by the good old woman, who three-and-twenty years ago had dressed him in his first clothes, and loved him ever since, with a patience that he had often tried, but never came to the end of. For Keith, faulty as he was, had the art of making people fond of him. Perhaps because of another simple art,—he also could love most deeply and faithfully; as was plain to be seen in every feature of the brown, rough face, whenever he looked at his old father.

Yes, they were very happy; no doubt of that. Was it a punishment—poor girl, it was her last!—that in the first moments of their reunion both father and son entirely forgot Charlotte? It was not till the church clock struck twelve, and she was to be home to

dinner at one, that the parson, with a sting of compunction, remembered his son's wife, after whom his son had never once inquired.

"My boy," said he, "some one besides myself will be very glad you are come home."

"You mean my wife," replied Keith, with a sudden hardening both of countenance and manner.

"You do not ask after her, so I conclude Jane has already told you all about her."

"Jane said she was well."

"And nothing more?"

"Nothing more. Was there anything to be told?"

The question was put with a sudden suspiciousness, but alas! not with the quick anxiety of love. And on receiving his father's negative, Keith relapsed into his former gravity of behaviour, intimating a determination to bear

his lot like a man, however hard it might be, but at the same time resolved to say, and to be said to, as little about it as possible.

This, and several other slight but significant indications of character which had cropped out even in the first half-ho r, convinced Mr. Garland of the great change that circumstances had brought about even in so young a man. He felt, too, what parents are often fatally slow to see, that without any lessening, perhaps even with deepening affection, there had, in the natural course of things, grown up between them, father and son as they were, the reserve inevitable between man and man, however closely allied. So much so, that, in his own shrinking delicacy, the parson found it difficult to open the subject nearest to his heart.

"Keith," said he, at last, "I do not want to meddle in your affairs; you are of an age to judge and act for yourself now. Still your father can never cease thinking about you. And before she comes in, which she will presently, for she is always very punctual, may I speak to you a few words about your wife?"

"Certainly, father."

Yet the few words would not come. It was after all the son—the less sensitive and most demonstrative nature of the two—who first broke the painful silence.

"Father," said Keith, turning his head away, and taking up the old man's stick to make little holes in the gravel walk while he spoke, "I had best make a clean breast of it to you, and at once. I know now that my marriage was a terrible mistake. A mistake

—the consequence of,—no, the just punishment of—Oh, father, father! heavily I sinned, and heavily have I been punished!"

While speaking he turned white, even through his tanned cheeks. Whatever the punishment was to which he referred, or whatever special form his remorse had taken, unquestionably both had been sharp and sore.

The parson did not attempt inquiries or consolations, still less reproofs. He only laid his hand on his son's shoulder, saying, "My poor boy!"

"Yes," Keith repeated, "I have been punished! Not in outward things; I have had plenty of external prosperity. I have often thought of two lines of poetry I used to say at school, about

"Satan now is wiser than of yore,
And tempts by making rich not making poor."

That was the way he tried it with me; eh, father? And he very nearly had me — but not quite."

"You have been successful, then, as regards money. You ought to be thankful for that," said the father, gravely.

"Oh, of course, very thankful. Never was there such a run of good fortune. It got to be quite a proverb, 'As lucky as Garland!' Why, I have made enough to start afresh in England—to set up a pleasant little home of my own, to which I might bring some sweet charming English girl,—English *lady*," with a sarcastic accent on the word; "a fit companion for me, a fit daughter for you. Such a woman, in short, as my mother was. Oh, father!" and Keith dropped his head with something very like a groan; "it is a fatal thing for a man if, when he chooses

a wife, he cannot, or dare not, measure her by what he remembers of his mother."

The parson was silent. He knew his son spoke the truth, none the less true because Heaven had mercifully made things lighter to him than he deserved. And though henceforward his burden would be lifted off; still what it had been the father could imagine, though even he might never thoroughly know. Still, as he looked on his boy's face, he saw written on it many a line that was not there before; and was certain that these years,—the most critical years of a young man's life, had not passed without leaving their mark—that bitter, searing brand, upon him,—possibly for ever.

Neither then, nor afterwards, did Keith make to his father any special revelations of the manner in which he had been "punished,"

whether by conscience-stings alone, and that vague, dark dread of the future which he was sure to feel; or by meeting, as many an honest-meaning and yet most miserable man has met, and been man enough to fly from, conscious that her very goodness and sweetness is to him as poisonous as the hot breath from the open pit of hell—some ideal woman who is, alas! *not* the woman he has married. Such things do happen, and if this or anything like it had happened to Keith Garland, even though the temptation was conquered and the struggle past, his torment must have been sharp enough to teach him lessons such as his old father had not learnt—nor ever needed to learn—in all his seventy years.

Still, something of this Mr. Garland dimly divined; and regarded his son with the sort of awe which parents feel when they see that their

dealings are not the only dealings with their children; that for each successive generation, and each individual of it, Providence has a separate education of its own. There was a kind of respect, as well as tenderness, in the old man's voice as he took his boy's hand, saying gently,—

"Yes, Keith, you speak truly. I cannot deny it. It would have been far happier for us all if your wife had been more like your mother."

There was a long, long silence: a silence due in one man to the memory of what was lost, in the other to the thought of what might have been. It was scarcely unnatural: in one sense, it was even right. For it is not our merit but God's mercy, which creates peace out of pain, and oftentimes changes resignation into actual happiness: till we count among

our best blessings, the things which once were our sharpest woes.

"My son," said the parson at length, "we will now set the past for ever behind us, and look forward to your future. Therein I see many reasons not to grieve, but to rejoice."

"Rejoice! over a man who comes home to a wife that writes him such a letter as this?" and Keith took out of his pocket-book the small note which Mr. Garland had seen Charlotte enclose with his own dictated letter,—two mails back.

"What does she say? I did not read it."

"Of course not. She had doubtless her own reasons for keeping it back from you. Now, father, do not look alarmed. I shall not act rashly: I am not going to take her at her word, indeed I could not do it if I wished. No, I'll not be hard to her. I took my burden

on myself, and I'll bear it like a man; but—just read the letter."

And he again applied himself, in angry agitation, to destroying the garden-walk, while his father read, slowly and with difficulty, for it was ill written, and startled him painfully at first, the poor little scrap which Charlotte had penned to her husband.

"Dear husband," (and then "husband" was crossed out, and "Dear sir" put instead)—"If I may make bold to say it, you ought to come home to your father. He is breaking his heart for you, and nothing will ever comfort him but the sight of you. Please come at once.

"I take this opportunity of saying what I ought to have said a good while ago, that ours having been such an unsuitable and unfortunate marriage, I will not be a trouble and

a burden to you any more, but as soon as you come to the Parsonage I will leave it. Also since—as your father tells me—there is a place in London where people unhappily married can get rid of one another, so as to be free to marry again; if you wish to get rid of me—so as to be able to marry somebody else more suitable for you—do it. I shall not object. I would never have let you marry me, had I seen things as I do now—or had I ever known your father.

"I remain,

"Your obedient wife,

"CHARLOTTE GARLAND."

"Poor little soul!" said Mr. Garland tenderly, as he finished the letter.

"Then you did not know anything about this?"

"Certainly not. She hid it all from me—the only thing she ever has hid, I think, since she came to live with me. How she must have suffered before she could have written such a letter!—poor, patient, loving little soul!"

"Loving?"

"Yes. Don't you see—but how could you?—that this is just the sort of thing she would do! She loves you so well that she will not even let you see her love, lest it should seem to be an additional claim on you."

"But she wants to get free from me?"

The parson smiled. "She wants to set *you* free—which is quite a different thing. She thinks of nobody but you—or perhaps of me a little, sometimes. She is the most unselfish woman I ever knew—except one. And to think that she had hidden this secret in her heart all these weeks, and kept telling me you

were sure to come home—when she expected to lose you as soon as ever you came—lose you that I might gain you. My poor little daughter!"

Keith looked amazed.

"Yes, she is my daughter. She has become such to me—and such she will always remain. Keith," added the old man solemnly; "however you may act towards your wife, I know how I shall act towards my daughter."

"What do you mean, father?"

"I mean that though I took her into my house out of pure duty, she has grown to be the greatest blessing in it;—and she shall never leave it, unless she leaves it for yours. Will you hear how things came about?"

Then Mr. Garland began and told his son, from beginning to end, what he had written in the letters which Keith never received—the history of himself and Charlotte. Just the bare

history; not dwelling, as indeed he was not likely to dwell, for in his great humility he scarcely saw it himself, on the one fact, the root of all—that it had been this simple doing of a parent's duty under sharpest pain—which brought about the whole.

Still, whether he saw it or not, his son saw it, clear and plain; and recognised, with an emotion that almost overwhelmed him then, but which afterwards taught him a lesson which he in his turn acted out to his children—that not only had his sin been covered and healed, but the best gift of his existence had been brought to him by his father's hand.

The parson's story was hardly concluded, and the silence with which his son listened to it throughout, had not been broken by a single word, when they heard from behind the syringa bushes the click of the garden-gate.

Keith sprang up, violently agitated. So was Mr. Garland; for it seemed as if the happiness or misery, for life, of these his children, trembled in the balance, and hung on the chance of the next few minutes. He could not speak a word—he only prayed.

"Father, is that my wife?"

"Yes."

Both father and son held their breaths, while unconscious Charlotte walked up the garden-path to the elm-tree under which the parson usually sat, and missing him there, came slowly on towards the house. Her step was weary —she had walked a good many miles; and her downcast face was very pale and sad. Still, in spite of this, nothing fairer, nothing sweeter, nothing more truly womanly, could a young man's eyes find to rest on than Charlotte Garland.

Either the creepers of the verandah hid the two figures more completely than they were aware, or else Charlotte was so absorbed in thought as to take little notice of outward things; but she came quite close to them before she perceived her father and her husband.

When she did, her recognition was instantaneous. But even then—like herself, poor girl!—she had self-control enough to make no "scene," to startle nobody and trouble nobody. She neither fainted nor screamed, but stood there, deadly pale, and steadying herself by the pillars of the verandah;—still, she stood quiet, gazing at them, attempting neither to move nor speak.

"Charlotte," Mr. Garland said, touching her dress, to draw her nearer to him; at which her eyes turned to his happy face—the old man who had found his son again—and she feebly

smiled. "You see, my dear, you were right after all. He has come home."

"Lotty," said Keith, speaking in a low, almost in a humble tone, as he rose from his seat, and came over to her side. "Lotty dear, haven't you a word for your husband?"

She looked up—looked in his face—first, as if she could hardly believe that it was himself—then with a piteous inquiry, as though trying to read in his countenance her sentence of life or death.

"Lotty—forgive me; I am your husband."

He opened his arms wide, and took her into them; and she sobbed her heart out upon his breast.

* * * * *

Keith fell in love with his wife all over

again—as his father had fore-seen, and in the true, and rational, and righteous way. Not suddenly—which was indeed hardly to be expected—but with the steady, progressive affection, which is built up day by day in the heart of a man who continually finds in the woman to whom he has bound himself for life, something fresh to love, something more worthy of his loving. For love never stands still; it must inevitably be either growing or decaying—especially the love of marriage.

As to Charlotte's love for her husband, it scarcely needs to be spoken of. It was of that kind, which, put into the heart of almost any woman, is a blessing and a safeguard to herself all her life-time, and, abiding in the heart of a good woman, constitutes the strength, the hope,—often the very salvation, of two lives.

Of her sin—of both their sin—what shall

we say—what dare we say? except that He may have forgiven it—as He did to one who "loved much."

Enough of these. And of the old man—the good father—whose days were nearly done?

Mr. Garland lingered on, in a serene old age, for fully ten years more. He lived to see about him, as he had seen in his dream, wonderful new faces, wherein he caught strange glimpses of other faces, old and dear; likenesses such as grandfathers and grandmothers delight to trace, in which the vanished generation seems revived again. One of Keith's children—the first—was, as not seldom happens, both in features and character, so exact a reproduction of her father's mother, that even as a little baby, the parson would hold her on his lap for hours, almost believing he was young again, and that she was his own "little daughter"

who never came. But the grandchild did come, and she grew to be the very darling of the parson's heart. Of course she was called Mary.

When at last, after the brief two days' illness, — which was the only suffering sent to take him home — Mr. Garland lay, conscious and content, in full possession of all his faculties, and knowing his time was come,—lay with his white head resting on his long solitary pillow— those about him thonght that his last word, like his last smile, was meant for this little granddaughter.

But Charlotte, matron and mother, who had yet found leisure from her many duties to be the parson's daughter still, and who stood silently behind him, fulfilling to the end all those tender offices which, during his latter years, had smoothed down every care, and kept every trouble away from him — Charlotte knew better.

"Stand aside, Mary," she whispered softly, to her little girl, "he is thinking of dear grandmama."

That evening, the blind was drawn down at Mr. Garland's bedroom window. No one sat there now; no one looked out in the twilight upon the church and churchyard; keeping watch as it were—as he had kept watch for more than thirty years.

By the next Sunday, there was a new face in the pulpit of Immeridge Church, and a new voice, which, though it was a stranger's, often faltered with emotion—preached the funeral sermon; eulogising, as funeral sermons do, that long, yet outwardly uneventful life, the real beauty of which was known only to God.

After the service the congregation went in little groups to look at the date newly filled up in the white head-stone, and to talk in whispers

of "the parson"—and of his dear wife, whom only one or two people now living in the parish ever remembered to have seen. But though every one loved him and missed him, no one grieved; no one could grieve, not even his own children. For the long separation was ended;—and Mary Garland's husband slept by her side.

THE END.

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET, JANUARY, 1867.

MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S LIST OF NEW WORKS.

THE LIFE OF JOSIAH WEDGWOOD; From

his Private Correspondence and Family Papers, in the possession of JOSEPH MAYER, Esq., F.S.A., FRANCIS WEDGWOOD, Esq., C. DARWIN, Esq., M.A., F.R.S., Miss WEDGWOOD, and other Original Sources. With an Introductory Sketch of the Art of Pottery in England. By ELIZA METEYARD. Dedicated to the Right Hon. W. E. GLADSTONE. Complete in 2 vols. 8vo, with Portraits and 300 other Beautiful Illustrations, elegantly bound, price 42s.

"This is the Life of Wedgwood to the expected appearance of which I referred at Burslem."—*Extract from a Letter to the Author by the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone.*

"We have to congratulate the authoress on the publication of her Life of Wedgwood. We can award her the praise due to the most pains-taking and conscientious application. She has devoted her whole mind and energy to her subject, and has achieved a work not less creditable to herself than it is indispensable to all who wish to know anything about English ceramic art and its great inventor. The two volumes before us are in themselves marvels of decorative and typographical skill. More beautifully printed pages, more creamy paper, and more dainty woodcuts have seldom met our eyes. It is rarely that an author is so well seconded by his coadjutors as Miss Meteyard has been by her publishers, printers, and the staff of draughtsmen and engravers who have contributed the numerous illustrations which adorn this sumptuous book."—*Saturday Review.*

"This very beautiful book contains that Life of Wedgwood which for the last fifteen years Miss Meteyard has had in view, and to which the Wedgwood family, and all who have papers valuable in relation to its subject, have been cordially contributing. In his admirable sketch of Wedgwood, given at Burslem, it was to the publication of this biography that Mr. Gladstone looked forward with pleasure. It is a very accurate and valuable book. To give their fullest value to the engravings of works of art which largely enrich the volumes, the biography has been made by its publishers a choice specimen of their own art as bookmakers. Neither care nor cost have been grudged. The two volumes form as handsome a book as has ever been published."—*Examiner.*

"The appearance of such a work as Miss Meteyard's 'Life of Josiah Wedgwood' is an event of importance in the sister spheres of literature and art. The biographer of our great potter has more than ordinary fitness for the fulfilment of her labour of love. She is an enthusiastic admirer and a practised connoisseur of Ceramic Art, and she brings the pleasant energy of individual taste and feeling to the aid of complete, authentic, and well-arranged information, and the well-balanced style of an experienced *litterateur*. The interest of the book grows with every page. The reader will peruse the numerous interesting particulars of Wedgwood's family life and affairs with unusual satisfaction, and will lay down the work with undoubting confidence that it will rank as a classic among biographies—an exhaustive work of the first rank in its school."—*Morning Post.*

"An admirable, well-written, honourably elaborate, and most interesting book." *Athenæum.*

"No book has come before us for some time so stored with interesting information. Miss Meteyard is a biographer distinguished by a clever and energetic style, by delicate judgment, extensive information, and a deep interest in her subject. The history of the Ceramic Art in England, and the biography of the eminent man who brought it to perfection, have evidently been to her a labour of love; and of the spirit and manner in which she has executed it we can hardly speak too highly. The splendid getting up of the work reflects much credit on the house from which it is issued."—*Dublin University Magazine.*

"In this magnificent volume we welcome one of the very noblest contributions to the history of the Ceramic art ever published. We place it at once and permanently side by side with Bernard Palissy's Memoirs and with Benvenuto Cellini's Autobiography. An abundance of rare and very precious materials is here admirably put together by the dexterous hand and exquisite taste of Miss Meteyard. A more conscientious discharge of the responsible duties devolving upon the biographer of a really great man has not been witnessed, we believe, since the days of Boswell, the greatest of all biographers."—*Sun.*

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